HRSP Minutes of the Meeting held on 16th November 2015

Attendees: Cllr Akwasi- Ayisi, Cllr Engert, Cllr Gallagher, Cllr Gunes, Cllr Griffiths, Cllr Ibrahim and Cllr Newton.

In attendance: Cllr Strickland

Council Officers: Andrew Billany, Helen Fisher, Molly Gavriel, Dan Hawthorn, Mustafa Ibrahim and Liz Poole.

1. Filming at meetings

1.1 This was noted by the panel.

2. Apologies

2.1 Apologies for lateness were received from Cllr Ibrahim.

3. Urgent Business

3.1 No items were received.

4. Declarations of interest

4.1 None received.

5. Deputations

5.1 None received.

6. Minutes of the last meeting

6.1 The panel noted that the Chair had written to Cllr Sahota and had arranged to meet in December to discuss his work with local high streets and if there were any ways in which scrutiny could assist. It was noted that there were significant changes happening in respect of the localisation of the business rates, though any work on this would fall within the realms of the main Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

6.2 The tenancy strategy is due to be updated in 2016, and the panel noted that this had been added to the work programme and would be scheduled in before final agreement.

6.3 Subject to a small number of minor typographical corrections (spelling of Lynton Road), the minutes of the 13th October were agreed by the panel.

7. Cabinet Q & A

7.1 The Cabinet member for Housing and Regeneration attended to respond to questions within this portfolio. Prior to this, the Cabinet member

highlighted a number national developments which would have a significant impact on local housing and regeneration policies and the way the Council is able to support those in housing need. Highlights of the panel's discussion with the cabinet member of these issues are presented below.

7.2 The panel noted that there were a number of provisions within the Housing & Planning Bill which, if implemented, would have a detrimental impact on the supply of affordable housing. The continuation of the Right to Buy discount would see a further reduction in the Council housing stock and the extension of Right to Buy to tenants of housing associations would further reduce the totality of affordable homes available in the borough.

7.3 The forced sale of high value council properties would result in a loss of housing stock, particularly in the west of the borough where property values were higher. It was suggested that this would inhibit the council's ability to provide affordable housing in such areas and curtail the ability of the Council to deliver mixed housing communities. Discussion noted that of the 560 properties that became vacant each last year about 30 could be liable for forced sale.

7.4 The introduction of Pay to Stay, where social tenants on an income of over £40k would be required to pay the market rental value of the property, would be difficult to administer and possibly incentivise Right to Buy. In addition, it was also noted that any surplus rent accrued through this process would be payable to central government and not retained by the Council.

7.5 Acute demand within the housing sector together with changes to Housing Benefit rules has made it difficult for the council to agree and retain contracts with private landlords in the provision of affordable housing with the private rented sector. This was having an impact on the cost of supporting homeless people through temporary accommodation.

7.6 Provisions with the Housing and Planning Bill require developers to provide Starter Homes, private unit sales at 20% discount. This requirement will inevitably reduce the amount of money available to provide affordable homes for rent which comes from the same source. It was also questionable how affordable homes for sale at a 20% discount would be to local residents, considering that average house prices (£450-500K) and wages (£26k) were for the borough.

7.7 In addition to provisions in the Housing & Planning Bill, the panel noted that there would be significant changes to welfare support in this parliament that could exacerbate the impact of limited affordable housing. It was noted that over £12billion of savings needed to be found from the welfare budget over the next five years.

7.8 The panel noted that an engagement exercise was being undertaken with local Registered Housing Providers to ascertain how they planned to respond to provisions within the Housing & Planning Bill, in particular the Right to Buy proposals. It was noted that the council would continue to seek to work in partnership with those organisations that prioritise affordable housing and work with the council to extend such provision.

7.9 The panel discussed the use of 'modern construction' methods in the delivery of local affordable housing (modular build). There were concerns around the quality of such construction and the need to avoid recreating housing and other related social problems. The panel were reassured that 'estates' of modern construction units would not be created (e.g. not have 100's on the same site) and thus avoid any perpetuation of spatial deprivation. The panel were also reassured that considerable effort was being taken to ensure high design quality was being used so that such units would exceed the current temporary accommodation offer.

7.10 Further discussions noted that modern construction units would be of high quality and that a mortgage would be able to be obtained upon them. Although provision would be not be widespread, the use of modern construction methods could help to improve the speed at which affordable homes are provided within the borough.

Agreed: Further details of prospective modular build units to be circulated to the panel.

7.11 The panel also raised the issue of the decanting of tenants from regeneration estates. It was noted that those tenants vacating estates earmarked for regeneration would be placed in the top priority group of the housing register to facilitate decanting processes. It was noted that many of those residents which had been decanted from the Love Lane Estate were very happy with the new accommodation (part of the High Road West regeneration scheme).

7.12 The panel noted that decanting of estate residents risked a loss of community cohesion as due to the open bidding process, neighbouring tenants may not always be relocated to the same site. It was noted that tenants decanted from existing estates are always presented with the option of returning though it was acknowledged that this could be some years later.

7.13 As the regeneration projects matured, the volume of new housing development available would increase, providing greater opportunity for communities to move collectively together. It was however reported that as many as 1/3 of existing tenants do not want to return to the area from which they have been decanted.

7.14 The requirement to reduce rents on the councils housing stock by 1% each year to 2020 was discussed by the panel. It was noted that this requirement would limit the council's ambitions to build new homes and its ability to meet Decent Homes standards of its housing stock as this would reduce income available for such capital investments. It was noted that limited capital spending had also reduced the council's ability to use Right to Buy receipts which required an element of local matched funding.

7.15 The panel also discussed the possible ending of life tenancies and how these would be replaced by 5 year short hold tenancies. Although this was only under discussion at the national level, it was noted that this could be inserted as an amendment within the Housing and Planning Bill. Such a move if approved would substantially alter the nature of the allocation of affordable housing. The panel noted that the new tenancy strategy is due to be considered by cabinet in 2016 and is earmarked to come to scrutiny.

7.16 The Chair thanked the Cabinet member for attending and responding to questions from panel members.

8. Haringey Housing Strategy

8.1 A presentation was provided on the Haringey Housing Strategy. A consultation on this strategy was conducted over two stages: stage 1 which consulted upon the vision and principles for the strategy (end December 2014); stage 2 which consulted upon the actual draft of the Haringey Housing Strategy (end October 2015).

8.2 The presentation focused on the analysis of the second stage of this consultation of which there were 82 on-line responses and 15 more detailed written responses. The on-line survey indicated that:

- There was strong support for the strategy to focus on those in housing crisis;
- There was strong support that the strategy delivers a social dividend;
- The 3 top priorities for improving the quality of homes and neighbourhoods were:
    - Tackling ASB;
    - Promote longer tenancies in the private rented sector;
    - Assess other ways to build affordable homes (e.g. co-ops).

8.3 The panel discussed the social dividend to development where it was expected that there would be a wider benefit beyond housing provision (e.g. job opportunities, new community facilities and other regeneration goals). It was accepted that the council needs to do more to define this and how it intends to achieve such objectives.

8.4 It was noted that there were 4 main themes emerging from the second consultation, these being:

- *Affordability* – that the current definition (defined as 45% of median income) would exclude lowest income households, that young people and those reliant on state benefits would continue to find housing unaffordable;
- *Vulnerability and social exclusion* – what more can the strategy do to assist those in greatest housing need?;
- *Supply, innovation and quality* – in particular, the quality of housing in the private rented sector and what actions the council can take to improve provision;
- *Council housing* – a strong commitment for ongoing provision targeted at those most in need.

8.5 The panel noted that tenant consultation was the key to estate regeneration and site development and should be an ongoing process within regeneration plans. It was noted that the Council had continued to learn from regeneration projects and applied this as new regeneration plans came on stream. The importance of tenant engagement was noted to have been critical to successesful progress in the regeneration of Love Lane Estate in Tottenham. In addition, it was hoped to encourage Love Lane residents to share their learning and experiences with other residents from other estates earmarked for regeneration.

8.6 It was noted that the Haringey Housing Strategy may need some further update and revision ahead of final Cabinet approval (March 2016) to reflect any additional changes that emerge from the Housing and Planning Bill as it progresses through parliament. Given the ambitions of the strategy, the panel noted that there would be significant challenges around the deliverability of ambitions within the strategy, and in particular the need to develop partnerships to help achieve these ambitions.

9. Empty Homes

9.1 The managing Director of Homes for Haringey attended to provide a briefing on empty homes and how they are brought back in to use in both the social rented sector (Council) and private owned sector.

9.2 Where privately owned properties are neglected and fall into disrepair this can become a problem for the local area (eyesore, ASB etc). In such cases, if the owner cannot be persuaded to improve the dwelling, the last line of intervention is the compulsory purchase order (CPO), a forced sale notice for the property. Once issued, the Council can then sell the property, recoup an outstanding debts (e.g. Council Tax) and bring the home back in to use.

9.3 CPO's are a last resort and usually the threat of such action is enough to spur owners into action. The panel noted however that there were 28 compulsory purchase orders issued in the borough over the past few years, though much fewer had actually progressed through to actual forced sale.

The current state of the housing market which has seen a substantial increase in property values has also meant that it is increasingly rare for people to leave properties vacant and neglected.

9.4 The panel enquired whether there were any penalties that the council could apply to those homes that were left vacant and untended. It was noted that since 2013 the Government has provided local councils with a discretionary power to charge a premium on properties which have been empty and unfurnished for two years or more. Haringey have set a premium of 50% which means properties that have been empty (unoccupied and unfurnished) for more than 2 years will be subject to a 150% council tax charge. There are a number of exemptions to this.

9.5 Panel members also enquired through what route they should notify the Council of empty properties in their ward. It was suggested that members could notify the Managing Director or through the appropriate page on the website (Empty Homes).

9.6 In respect of the Councils own housing stock it was noted that 567 properties became vacant last year, most of which are brought back into use within 21-23 days of tenant vacating the property. There were however approximately 30 dwellings per quarter which take substantially longer to bring back in to use and these become known as voids.

9.7 The panel understood that there could be a multitude of reasons which contribute to the void status of a dwelling these include:

- Problem with pest control;
- Dwelling left in very poor condition by previous tenants;
- Structural problems;
- Repairs in excess of £40k;
- Requirement for adaptations (e.g. for a disabled tenant);
- Legal action or processes involving the tenant.

9.8 The Chair thanked officers for attending to discuss this item.

10. Tottenham Regeneration

10.1 The panel, accompanied by other local councillors, undertook a visit to Tottenham on the 12th November 2015 to visit the main regeneration sites in the area which included:

- High Road West Regeneration;
- Tottenham Hotspur FC redevelopment;
- Northumberland Park.

10.2 The panel found the visit very informative as it helped members to understand the scale of proposed regeneration plans and the challenges and opportunities that each individual site presents. Members expressed their

thanks to the Tottenham Programme Director and the Area Regeneration Manager who accompanied them on the visit. Panel members discussed a number of issues arising from the visit and which are summarised below.

10.3 Firstly, members were keen to understand how regeneration plans intended to balance local needs for housing with local employment opportunities, particularly as the parts of the areas earmarked for development may result in the loss of some sites which were currently used for light industrial purposes (e.g. Peacock Industrial Estate).

10.4 It was noted that consultation with the Tottenham Traders Association would be ongoing throughout the regeneration process to ensure that the views of local businesses were incorporated in to such development plans. Whilst the Area Action Plan sets out those areas identified for change, the council clearly wants to retain business sites in the area to ensure that the area continues to provide employment opportunities in addition to new homes.

10.5 The panel discussed how best the Council can continue to meaningful engage and involve local people in regeneration plans, particularly when the area plan may span the next 10-20 years and it would be at least 3-4 years before any ground is broken on development sites. The panel noted that a difficult balance needed to be struck in getting the level of consultation right and whilst the community needed to feel involved and part of regeneration projects there was a danger of consultation fatigue.

10.6 The panel heard that the housing market continues to be very challenging, particularly in relation to those factors that contribute to viability of regeneration schemes, and which would ultimately affect the delivery of new affordable homes. Costs continued to rise within the sector which would impact on deliverability of affordable homes and other regeneration ambitions.

10.7 The development of Tottenham High Road was discussed by the panel, particularly in relation to the commercial offer. It was noted from panel discussions that:

- Consultations had shown that people wanted more skilled jobs and more developed access to local training opportunities;
- Local people wanted to spend in Tottenham High Road, but needed a different mix of commercial premises and retail outlets to encourage and support this;
- The size of current retail units should be more varied to encourage different business opportunities (current makeup is too restrictive);
- The diversity of local retail opportunities would be critical to help develop the identity of the area.

10.8 The panel noted that there had been some areas of considerable investment which would contribute to the improvement in this Tottenham High Road area, which included:

- Investment in shop frontage;
- Support provided to Holcombe Road Market;
- Transport for London public realm improvements;
- A new frontage with additional retail space to be provided at Bruce Grove Station.

10.9 The panel noted that the A10, which runs the length of Tottenham High Road, generated significant traffic levels which were a barrier to this area being seen as a commercial destination. High volumes of traffic and associated road safety issues will need to be recognised and addressed to support the commercial and retail ambitions for this area.

10.10 The panel discussed the different mediums through which local residents and other stakeholders were engaged and involved in regeneration plans. It was noted that within feedback from local residents, the *'Tottenham News'* a newsletter sent to all residents from the regeneration team, had a wide readership and had high levels of acceptability within the community. The regeneration team noted that this medium would be continued to be used to help communicate and engage with local residents.

10.11 The Chair thanked officers for attending the meeting and for supporting the visit to the regeneration sites in Tottenham.

11. Community Infrastructure Levy

11.1 The panel were updated on plans for the scrutiny in a day event being planned for the 3rd December 2015. It was noted that an external expert from the Planning Officers Society would attend to give evidence, as to would representatives from local developers and Neighbourhood Forums.

11.2 Evidence gathering was expected to be completed on the day with any additional evidence gathered through a 'mopping up' meeting. It was hoped that a draft of the report with the panel's recommendations will be brought to the next meeting of the panel for approval.

12. Work Programme Update

12.1 An update of the work programme was noted by the panel. The next scrutiny in a day exercise would consider 'Housing Viability' and would be planned for February 2016.

13. New items

13.1 None.

14. Dates of future meetings

14.1 These were noted by the panel.

The meeting closed at 9.10pm