

**MINUTES OF THE HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL
WEDNESDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2014**

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

Apologies Councillor Marshall

LC1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Carroll and Cllr Marshall.

LC2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

LC3. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

LC4. DEPUTATIONS/ PRESENTATIONS

None received.

LC5. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The panel scrutinised savings and investment proposals as set out in the Medium Term Financial Plan that fell within its remit. These were:

- Priority 4 - Drive growth and employment from which everyone can benefit – proposals 46-48 (planning) and 53 (regeneration);
- Priority 5 - Create homes and communities where people chose to live and are able to thrive – proposals 56-66 (housing);
- Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme.

Priority 4 (Planning) - Item 46: Increased income through new advice and review of existing charges (£75,000 saving)

- The planning service currently provides a verbal, free pre-application planning advice service to local residents;
- From 2015/16, a new written and chargeable service will be introduced to improve transparency and accountability of planning advice provided;
- The panel noted that a similar charge will also be introduced for Design Panel at a later stage;
- Exact details of charges for pre-application advice service will be agreed by Cabinet.

Agreed: that the proposal be noted.

Priority 4 (Planning) – Item 47: Changes to policy and practice to remove non-statutory consultation (£50,000 saving)

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- Planning service currently sends out 175,000 planning notification letters each year which exceeds the statutory minimum (e.g. 4,000 letters sent out for Hornsey Depot Consultation though only 280 were statutorily required);
- From 2016/17 the volume of letters sent will be reduced (subject to confirmation within the revision of the Statement of Community Involvement);
- There will be greater use of web based consultation methods as new systems will be developed (with Northgate);
- A new My Haringey account will be developed for residents where they will be able to receive planning notifications in a particular area.

Agreed: that the proposal be noted.

Priority 4 (Planning) – Item 48: Wider restructure reducing core service (£75,000 saving)

- There is currently a team of officers preparing local plans many of which are temporary and agency staff;
- Workforce demands will be reduced once area plans have been produced and adopted (in year 3).

Agreed: that the proposal be noted.

Priority 4 (Regeneration) – Item 53: Tottenham team increased staffing resource (£250,000 investment)

- This proposal will increase capacity within the Tottenham regeneration team, in particular to project officer support to Area Managers and a GIS officer.
- It is expected that this investment will pay for itself provided that it speeds up regeneration plans (e.g. earlier benefits of new development and regeneration).

Agreed: that the proposal be noted.

Priority 5 (Housing, General Fund) – Item 56: Implement selective licensing across the borough (investment £100,000 year 1 and year 2, increased income £950,000 year 3)

- A investment of £200,000 to set up a selective licensing scheme for all rental properties required for years 1 and 2 will be offset by income from landlord registration of £950,00 in year 3;
- This will be a cost neutral position as income will be used to support enforcement activities (e.g. health and safety inspections);
- Learning from other boroughs (Newham, Enfield and Hackney) which have developed similar schemes will support the development of this initiative;
- Investment is needed to collate evidence to support the application process and to consult with relevant stakeholders (e.g. landlords, tenants).

Agreed:

- (i) that further information on selective licensing scheme is distributed to the panel;
- (ii) that the panel is provided with further information of the impact of £400,000 investment in enforcement activity in respect of residential units in commercial designated areas;
- (iii) that the proposal be noted.

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Priority 5 (Housing, General Fund) – Item 57: Private sector supply and management (£500,000 savings years 2 and 3, £250,000 investment over years 1 and 2)

- The Council will set up its own letting agency within Homes for Haringey (which is currently working up options);
- Other local authorities have developed similar agencies, and any learning or evolutions of these services will inform local plans;
- There will be initial start up costs of £250k, though this proposal is expected to generate a surplus once up and running and will also help to save money from the Temporary Accommodation budget.

Agreed: (i) that the proposal be noted.

Priority 5 (Housing, General Fund) – Item 58: Early intervention / Prevention & Temporary Accommodation Management (£500,000 savings years 2 and 3, £250,000 investment over years 1 and 2)

- There are over 1,000 placements in TA in the private sector each year. This places a strain on TA budget as rents in this sector are increasing;
- The six individual proposals will together help to reduce the cost of the TA budget;
- Provision of early housing advice will better support people in meeting their housing needs and in preventing homelessness;
- More efficient processing of homelessness decisions (staff investment);
- A placement protocol will go to Cabinet for approval to provide options for out of borough placement for those needing TA;
- Decanted stock (e.g. from Love Lane) will be used for TA;
- The Panel noted that Children's Services are still procuring housing though there may be plans to unify procurement processes (to prevent competing bids).

(i) that further documentation is provided to the panel in respect of councils duty to re-home people who may have a property abroad;

(ii) that the proposal be noted.

Priority 5 (Housing, General Fund) – Item 59: Early intervention / Prevention (Housing Commissioning) (£1,320,000 savings)

- It is expected that significant savings will be achieved in Housing Related Support through new contracting and market testing of agreements which are due to expire over the three year period;
- There has been over achievement of savings in this area in the current year and there is confidence that the projected savings for 2015/16-2017/18 can be achieved;
- The panel noted that in some housing related support schemes, all the furniture is rented, which can then be passed back to Housing Benefit. This may represent an opportunity for further savings

Agreed:

(i) Head of Housing Commissioning Manager would investigate further the provision of rented furniture within housing support contracts and if this presented an opportunity to reduce costs;

(ii) Plans for the Supported Housing Review would come to Overview & Scrutiny (Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Panel) the timing of which will be at a juncture where scrutiny can add most value and agreed with officers;

(iii) that the proposal be noted.

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Priority 5 (Housing, General Fund and HRA) – Item 60 and 62 Housing Unification synergies (£700,000 savings)

- The Community Housing Service was merged with Homes for Haringey in September 2014, and it is expected that there will be savings arising from this unification, in particular income Collection, Housing Management and Asset Management Teams;
- There was some concern among the panel as to the quality of back office facilities available to Homes for Haringey, and whether the ALMO was tied-in to using these services. It was noted that the Business Improvement Programme would help to develop and expand the back office offer.

Agreed:

- (i) That a further update of the unification process is provided to the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel at its March meeting;
- (ii) that the proposal be noted.

Priority 5 (Housing, General Fund and HRA) – Item 61 and 66 Management (£1,400,000 savings, £450,000 investment)

- Savings will be achieved through new technology, streamlined working and self serving customers;
- The housing management IT system (OHMS) will be upgraded and redeveloped and whilst this will require an initial investment, it is anticipated that this will deliver savings through more efficient and streamlined work processing;
- The panel noted that front line housing staff could still not access email through their phones, which was not conducive to officer accessibility or efficient working;
- Savings will also be accrued through the restructuring of staff: it is anticipated that 30 posts will be lost from a base of 800.

Agreed:

- (i) that the proposal be noted.

Priority 5 (Housing, HRA) – Item 63 Repairs (£1,300,000 savings)

- A number of actions would take place to reduce the cost of repairs to the council housing stock these would include: making better use of assets and selling those which are uneconomic to repair; reviewing lettable and void standards;
- The Panel were concerned at any proposal that may potentially lead to a loss of Council owned stock. The panel noted that any disposal would be subject to a rigorous economic assessment and other possible options for use (e.g. supported housing if it is a sizeable property);
- The Panel were concerned that the current age threshold at which tenants were not responsible for minor repairs was too low, and that this should be reassessed in line with current retirement age;
- The Panel indicated that lettable standards were at a minimum and were concerned that there should be any reduction of these as set out in the proposals. It was noted that there were plans to introduce decoration vouchers which may further help to reduce costs;
- The Panel noted that Homes for Haringey would review the penalties and sanctions imposed on those tenants who had wilfully damaged their property;

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Agreed:

- (i) that further consideration is given to disposal of council owned stock, particularly the option to demolish and rebuild where the present condition is uneconomic to repair;
- (ii) Homes for Haringey would reassess the age at which tenant responsibility for repairs is relinquished:
- (iii) that the proposal be noted.

Priority 5 (Housing, HRA) – Item 64 Garage Fee Review (£500,000 savings)

- The Panel noted that garage fees have not been reviewed since 1989;
- Proposal to review fees would be considered at Cabinet in February which would result in an increase of between £4-10 per week;
- The Panel felt that this opportunity should also be taken to review parking fees for Homes for Haringey estates (where there is currently no charge);

- (i) that Homes for Haringey review parking fees on its housing estates, particularly where these occur within and existing an Controlled Parking Zone;
- (ii) that the proposal be noted.

Priority 5 (Housing, HRA) – Item 65 Management (£300,000 savings)

- This savings proposal will results from the Housing Unification and Improvement Programme and will remove duplication in quality assurance and contract monitoring;

Agreed:

- (i) that the proposal be noted.

Housing Revenue Account -Proposed Capital Programme 2015/16 to 2017/18

The panel noted that:

- Capital spend proposals were similar to previous years;
- A bid of £6m is currently with the GLA for further capital improvements to local housing stock;
- Decent Homes money would cease beyond 206/17 and that plans for a successor programme are being put in place, including a reassessment of Decent Homes standards;
- In relation to borrowing headroom within the HRA and use of Right to Buy Receipts for new development, it was reported that:
 - There was a £56m borrowing cap within the HRA and that approximately £21.78m was left in the headroom after planned council new build of 94 new homes;
 - The preferred order in which RTB receipts would be used was 1) use to acquire ex council owned stock 2) use to support new council development 3) pass to Registered providers for new development;
- It was noted that residents in supported housing were not full charged for services, and this would be applied with no impact to residents as this would be covered within Housing Benefit framework (page 122, section 14.2 of the MTFS);
- The panel noted that there would be significant level of redundancies within Housing Management in the three year period and wanted further clarification as to whether these would be financed through the HRA or Council;

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Agreed:

- (i) Whilst accepting that the introduction of service charges for those in supported housing would be covered by commensurate rise in Housing benefit, further reassurance was sought on the affordability of such a charge (e.g. will all those affected be fully compensated);
- (ii) That further clarification would be provided as to capital provision for redundancy costs would be met through the HRA or Council;
- (iii) that the proposals be noted.

Draft Capital Programme 2015/16 and Indicative Spending Plans 2016/17 and 2017/18 (page 223)

The panel noted that:

- Public Space – the £5m agreed Tottenham Programme for new community space adjacent to the stadium was of course dependent on completion of the stadium.

Clr Charles Adje

Chair