

# **MINUTES OF THE MEETING Housing, Planning and Development Scrutiny Panel HELD ON Thursday, 6th March, 2025, 6.30 pm**

## **PRESENT:**

**Councillors: Alexandra Worrell (Chair), Dawn Barnes, John Bevan and Diakides**

### **222. FILMING AT MEETINGS**

The Chair referred Members present to agenda Item 1 as shown on the agenda in respect of filming at this meeting, and Members noted the information contained therein'.

### **223. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Moyeed and Cllr Harrison Mullane.

### **224. URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Urgent Business.

### **225. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

### **226. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS**

None.

### **227. MINUTES**

Cllr Bevan advised that he had not been able to arrange a meeting with Clarion for an estate walkabout and requested help from officers to arrange this. **(Action: Hannah).**

In relation to the partnering contract, officers advised that a number of bids had been submitted as part of the tendering process and it was hoped that a contract would be awarded towards the end of 2025.

Officers were requested to provide a written update on the frequency that the £20 food voucher was paid. **(Action: Jahedur Rahman).**

## **RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

## **228. VERBAL UPDATE ON THE LOCAL PLAN**

The Panel received a verbal update along with a tabled presentation that provided an update on the timelines and development of the updated Local Plan. The presentation was given by Bryce Tudball, Head of Spatial Planning as set out in the tabled papers agenda pack. Cllr Williams, Cabinet Member for Housing & Planning was present for this agenda item. The following arose as part of the discussion:

- a. The Chair acknowledged the amount of work that had gone into the Local Plan to get it to this stage and welcomed a number of the positive changes that had been made. The Chair requested that officers provide some further comments about the reasons for the delays to date. In response, officers advised that the delays had been part of the feedback arising from the planning service peer challenge review and that the principal reason for this was around resources within the team. The Panel was advised that this had been acknowledged by senior management and the service now had a full complement of staff. Officers advised that the delays had allowed the service to respond to raft of changes put forward by the new government, and that the timescales for the Local Plan were now running in tandem with the London Plan.
- b. The Chair sought assurances around the extent to which the emerging Local Plan could be used as a consideration when determining planning applications. Officers advised that once it had been published as a draft Local Plan in the summer, a limited amount of weight could be given to the new Local Plan when considering planning applications.
- c. The Panel commented that the updated Local Plan had a lead-in time of seven years, and assurances were sought that it wouldn't be out of date by the time it was in place. In response, officers acknowledged the lead-in time but gave assurances that by the time it was finalised in 2027 it would be very up to date, a lot of work had gone into future proofing the Local Plan. A lot of emphasis was being given to placemaking within the plan, rather than it being reactive.
- d. The Panel sought assurances about whether there would be a greater emphasis on increasing the number of social housing units within the plan. Officers advised that they anticipated that the new plan would have stronger policies around having more properties for social rent, including more social rent properties in Tottenham and the east of the borough.
- e. The Panel raised concerns with the number of very tall buildings that had been permitted in Tottenham Hale under the current Local Plan, and sought assurances that something similar wouldn't happen in Wood Green under the new Local Plan. In response officers advised that the aim of consulting on a new Local Plan was to build up an evidence base from the consultation with which to base the borough's planning priorities on. It was identified that the new Local Plan would, unlike the previous iteration, have a dedicated section that identified areas that were appropriate for tall buildings, and that some of these may be in Wood Green. Officers gave assurances that they did not believe that Wood Green would look like Tottenham Hale in respect of the concentration of tall buildings.

- f. The Panel sought assurances around whether the new plan would enable environment goals, and specifically retro fitting. An example was given of a resident who was very keen to retrofit his home to improve its energy efficiency, but was unable to do so because he lived in a conservation area. In response, officers advised that one of the areas that would be substantially reinforced in the plan was the climate emergency and buildings sections. The vision was to have a leading retrofit policy within London. Officers acknowledged that there were some policy conflicts between retrofitting and conservation areas. It was suggested that solar PVs may be permitted in some circumstances. It was necessary to consider the specific character of a conservation area and how retrofitting would impact that area. For example, solar panels would not be suitable in a conservation area where one of its primary characteristics was the roofs of the buildings.
- g. The Panel sought clarification about protected views in the borough and whether this applied to Alexandra Palace. In response, officers advised that there was a range of protected views in the borough, some of these were protected at the local level and some at the London level through the London Plan. The GLA were looking at strategic views, of which Alexandra Palace was one, but these were unlikely to change.
- h. The Chair sought assurances around whether the new plan would include an enhanced focus on future proofing against extreme weather and flooding. In response, officers advised that there would be a specific chapter around climate resilience including flood risk and heat mitigation. It was commented that the current Local Plan did say much on these topics.

## **RESOLVED**

Noted

### **229. MOCK HOUSING INSPECTION - UPDATE**

The Panel received a report which provided an update on the mock housing inspection of housing services conducted against the Regulator of Social Housing's consumer standards, carried out by specialist housing consultants, Housing Quality Network (HQN) between September and October 2024. The report was introduced by Jahedur Rahman, Operational Director of Housing Services & Building Safety as set out in the agenda pack at pages 13 – 20. Cllr Sarah Williams, the Cabinet Member for Housing & Planning was also present for this item. The following arose as part of the discussion of this item:

- a. The Director of Housing advised that overall the outcome of the mock inspection was a C2 grade, which was the second highest of four possible grades (C1, C2, C3 & C4). Prior to the referral to the regulator, Haringey would have likely been a C4 authority. The Chair welcomed the overall positive outcome of the mock inspection and commented that a number of areas of improvement had been made. It was questioned how many inspections of the new consumer standards had been carried out to date and what sort of scores were being achieved. In response, officers advised that there had been 50 inspections and that most authorities were coming out at C3. Some achieved a C2 grade, and only one in authority in London had achieved a C1 grade – Westminster. Officers advised that HQN issued 48 recommendations that

should bring the Council up to a C1 grade. Of those 48, there were a number of recommendations that had been identified internally as areas for improvement. Six of the 48 had been implemented. One of these was around reporting beyond the big six compliance areas, which was already happening internally. HQN commented on Haringey's extensive resident engagement structures. Resident engagement impact assessments would be carried out every year by the Council to drive forward the improvement agenda.

- b. The Panel expressed a degree of surprise around the overall score, given the gaps in stock condition surveys and the performance levels on voids. The Panel sought assurances that the C2 score was realistic. In response, officers advised that rating was given by an external company, rather than the regulator, so it was not a certainty. However, HQN used the criteria set out by the regulator and also reviewed all of the previous judgments made by the regulator when assigning a rating. The report set out that Haringey was able to meet the criteria for a C2 rating, but did not say that it definitely would achieve this score. In relation to stock condition surveys, officers advised that the authority had achieved a 75-80% compliance rate on stock condition surveys. The Director of Housing advised that he did not want to be complacent, but advised that the mock inspection gave the authority a critical view of whether it was on the right track and also set out what steps needed to be taken to achieve a C1 grade.
- c. In response to a question, officers clarified that the 48 actions were what was considered necessary in order to achieve a C1 rating, rather than what was required for a C2 rating.
- d. The Panel raised concerns about tenant walkabouts and that these needed to be reconfigured. It was commented that residents no longer attended these in Northumberland Park ward. Concerns were also raised around walkabouts on sheltered housing blocks and the need to ensure that a sheltered housing manager, or one of their staff, needed to be present when conducting these. It was suggested that this was something that the Cabinet Member may want to take forward. In response, the Cabinet Member advised that she would take these comments on board. The Director of Housing acknowledged the need to reconfigure tenant walkabouts of estates. It was commented that the resident advisory panels would be part of this process going forward. The Director of Housing acknowledged that the walkabouts needed to be meaningful, signed off by residents, and that the residents understood the grading and how it was applied.
- e. A Member of the Panel raised concerns about a case where a resident had a water leak and had been charged for several thousand baths worth of water. Concerns were raised that, in many instances, the Council did not know where Thames Water had installed water meters. In response, officers acknowledged this individual case and advised that the Member had been working with the relevant Assistant Director to resolve it.
- f. In relation to stock condition surveys, officers advised that 75% of internal surveys had been carried out and 80% of surveys in communal areas.
- g. The Panel sought assurances around the comments in the report around housing fraud. In response, officers advised that tenancy audits took place which used a number of algorithms to identify possible cases of tenancy fraud. The Housing team worked with Corporate Fraud team to review these and take

- the necessary action. The report made a recommendation that a new policy document should be developed to formalise this working arrangement.
- h. The Panel queried the impact of asbestos on the Council being able to carry out works. In response, officers acknowledged that if work was required in an area with known asbestos, then the health and safety risk could make the works complicated. It was commented that in general, the policy was to try and not disturb the asbestos and work round it where possible. The Director of Housing agreed to provide written feedback on any specific cases, if a member of the Panel were to email him with the details.
  - i. The Panel raised concerns about the extent to which the Council would be reliant on its contractors in order to achieve a satisfactory rating in the event of a future inspection by the regulators. It was commented that as an organisation the Council was weak on contract management. In response, the Cabinet Members advised that the Council was ultimately responsible for checking the work undertaken by its contractors and it was acknowledged that there was a need to ensure effective contract management was carried out, particularly in the key areas of building safety and compliance standards.
  - j. In response to a question, the Panel was advised that the report and action plan was not for external consumption, and therefore not attached to the report, at the request of HQN.
  - k. The Panel sought clarification about the role of Scrutiny in the formal reporting structures around the consumer standards and a future inspection given that it was a public facing body. In response, officers acknowledged the role of Scrutiny, but set out that the Council also had a cross-party Housing Improvement Board, chaired by the Chief Executive and that there was a degree of overlap. Officers advised that HQN were aware of the role of Scrutiny and that 2 years' worth of papers to this panel were submitted as part of the evidence for the inspection.
  - l. In response to a question, officers clarified that a C2 rating reflected that that overall the organisation was delivering on the consumer standards, but that some areas of improvement were required.

## **RESOLVED**

That the update was noted.

## **230. ALLOCATIONS POLICY**

The Panel received a report which set out the background to the development of a new housing allocations policy, set out the requirements for, and process for, consultation and covered the main principles of Haringey's new draft housing allocations policy. It also included the draft housing allocations policy and the EQIA as appendices. The report was introduced by Hannah Adler, Head of Housing Policy and Strategy and Darren Fairclough, Head of Lettings & Rehousing - Housing Demand, as set out in the second agenda pack at pages 1-82. Cllr Sarah Williams, Cabinet Member for Housing & Planning was also present for this agenda item. The following arose as part of the discussion of this report:

- a. The Panel sought assurances around how the focus group was representative of the makeup of Haringey's housing register. In response, officers advised that

the focus group proportionally represented the reasons that people were on the housing register, such as severe overcrowding, medical need, living in TA etcetera. It was also commented that the group was in itself also a diverse group that represented Haringey's residents.

- b. The Panel queried the process for how people were selected to sit on the focus group. In response, officers advised that the Council took a data driven approach and developed a shortlist that was representative of the categories of reasons why people required housing as listed on the housing register. From that shortlist, the Council then wrote to those people in order to make sure they would be willing to take part.
- c. The Chair questioned the new approach that was being taken to prioritise families with dependent children over those with a mixture of dependant and non-dependent children (i.e. those over the age of 22). In response, officers advised that a number of different options were considered and that the reason that those with solely dependent children were proposed as having priority was that, whilst the wider housing challenges across London were recognised, it was considered that a child of 23 and above did not need to live at home and could live independently. The Council was seeking to prioritise those with the most need, and so it was felt that dependent children should be prioritised. Officers acknowledged that every model would result in some groups being prioritised at the expense of others. The Cabinet Member added that the aim was to give children the best chances to not have their life blighted by their housing situation. Officers advised that the age at which a child was considered non-dependant i.e. 22 was part of the consultation process.
- d. The Chair asked for figures on what the impact would be on the housing register if we gave equal priority to those families with dependent and non-dependent children. Officers agreed to provide a response in writing. **(Action: Hannah Adler).**
- e. The Panel sought further clarification about how the cut-off point for dependent children being 22 and under was reached. It was commented that in some cultures there was an expectation that adult children would live with the family until they were married. Concerns were also raised with the general feasibility of a 23 year old being able to afford to live in the private rented sector. The Panel asked whether a 23 year old child would then go on the housing register in their own right and potentially add to the length of the waiting list. In response, the Cabinet Member acknowledged that there were no perfect answers to the issue, given the scale of the housing crisis. However, it was commented that what the policy was trying to do was prioritise those most in need. It was also stated that the policy specifically referred to when a person of family was allocated a new home. The Council was not seeking to move people out of their existing homes. The Cabinet Member also commented that the service was also looking at the rightsizing policy in conjunction with allocations. Officers reiterated that the cut-off point of 22 was being consulted upon and was not final. Officers also acknowledged that a 23 year old child could join the housing register as they were no longer classed as a dependant, and that their status and banding would depend on their individual circumstances.
- f. The Panel questioned how many homes were classed as being overcrowded and how many people were allowed to share a room. In response, officers

advised that severe overcrowding was classed as being overcrowded by two bedrooms and this was something like 400 homes. Severe overcrowding would place that family on Band B of the housing register. Overcrowding was classed as being overcrowded by one room and this would put the family at Band C of the register. Officers set out that the draft housing allocations policy did not prioritise two adult children sharing a room. The Panel was advised that under the proposed model, demand for significantly larger homes of 5 bedrooms and above would be halved. This would ensure those with the most need were able to get the larger homes.

- g. The Chair acknowledged that setting a cut-off age for dependent children was difficult but commented that she thought it may need to be higher than 22.
- h. The Panel commented that the key activity needed to alleviate housing crisis was to build more houses, and that the allocations policy had a role in this. The Panel queried whether the policy was, in effect, giving priority to those in TA over those with severe overcrowding. An example was given of a property that had 8 people sharing a two bed flat and that the average waiting time for the family would be something like 12 years. In response, officers acknowledged that there was a significant amount of severe overcrowding in Haringey's social housing stock, and the negative outcomes that this had on families. In relation to severe overcrowding and those in TA, both of these families were in Band B in the current policy and there were no plans to change this in the revised policy.
- i. In relation to increasing supply, officers acknowledged that this was one of the key things required to tackle the housing crisis. It was commented that under the Housing Delivery Programme, Haringey was building more than 3k new homes, of which around 700 had been delivered to date. Officers set out that there was a number of other activities that could be undertaken in order to increase the availability of larger family homes, such as having more people sharing bedrooms in certain circumstances and also through looking at our under-occupation offer. It was commented that one of the small levers within the housing allocation policy was to potentially increasing the priority for under-occupiers within their band, so that they had more choice.
- j. The Panel was advised that the Council had managed to secure 4 times as many under occupation moves in the current year, compared to 2023/24. They key support area that was needed in relation to rightsizing was to be able to offer the right level of flexible support to individuals. Officers provided assurances that there were other routes out of TA that were not just being put into social housing, it was commented that the Council needed to promote these routes.
- k. The Cabinet Member commented that there was a pilot programme underway to build extensions on existing homes and that there were four of these currently underway. The Cabinet Member also set out that Haringey had one of the highest allocations for its allocations programme, the properties from which would go into the HCBS and could be used for TA.
- l. In response to a question, officers advised that under the current policy there was scope to allow a family to move from an overcrowded property to a less overcrowded one, such as moving into a four bed when they needed a five bedroom home.

- m. The Panel queried whether there was any way the Council could restrict Right to Buy. In response, officers advised that Right to Buy applied to all council tenants and that unless the new government revised the existing policy position, such as giving local authorities more flexibility, then there was not much that could be done. It was commented that the building costs of the new homes would make tenants' ability to purchase them prohibitive, in many cases.
- n. The Panel commented that they would be interested in seeing whether anything could be done through the allocations policy to support split families or even families that have separated.
- o. The Panel sought clarification about the change in numbers for each priority band that would arise from the proposed changes. In response, officers advised that the main change was de-prioritising those with non-dependent children into a lower Band B. It was suggested that there wasn't much change to the other bands. The Panel was advised that there were around 500 households who would be impacted by this change.
- p. Officers advised that if the Panel wanted to comment on the draft allocations policy, they would invite them to respond as part of the wider consultation process.
- q. The Chair queried whether moving under-occupiers to the highest band and retaining the start date of their tenancy was enough of an incentive to get people to move. In response, officers advised that the policy used the main lever that was available to it, which was to prioritise under-occupiers and move them to Band A. It was suggested that there was not much more that could be done through an allocations policy. Officers acknowledged that Council needed to be able to offer a broad suite of incentives to those who were under-occupying, including cash incentives and tailoring support. It was suggested that the Neighbourhood Moves scheme was also available to them. Officers advised that the Council was able to make direct offers to individuals where there was an overriding interest in regaining a particular property and that the existing policy did not prohibit this.
- r. The Panel noted that there were a few instances where the Council would allow someone to under-occupy, usually if it meant they were under-occupying by less than their current home, and questioned whether they should just be given greater cash incentives instead. In response, officers advised that the incentives worked in such a way that you got a payment for downsizing and then an additional payment for each room you downsized to, so technically they were also getting additional cash incentives. It was noted that the level of incentives and the need for wrap-around care were something that needed to be developed as part of the incentives work.
- s. The Chair expressed concern about the proposed use of auto-bidding, suggesting that there may be a number of legitimate reasons why someone might be entitled to a second choice, before they were deemed to be intentionally homeless. In response, officers emphasised that it was an offer of a suitable home and that there was also an option to appeal. Officers commented that this was in-line with what was offered by other local authorities and that the properties went through an assessment process to determine their suitability. The Panel was advised that the auto-bidding was in addition to the



- ability to express a choice on a particular property. It was commented that, in reality the auto-bidding would only affect those who were not bidding themselves. The Panel was advised that in some respects, those who received an offer of social housing were in a fortunate position, as many more of those on the housing register would never receive an offer. The Chair commented that she was mindful of the above but questioned what real impact it would have to give people two choices, given that property would be allocated to someone else.
- t. The Chair questioned what steps would be taken to make sure that people were aware that auto-bidding was in place and the rules around only getting one offer of a suitable placement. In response, the Cabinet Member set out that the changes to the policy were aimed at making people engage with the process and to make that process easier and more transparent. The Cabinet Member also emphasised that housing people in Temporary Accommodation was a comparatively very costly, and there was a financial need to people into alternative sources of housing.
  - u. The Panel commented that the Neighbourhood Moves scheme seemed to have had a knock-on effect on the performance around voids and that perhaps the scheme should be limited to just under-occupiers and those with housing need. In response, officers advised that as part of the consultation they were proposing to limit the scheme to those living in overcrowded accommodation and under occupiers, and would no longer be offered to those without housing need.
  - v. The Chair raised concerns about the possible impact of the new supported housing regulations leading to some providers failing to get a licence and having to leave the sector. The Chair queried what support would be in place for supported housing residents who lost their accommodation because the provider left the sector. In response, officers acknowledged that this was a concern and set out that there had been some bad actors in the sector, who had disguised profits and used housing benefit to pay for care and support. It was acknowledged that it had created challenges to the market but that it was hoped it would result in improving standards across the sector. Officers advised that they were aware of the issue and that there was a project board in place that was coordinating a response to the consultation. Officers emphasised the need for regional and sub-regional provision across London to prevent bad actors from simply moving from one borough to another.
  - w. Officers advised that the exact date of the consultation was not finalised, but that it was likely to begin a couple of months.

## **RESOLVED**

That the Panel noted the report and the draft Housing Allocations Policy.

## **231. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

## **RESOLVED**

- I. That the Panel considered its work programme, attached at Appendix A of the report.
- II. That the Panel agreed the scoping document for a proposed Review on TA Placements Policy and the PRS Discharge Policy, set out in Appendix B of the report.

**232. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

N/A

**233. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

It was noted that there were no further meetings of the Housing, Planning & Development Scrutiny Panel in 2024/25 municipal year.

CHAIR: Councillor Alexandra Worrell

Signed by Chair .....

Date .....