

**MINUTES OF THE HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL
TUESDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER 2014**

Councillors Adje (Chair), Bevan, Carroll, Diakides and Engert

LC1. WEBCASTING

LC2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Elliot and from Cllr Marshall.

LC3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

LC4. URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

LC5. DEPUTATIONS/ PETITIONS/ PRESENTATIONS/ QUESTIONS

None received.

LC6. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The panel noted and agreed the terms of reference for the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel.

LC7. CABINET Q & A

7.1 The Cabinet Member for Planning attended and provided a briefing on this portfolio and then responded to questions from the panel. As the following item (Planning Enforcement) fell within this portfolio area, this was also incorporated into the Cabinet Q and A discussions. The following is a summary of the key points from this discussion.

7.2 Within the briefing, the Cabinet member highlighted key achievements of the planning service over the past 6 months together with future challenges and opportunities that the service faces going forward. These were:

- Achievements: significant progress on delivery of planning service improvement programme, completion of new member training, adoption of Community Infrastructure Lev;
- Opportunities: harnessing community interest and expertise in local planning and development processes;
- Challenges: workloads and planning reforms, increased workloads are not matched by increased income from fees due to statutory fees regime, recruitment and retention of expert planning staff.

7.3 It was noted that the planning service would be offering a programme of planning visits for members. This programme would incorporate a range of activities including visits to local completed developments, developers and architects. The

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purpose of this programme was to raise awareness of some of the local planning challenges and successes, and through dialogue with members, further identify community aspirations for new development.

7.4 The panel noted the work of the planning enforcement service in relation to a number of local industrial sites that were being used for residential accommodation. Planning and other enforcement services (waste, licensing, building control and planning) were working together to resolve the following issues:

- Designated employment site being used for residential accommodation being;
- Health and safety issues;
- Hygiene and public health issues.

7.5 The panel noted that there were a number of factors that inhibited effective enforcement action in respect of 'industrial living sites' which were:

- The scale of the issue, there are estimated to be in excess of 1,000 people living in such accommodation;
- Access to units can be difficult were the planning service to resort to courts to gain access;
- In some instances, people have lived in this setting for many years which restricts planning enforcement options.

7.6 After further assessment of the nature and usage of the sites, it was apparent that units were also used for small artist workshops and other small enterprises. As a result, what was originally an enforcement issue for the Council, now encompasses a regeneration perspective, given the value that these units provide in terms of economic and social benefits to the local community. It was noted that this had precipitated a meaningful dialogue about the use and purpose of the land with both landowners and residents.

Agreed: That a briefing on industrial living would be provided to the panel for the 3rd November 2014.

7.7 It was noted that the sites such as those described above were important for the growth and development of small and medium sized businesses and that there was a concern that such sites may be lost to housing development. The panel wanted reassurance that the economic value and importance of existing and potential SME business sites should be considered in the broader economic development plans for the borough.

Agreed: That a briefing on the Growth and Economic Development Strategy would come to the panel (with reference to retention of sites for small businesses) on the 3rd November 2014.

7.8 It was noted that in respect of large scale developments (i.e. Tottenham), miscommunications sometimes arose between the planning service, local councillors and the community which resulted in misinformation being circulated. The Cabinet member indicated that an open and transparent approach was being adopted within these developments and that he had met with local ward councillors in Northumberland Park and Tottenham Green and was open to further meetings with other members to discuss and clarify plans.

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7.9 The panel noted that the planning website was constantly being evaluated to ensure that all necessary information was available and that relevant pages were easy to navigate. The Customer Service Transformation project, with a new IT system, would also contribute to greater ease of access to planning service information.

7.10 The panel noted that a consultation for the new waste plan would be undertaken in the New Year, most likely February 2014.

7.11 Members of the panel indicated that transportation responses to planning applications (from TFL) were often not accurate or in sufficient detail when included in final planning reports. It was noted that in a number of cases, TFL had responded directly to the applicant and these responses had been omitted from reports. The panel were reassured that these would be incorporated into future reports.

7.12 The panel was informed that the inclusion of planning enforcement function in to all planning officers' job descriptions was not viable. This had been trialled but had not been successful as this role often required specialist knowledge and input for effective action. The panel noted that the service was intending to increase its enforcement profile and capability through a number of other ways:

- Where planning breaches were identified, that a more robust approach to enforcement is adopted by the council;
- Publicising the outcomes successful planning enforcement outcomes within the community;
- The introduction of new working methods in the planning service;
- In respect of industrial living complexes, a project manager was being recruited to coordinate enforcement action and planning response.

7.13 The panel noted that the resource for planning enforcement had not been increased in recent budgets, and as a result, new ways of working were being developed to help extend enforcement capability. Further prioritisation of this aspect of planning function would require a reassessment of current resourcing levels. It was noted that a workshop was planned for November 2014 to raise awareness of planning enforcement issues with members, and that this would also be an opportunity for members to contribute to the repositioning and focus planning enforcement services.

7.14 Members of the panel sought further clarification in respect of planning applications being agreed when these appeared to contravene local planning policies. An example provided was that of a recent planning proposal being approved when this did not meet minimum room size policy guidelines. The panel noted that a planning proposal can only be rejected for what are defined as 'material reasons', and that local policies are predominantly there for guidance and are not part of the legal framework for decisions. The panel noted that difficult decisions have to be taken and that a balance has to be struck in terms of the quality and compliance of the whole application, and the likely costs of dealing with an appeal.

7.15 The panel suggested that in light of the above, further work may need to be undertaken to promote awareness of the planning process among local residents. It was noted that further information would be placed on planning service web pages to ensure that local stakeholders have an improved understanding of how planning decisions are reached.

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7.16 The panel noted that the planning service had provided training sessions for councillors on planning policy and development management processes and that these had been well received. The panel welcomed the planned site visits programme as this would help them to identify the nature and characteristics of good development and inform decision making processes.

LC8. PLANNING ENFORCEMENT - PERFORMANCE MONITORING

This item was covered in discussions for item 6 above.

LC9. WORK PROGRAMME 2014/ 15

The panel noted and discussed the work programme for the year ahead (2014/15). The work programme is made up of a number of short reports requested by the panel together with those projects that the panel wish to investigate in further detail. These have been scheduled in to a forward plan, which was agreed by the panel.

Agreed: Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel forward plan to be circulated to lead officers to note.

LC10. DELIVERY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING (PANEL PROJECT)

A presentation on the proposed scope for the panel project was presented at the meeting to the panel. Panel members were invited to comment further on the aims and objectives of the project scope (by October 8th 2014), which could then be discussed with relevant officers and agreed by Overview & Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting.

Agreed: The panel to feedback on the proposed scope of the project.

LC11. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Dates were noted and confirmed.

Clr Charles Adje

Chair