

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON THURSDAY, 22ND JUNE, 2017, 6.30 - 8.45 pm

Present: Councillors: Emine Ibrahim (Chair), Zena Brabazon, Gail Engert, Martin Newton and Ann Waters

Also Present: Councillors: Vincent Carroll, Clive Carter, and Alan Strickland

1. 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'.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Cllr John Bevan and Cllr Jennifer Mann.

3. URGENT BUSINESS

In response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy the Chair informed the Panel that an urgent item on fire safety would be considered.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

5. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None.

6. MINUTES - 6 FEBRUARY 2017

AGREED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2017 be approved as a correct record.

7. MINUTES - 7 MARCH 2017

It was noted that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2017 would be reported to the next meeting.

8. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP

Christian Scade, Principal Scrutiny Officer, introduced the report as set out.

AGREED:

- (a) That the terms of reference and protocol for Overview and Scrutiny be noted; and
- (b) That the policy areas, remits and memberships for each Scrutiny Panel for 2017/18 be noted.

9. AMENDMENT TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

AGREED: That a New Item of Urgent Business, concerning Fire Safety, be taken before agenda item 9, Homelessness – Supply and Demand Update.

Clerks note – the minutes follow the order of the meeting.

10. NEW ITEM OF URGENT BUSINESS - FIRE SAFETY

Following recent events in Kensington, the Chair advised that thoughts and sympathies were with all those who had lost their lives or been affected by the terrible Grenfell Tower tragedy.

It was acknowledged that it was not yet known what had caused the fire or why it had spread in the way that it had. However, the tragedy had understandably raised a number of questions and concerns about fire safety.

In terms of tower block fire safety in Haringey, the Panel was informed that:

- 54 blocks over 6 storeys high were managed by Homes for Haringey.
- None of the blocks managed by Homes for Haringey had the Reynobond aluminium system that had been used on Grenfell Tower.
- All exterior cladding on properties managed by Homes for Haringey had met the specifications for this type of work and complied with building regulations.
- All Homes for Haringey managed tower blocks had valid Fire Risk Assessments with established processes for ongoing monitoring including regular checks with the communal areas and regular servicing of fire-fighting equipment.
- Homes for Haringey employed two full time, appropriately qualified, fire risk assessors.
- Homes for Haringey staff had visited every high rise block and inspected communal areas and access routes to ensure they were clear.

In response to questions, the Panel was informed that the procedures used by Homes for Haringey were in line with the London Fire Brigade's audit tool for fire safety.

As an additional measure of re-assurance the Panel was informed fire risk assessors would, during the following week, visit every high rise block in order to review fire risk assessments and speak to residents.

In terms of non-council owned tower blocks, officers explained work was under way to ensure the Council had a record of all high rise blocks in the borough, and to understand any challenges faced.

A number of questions were raised in relation to Rivers Apartments, a new 22 storey tower situated in Tottenham. In response, officers provided an update from Newlon Housing Trust, who owned the property, with the following points being noted:

- Rivers Apartments completed in the spring of 2015 and had been clad with Reynobond PE. It was confirmed this was the same as the cladding used on Grenfell Tower.
- London Fire Brigade had carried out an extensive safety audit on 22 June 2017 and had made some minor recommendations for the building.
- Newlon Housing Trust had started work on the recommendations and had requested some additional technical clarifications. However, subject to meeting these recommendations, the Fire Brigade had confirmed they were satisfied Rivers Apartments should be considered a low fire risk building.

The Panel was informed Rivers Apartments was a modern building with many active fire safety systems including a sprinkler system, wet riser, a firefighter's lift and smoke evacuation valves.

With regard to the status of the cladding the Panel was informed that the Building Research Establishment (BRE) had been asked to review its design and specification. It was noted that Newlon Housing Trust was waiting for these technical and independent recommendations before determining whether or not the cladding should be removed and if so what the appropriate replacement should be.

In view of the concerns that had been raised the Panel strongly suggested, as a precautionary measure, that the cladding on Rivers Apartments should be replaced. The Panel also agreed that the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and Planning should provide an update, as soon as possible, to all councillors to confirm what action would be taken.

The Chair concluded by providing an update on scrutiny work that would be undertaken during the summer. The Panel was informed the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would lead this by receiving updates on inspections already underway and by reviewing wider responsibilities of the council and Homes for Haringey. Subject to final scoping, this would include consideration of issues relating to: planning policy; building regulations; the resources available to support adequate inspection; questions arising from construction materials; and the council's response, as landlord and regulator; following initial findings from the national Grenfell inquiry.

To avoid possible duplication, the Panel suggested the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should liaise with the Homes from Haringey Residents' Panel before the scope of the project was confirmed.

AGREED: That the update on tower block fire safety be noted.

11. HOMELESSNESS - SUPPLY AND DEMAND UPDATE

Denise Gandy, Director of Housing Demand, Homes for Haringey, and Alan Benson, Housing Strategy and Commissioning Manager, Haringey Council, provided an update on supply and demand issues in relation to homelessness.

Ms Gandy commenced her presentation by providing information on current performance and the future trajectory. In terms of households in temporary accommodation, the Panel was informed that after 3 years of rapid growth 2016/17 had seen a turnaround, with a net loss of 30 over the course of the year. The Panel considered comparative data for 2016/17 that showed Haringey had beaten the overall London rise of 4.3%.

The following points were noted:

- Since the Homes for Haringey restructure in October 2017, the number of households in temporary accommodation had fallen.
- 60-70% of post-restructure TA applications had been decided within 33 days, compared to 20-40% before the restructure.
- Faster decision making had reduced the number of cases placed in interim temporary accommodation while decisions were made.
- The prevention work carried out by Homes for Haringey had been effective. The Panel was informed that over the last five years only 10% of cases recorded as a prevention went on to “fail” with the household returning to apply for temporary accommodation.
- A simple trajectory for 2017/18 had forecast that there would be 2,994 households in temporary accommodation by April 2018.

In response to questions, the Panel was informed the cost of temporary accommodation had increased significantly in recent years and that this was likely to continue unless the supply mix changed.

Ms Gandy advised that prevention alone would not reduce numbers sufficiently, neither would social lets. For example, if inflow stopped entirely the numbers in temporary accommodation would only drop to about 2,450. In response, the Panel went on to consider the following:

- In terms of Haringey’s Allocations Policy and Lettings Plan, it was noted there was competing demand for a reducing number of lets. It was projected that there would be 490 lets in 2017/18 (164 to households in temporary accommodation).
- Issues in relation to decant decisions were considered and it was noted decanted stock was used as temporary accommodation but there had been huge pressures

in certain years. Moving forward, the Panel suggested that the term re-housing, rather than decanting, should be used in official documents and publications.

- The use of Haringey's own one bed stock as temporary accommodation.

In terms of the Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy the Panel was informed that there was a limited number of out of London placements. It was noted that:

- This was an area of significant legal challenge.
- As you moved further away there was more to consider. For example, right to family life with both parents.
- Only 20% were eligible to move under the Policy.
- The most common reason to remain in London was employment.

In terms of Welfare Reform, the Panel received an update on the following issues: the continued impact of the benefit cap; Universal Credit and the Local Housing Allowance cap across the social sector.

In response to questions, the Panel received an update on the Flexible Homeless Support Grant. The following points were highlighted:

- The support grant replaced the £40 TA Management fee from 1 April 2017.
- The new funding was to allow local authorities greater flexibility in the use of funding.
- 2 year settlement:
 - o 2017/18 - £7,386,509 plus £1,244,342 (1 year only)
 - o 2018/19 - £8,603,852
- It was based on a formula that took into account homeless pressures but also protected local authorities with high temporary accommodation use.
- It was ring fenced for work to prevent or deal with homelessness.

The Panel also considered the implications of the Homelessness Reduction Act in terms of temporary accommodation and supply. It was noted this would amend Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, rather than replace it.

Ms Gandy concluded the item by outlining actions that would be taken in relation to prevention, the best use of stock and supply. These are summarised below:

- Prevention
 - o Additional Prevention Fund funding
 - o Use of Discretionary Housing payment
 - o Preparation for the Homelessness Reduction Act

Best use of stock

- Use of decanted properties as temporary accommodation
 - Under occupation incentives reviewed
 - More activity on addressing fraud – occupancy initiatives
 - Further work on the Housing Allocations Policy
- Supply
- Additional shared facility hostel units – conversations
 - Exploring best options for property acquisition
 - Increasing Assured Shorthold Tenancy supply

AGREED: That the homelessness supply and demand update be noted.

12. CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING, REGENERATION AND PLANNING - QUESTIONS

The Chair welcomed Councillor Alan Strickland, Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and Planning, to the meeting.

In view of the Panel's terms of reference, Councillor Strickland provided an update on his responsibilities. The following points were then discussed:

- How Cranwood could be the HDV's first development and an opportunity to deliver on the Council's ambitions to create sustainable, balanced communities. The Cabinet Member informed the Panel that overall the council's housing strategy committed to 40% of new homes being affordable. However, it was confirmed that the design masterplan for Cranwood included an enhanced level of affordable housing compared to emerging policy (50% by habitable room) of which at least 60% would be for low cost affordable rent.
- Issues concerning the level of consultation that had taken place between the Council and the Board of Homes for Haringey in relation to the HDV and its impact on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
- The Panel was informed that senior Council officers had held discussions with Homes for Haringey's Managing Director and Executive Leadership team, and had participated in a dedicated meeting with the Board. These had covered the potential impacts and opportunities arising from the HDV in the short term, medium and long term. Assuming the Council approved the establishment of the HDV, and agreed to proceed with development on sites managed by Homes for Haringey, it was noted that discussions would continue both within Homes for Haringey and between Homes for Haringey and the Council.
- It was noted the management of the Housing Revenue Account was the responsibility of the Council, and not Homes for Haringey. It was also acknowledged that income from commercial properties on Council estates went to the HRA and not to Homes for Haringey.

- The equalities impact of the HDV. The Panel was informed that recommendations to Cabinet in July 2017 – to establish the HDV, and to agree the first set of business plans – would be accompanied by full Equality Impact Assessments.
- The fact that the HDV would operate in line with the Council's Housing Strategy and other housing policies. The Panel was informed that new mixed-use, mixed-tenure developments would be based on standards of quality, access and experiences that were blind to tenure. It was noted that individual proposals would be considered – both by the HDV Board and the Council's planning function – as they came forward, and tested against these principles while being balanced with other factors such as efficiency of maintenance regimes and affordability of mandatory service charges which could make separate building cores for different tenures the most effective way to ensure affordability and good housing management.

In addition to the HDV, the Panel discussed the innovative work that was taking place in Brent to provide temporary accommodation. It was explained that Brent Council had put together a significant fund, made up of right-to-buy receipts and borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board. It was noted the fund was being used to purchase street properties for use as temporary accommodation and was planned to facilitate the purchase of 300-400 properties, many ex Council right-to-buy properties, so some purchases would also be on Council estates.

In view of the innovative work taking place in Brent, the Panel asked whether it would be possible to implement a similar scheme in Haringey. In response, Alan Benson, Head of Housing Strategy and Commissioning, explained that Brent had acquired properties through a wholly owned company. The Panel was informed Haringey did have a programme that was being run by Homes for Haringey. It was noted this would be scaled up, but not to the size of the Brent programme, following legal advice from a QC. However, the Panel was assured that other models were being pursued in order to deliver a viable local solution.

AGREED: That the update from the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and Planning be noted.

13. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT 2017/18

Christian Scade, Principal Scrutiny Officer, introduced the report as set out.

It was agreed that the issues below, set out in section 4.6 of the report, should be included in the Panel's work programme for 2017/18:

- Selective Licensing Update (October 2017)
- An update on the financial performance / budget monitoring of services related to Priorities 4 and 5 of Haringey's Corporate Plan (November 2017)
- Budget Scrutiny – MTFs and HRA (December 2017)

- Consideration of performance against housing supply commitments within the Council's policy framework (Details TBC)
- The work of the Decision Panel (Details TBC)
- Older People Housing (Details TBC)
- Supported Housing Review Update (Details TBC)

In addition, and following a discussion, it was agreed that the following areas should be scrutinised:

- HDV updates to be considered at each Panel meeting.
- What does Good Growth, as a concept, mean for Haringey, especially in terms of people, place and prosperity (October 2017)
- The impact of tall buildings and high density development on residents way of life, including public health (Scrutiny in a Day – towards the end of 2017 / early 2018)

In terms of in-depth scrutiny work, the Panel agreed to scope a project that would focus on the conditions and attitudes towards social housing in Haringey. It was agreed consideration should be given to new and older housing across the borough. It was proposed that the review be scoped before the end of August, with evidence gathering concluded before Christmas.

Following updates from Alan Benson, Housing Strategy and Commissioning Manager, Emma Williamson, Assistant Director for Planning, Peter O'Brien, Area Regeneration Manager, and Denise Gandy, Director of Housing Demand, Homes for Haringey, the Panel suggested that the following issues should also be considered, subject to further discussion between the Chair and officers outside of the meeting:

- Estate Renewal Schemes
- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping
- Preparation for the Homelessness Reduction Act
- Intermediate Housing Policy
- Private Rented Strategy

AGREED:

- (a) That the work completed by the Panel during 2016/17, attached at Appendix A, be noted.
- (b) That the verbal updates from officers on work relevant to the Panel's terms of reference be noted.

(c) That, subject to the additions and comments above, the areas of inquiry outlined in section 4.6 of the report be approved and recommended for endorsement by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

14. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Chair referred Members present to item 13 as shown on the agenda in respect of future meeting dates, and Members noted the information contained therein'.

CHAIR: Councillor Emine Ibrahim

Signed by Chair

Date