

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON TUESDAY, 19TH DECEMBER, 2017, 6.30 - 8.20 pm

PRESENT:

Councillors: Emine Ibrahim (Chair), John Bevan, Zena Brabazon, Gail Engert and Martin Newton

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 apologies for absence had been received from Cllr Ann Waters and Cllr Vincent Carroll.

3. URGENT BUSINESS

It was noted Homes for Haringey had recently put safety measures in place on the Broadwater Farm estate following test result findings highlighting several low-rise blocks had not met required building regulations for large panel system blocks with gas supplies. The Chair informed the Panel that an urgent update on these issues would be considered at the meeting.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

5. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None.

6. MINUTES - 2 OCTOBER 2017

AGREED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2017 be approved as a correct record.

7. MINUTES - 7 NOVEMBER 2017

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

8. AMENDMENT TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

AGREED: That a New Item of Urgent Business, concerning Broadwater Farm Gas and Fire Safety, be taken before agenda item 8, Preparation for the Homelessness Reduction Act.

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

9. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS - BROADWATER FARM GAS AND FIRE SAFETY

Chris Liffen, Interim Managing Director, informed the Panel that Homes for Haringey had recently put safety measures in place on the Broadwater Farm estate. Mr Liffen explained test result findings had shown several of the low-rise blocks had not met required building regulations for large panel system blocks with gas supplies.

The Panel was assured affected residents had been contacted to explain safety measures being taken following the review into the blocks. It was noted around 1,400 people across 725 properties had been affected.

Mr Liffen explained following national advice, given by the Department for Communities and Local Government, Homes for Haringey had started investigations into the construction of the estate which had been built in the 1960s and early 1970s. The Panel was informed that reviews from structural engineers had suggested some blocks did not meet required standards to use gas. It was noted that although the risk was very low, Homes for Haringey had taken a number of precautionary steps to enable residents to stay in their homes.

The Panel was asked to note that the blocks affected, housing both council tenants and some leaseholders, were Croydon, Hawkinge, Hornchurch, Lympne, Manston, Martlesham, Rochford, Debden and Stapleford. In addition, it was noted that the two tower blocks on the estate, Northolt and Kenley, did not have gas supplies while Tangmere was of a completely different construction to the low rise blocks. However, as a precaution, Mr Liffen explained that structural surveyors were reviewing these blocks with results expected soon.

The Panel was informed that Homes for Haringey would visit affected properties to arrange to cap off supplies for gas cookers and to replace them with electric cookers. It was noted that the team would work as quickly as possible and aimed to have the cookers replaced by Christmas, subject to staff gaining access to properties. In response to questions, Mr Liffen advised that as a precaution, the team would also be fitting interrupter valves in order to switch off the gas if a leak was detected and would increase the frequency of gas safety visits. It was noted that a gas safety check would be carried out for free in each leased home and that there were plans to replace the gas system temporarily until a permanent measure could be put in place.

The Panel noted that this was an uncertain time for Broadwater Farm residents but welcomed the steps that had been taken by both the Council and Homes for Haringey, including:

- Holding meetings with the residents' association, knocking on doors on the estate, and distributing letters informing residents of the changes.
- The setting up of a dedicated phone line for effected residents.
- The drop-in centre at the community centre
- The sharing of information with community representatives on the estate.
- The large staff presence that had been on hand and available for discussion.
- The briefings and work that had taken place with colleagues from the police and fire brigade.

During the discussion that followed a range of issues were considered, including:

- The work that was taking place to help identify, and support, vulnerable residents.
- The fact all tenanted properties on the estate had valid gas safety certificates.
- Various issues in relation to the Ronan Point Disaster.
- The importance of good, and continuing, communication with all residents affected.
- Concerns that the cost of an electric cooker would be greater than a gas cooker.
- Compensation packages for affected residents.

The costs associated with putting the safety measures in place were also considered. In response to question, Mr Liffen made clear that Homes for Haringey always put the safety of its residents first and were looking to make residents as safe as possible in the quickest possible timeframe with the minimum of disruption.

In conclusion, the Panel was informed that work would be carried out by Keepmoat. It was noted that Keepmoat had recently been responsible for a kitchen and bathroom renewal project on the estate and had established relationships with residents.

AGREED: That the update on Broadwater Farm Gas and Fire Safety be noted.

10. PREPARATION FOR THE HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION ACT

The Panel received a presentation from Alan Benson, Head of Housing Strategy and Commissioning, Haringey Council, and Denise Gandy, Executive Director of Housing Demand, Homes for Haringey.

Ms Gandy commenced the presentation by explaining the Homelessness Reduction Act received Royal Assent in April 2017 and that it would be implemented in April 2018. The following points were noted:

- It was the first major change to homeless legislation in 15 years and the most significant in 40 years.
- Rather than replacing existing legislation, the Act created additional duties, relating to prevention (prevent more people from becoming homeless in the first place by identifying people at risk and intervening earlier) and relief (intervene rapidly if a homelessness crisis occurs, so it is brief and non-recurrent).

In response to questions, the Panel was informed that if prevention and relief activity failed then the usual tests (priority need and intentional homelessness) would be applied to ascertain if the person was owed the full homelessness duty.

In terms of the duty to provide advisory services, Ms Gandy explained that this required free homelessness advice and information services to be provided to all residents and for advice to be designed with certain vulnerable groups in mind, including care leavers, former armed forces, people leaving custody, victims of domestic abuse, people leaving hospital and people with mental health issues. The Panel noted that the advice must include:

- Prevention on homelessness
- Securing accommodation when homeless
- The rights of applicants and local authority duties
- Help available to people threatened with homelessness
- How to access available help

In response to questions, Ms Gandy explained the legislation would extend the period during which someone might be threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days. In addition, it was noted an applicant would be threatened with homelessness if they had been served a valid section 21 notice to end the Assured Shorthold Tenancy of their only available accommodation, that had expired or would expire within 56 days.

In terms of assessments and personalised housing plans, the Panel was informed that:

- Local authorities needed to carry out an assessment of circumstances and needs of all eligible applicants within 56 days.
- The assessment should include circumstances leading to the threat of homelessness, housing needs and support needs.
- Following the assessment, a Personalised Housing Plan would be drawn up to set out the “reasonable steps” the authority and the applicant would take (and other agencies/people as appropriate).

The Panel was informed that “reasonable steps” should be tailored to the individual and that the plan should be realistic. In response to questions about prevention and relief the Panel was informed that:

- Prevention Duty
 - o Local housing authorities (LHAs) must take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for any at risk eligible applicant, regardless of priority need. It was noted that this could involve assisting applicants to stay in their current accommodation, or helping them to find a new place to live.
- Relief Duty
 - o LHAs must take reasonable steps to help the applicant secure suitable accommodation. Help could be, for example, providing a bond guarantee, funding a rent deposit or working with a private landlord to make properties available.

Ms Gandy advised LHAs could not refer the prevention duty to another LHA. However, it was noted that the relief duty could be referred if the applicant had no local connection and had a connection to another LHA area. The Panel was informed that a local authority may end the prevention and relief duty, if:

- The applicant had suitable accommodation for at least 6 months
- After 56 days (except where a valid s21). It was also noted that the relief duty must end after 56 days for an applicant who had priority need and was not intentionally homeless.
- The applicant had refused a suitable offer
- The applicant had deliberately and unreasonably refused to cooperate
- The applicant ceased to be eligible
- The application was withdrawn
- The applicant was intentionally homeless from accommodation provided

In response to questions about duties owed to applicants who deliberately refused to cooperate, Ms Gandy advised that local authorities needed to make every effort to engage applicants through a personalised plan. In addition, it was explained that a warning notice must be served if an applicant continued to refuse to cooperate.

Ms Gandy concluded her presentation by providing information on other aspects of the Act and the Code. This included information on the duty to refer and local connection in relation to care leavers. The Panel was informed that in addition to having a local connection to the local authority who looked after them, a care leaver would also have a local connection with an area if they had lived there for 2 years, including time before their 16th birthday. In terms of the Code, it was noted guidance on out of area placements shouldn't limit the search to a specific area if accommodation wasn't affordable. In addition, it was noted households would retain

local connection for 5, rather than 2, if placed into private rented accommodation outside the borough.

The Panel went on to consider the implications and Haringey's response to the legislation. The following points were highlighted by Mr Benson:

- Implications for Haringey:
 - o The number of homeless applications was likely to increase significantly. It was noted that "sector" estimates suggested a 50% - 300% increase in applications across London.
 - o The new approach would be administratively burdensome and there were significant budget implications for: additional staffing resource; the procurement of a new IT solution; additional storage responsibilities; increases in requests for review and legal challenges. However, it was noted that the Act was meant to be "cost neutral" after 2 years.
 - o Further welfare reforms, including the full rollout of Universal Credit in October 2018, likely to exacerbate difficulties associated with homelessness and securing housing options.

- Haringey's Response
 - o It was noted a Task and Finish Group had been set up and that a new staffing structure was in place.
 - o The development of a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy
 - o The use of the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant to enhance the local service offer
 - o The work that was taking place on a new Housing Related Support Commissioning Plan
 - o The work that was taking place to review the implications of other policies. For example, it was noted that the Housing Allocations Policy would need to change to reflect new "reasonable preferences".
 - o Modelling work that was taking place on the possible impacts of homelessness demand and TA usage across the Council and wider public sector, including mental health services.
 - o The development of a communication and partner engagement plan in order to raise awareness and manage expectations.

Following the officer presentation a variety of areas were discussed, including:

- Issues in relation to rough sleeping, including on Stroud Green Road especially under the bridge at Finsbury Park.

- Objectives and procedures in relation to the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol.

- Concerns about the level of resource that would be required to deliver services under the Act.

- The importance of support provided by street outreach and homelessness advocacy services.

- The role of customer services

In addition, a number of issues were considered in relation to the processes and procedures that were in place concerning the use of the capital budget to purchase existing properties. It was noted that this included the use of retained Right to Buy receipts, which had previously been returned to Government.

AGREED:

1. That the update on the Homelessness Reduction Act be noted.
2. That the Head of Housing Strategy and Commissioning be asked to provide further information to the Panel, via email, on the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol.
3. That the Head of Housing Strategy and Commissioning be asked to provide further information to the Panel, via email, on the processes and procedures in place concerning the use of the capital budget to purchase existing properties.

11. SCRUTINY OF THE DRAFT 5 YEAR MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2018/19 - 2022/23)

Rita Bacheta, Senior Business Partner, introduced the report as set out. The Panel considered and noted the information set out in Appendix A (key lines of enquiry for budget setting), Appendix B (Medium Term Financial Strategy), Appendix C (2017 Budget (Savings) Proposals) and Appendix D (Overview and Scrutiny Recommendations from 2017).

The Panel went on to consider the (new) budget proposals for Corporate Plan Priority 4 (P4) and Corporate Plan Priority 5 (P4), as set out in Appendix E of the report.

In addition to the comments below, the Panel raised concerns about the limited financial information provided in the report.

Consultancy Spend (Tottenham Regeneration)

The Panel was informed that following a detailed review of the overall Tottenham Regeneration Programme budget, savings from the General Fund (£50k) had been identified from 2018/19 on consultancy spend. It was noted proposed savings followed a detailed review with budget holders in order to determine what spend could be delayed or reduced to meet savings the Council was required to make. Officers explained that the impact of reduced spend on consultants would mean that progression of regeneration schemes or projects might be delayed.

Reduction in Housing Related Support Budget

The Panel was informed that this was a budget that commissioned services rather than council employees. It was noted that the current budget (2017/18) still included funding that was due to be transferred to Adults Services following the implementation of the Housing Related Support Review. It was explained that the split was as follows: £4,654k to Adults Services with £3,999k to remain in Housing Related Support. In terms of savings offered it was noted that there would be potential savings for 2018/19

of approx. £50k by bringing monitoring roles back into the Housing Related Support team from Homes for Haringey. It was also noted that additional savings, of approx. £120k in 2019/20, would be achieved by recommissioning community based homelessness prevention work.

In addition to the issues above, a number of topics were considered in relation to the budget strategy for P4 and P5, consultancy spend for Wood Green Regeneration, the Council's capital strategy and programme, and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The Chair concluded the discussion by thanking everyone for their contributions.

AGREED:

1. That further information on the Consultancy Spend for Tottenham Regeneration be made available for consideration by OSC on 29 January before final budget scrutiny recommendations are made. This should include information on how the budget was spent in 2017/18 and what the budget will be used for during 2018/19.
2. That a full breakdown of the P4 and P5 budget, for April 2018 – March 2023, be made available for consideration by OSC on 29 January before final budget scrutiny recommendations are made. This should include information on the capital strategy and HRA.
3. That further information on the Consultancy Spend for Wood Green Regeneration be made available for consideration by OSC on 29 January before final budget scrutiny recommendations are made. This should include information on how the budget was spent in 2017/18 and what the budget will be used for during 2018/19.

12. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

Christian Scade, Principal Scrutiny Officer, provided an update on the proposed work programme for the remainder of the 2017/18 municipal year.

During the discussion a range of issues were considered in relation to the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). In response to questions, Emma Williamson, Assistant Director for Planning, suggested BNP Paribas be asked to attend a future Member Learning and Development session to explain the methodology for assessing viability for CIL setting and the reasons behind not recommending a rise in North Tottenham. The Panel agreed that this would be useful and asked that the delay to the increase in the CIL at Tottenham Hale be included.

AGREED: That subject to the comments above, the areas of inquiry outlined in Appendix A of the Work Programme Update be approved and recommended for endorsement by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

13. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Chair referred Members present to item 12 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

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