

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
TOWNS & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
20 October 2011 (7.30 - 8.45 pm)**

Present:

COUNCILLORS

Conservative Group Fred Osborne (Chairman), Wendy Brice-Thompson, Osman Dervish, Garry Pain and Keith Wells

Residents' Group Linda Hawthorn (Vice-Chair) and Ray Morgon

Labour Group Paul McGeary

Independent Residents Group

Councillor Lesley Kelly was also present

All decisions were taken with no votes against.

The Chairman reminded Members of the action to be taken in an emergency.

5 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2011 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6 OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE HOUSING MANAGEMENT SERVICE

Committee members received a presentation on the future of Homes in Havering (HiH) from Paul Ryrie, Interim Consultant for Housing and Public Protection.

Members were advised that Cabinet had taken the decision to consult with tenants and leaseholders on the future of HiH.

HiH was an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) set up to manage council homes in 2006. ALMOs were an alternative to transferring homes to housing associations and a way to secure extra funding to improve homes to meet the Decent Homes standard.

During the past five years HiH had achieved many successes including:

- A “two star” inspection result in 2009
- Assisted the Council to secure £62.7million Decent Homes funding
- A thriving resident movement with tenants involved in decisions about housing services
- Improved standards of housing service

Members noted that the Council was now consulting with tenants and leaseholders for two main reasons: firstly the new Government had changed the rules on council housing finance. Money for Decent Homes works could now be provided to councils both with ALMOs and to those without and it was also five years since the Council last asked tenants how they wanted their housing service to be provided.

The Government had set down rules about consultation and tenants had to be consulted on all important matters concerning the management of their housing. Consultation on the future of an ALMO should be thorough, as it was when the Council consulted on setting it up in the first place and tenants' views had to be sought in a variety of ways.

Cabinet had decided in September 2011 to consult residents about whether to continue with HiH or to bring the housing service back into the Council's management. The consultation would be led by the Council, not HiH.

The plan was to provide information to residents about what the options would mean by December this year. Between December and February 2012 the Council planned to find out what residents thought by holding events and inviting them to fill in a questionnaire, the findings from which would be reported back to Cabinet for final decision.

The Council would use the HiH newsletter “*At the Heart*” to provide residents with information and intended to use meetings and events which were already planned as much as possible to consult with residents. There would also be independent advice available.

If the residents chose to bring the service back in house many things would **not** change: rents, landlords responsibilities, Decent Homes improvements, tenancies and rights including the Right to Buy.

The Council had to follow the Government's rules about consulting and was not allowed to make a decision until it knew the residents' views so the people who would be deciding on the future of HiH were the residents themselves.

Members noted that following the decision one of two things would happen. The Council would either renew the management agreement with HiH, or the Council would begin the process of bringing housing management back into its structures. This would be a long term project, and the Council would consult again about what sort of housing service the residents wished to have.

In reply to a question from members Councillor Lesley Kelly, Lead Cabinet Member for Housing, replied that there was a savings implication if the service was brought back in house but that ultimately it was the resident's decision on which option was chosen.

Members thanked officers for their presentation and **AGREED** to note its contents.

7 **SHELTERED HOUSING IN HAVERING**

At officers' request the Committee **AGREED** to defer this item until the next meeting.

8 **QUEENS THEATRE**

Committee members received a presentation on the work of the Queens Theatre from Thom Stanbury, Stage Manager of the Queens Theatre.

Members noted that the theatre was owned by the Council and operated as a charity, the Havering Theatre Trust Limited, which was established in 1953.

The theatre's mission was to transform lives by producing and presenting high-quality professional theatre at affordable prices for audiences from Havering and from outer East London and Essex.

The theatre's producing work was complemented by an extensive Education and Outreach programme for all ages, by a diverse guest programme including professional promotions and hires to community groups, and by programming in the foyer space.

Each year the theatre produced and presented seven main in-house productions, a traditional pantomime, a touring Theatre in Education production and a community theatre.

Members noted that the theatre visited both infant and secondary schools performing to over 8,000 children each year. The theatre also had a matinee club for older people that had over 500 members.

During 2010/11 over 60,000 people saw one of the theatre's productions and each production had an average attendance of 75% which was higher than the national average.

During the same period the Trust's income was £3m of which nearly three quarters was made up from box office income, trading income and other income. The remainder was given through grant-aid from the Trust's funding partners: the London Borough of Havering, Arts Council England and by London Councils.

Members thanked Thom for his presentation and **NOTED** the contents.

9 **COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12**

The Committee **NOTED** the details of the proposed work programme for the Committee for the forthcoming year.

10 **NAPIER & NEW PLYMOUTH HOUSES**

Members were advised that officers were currently drawing up costings to either refurbish or possibly demolish Napier and New Plymouth Houses in South Hornchurch.

Members noted that both blocks were in need of major re-investment to bring them up to Decent Homes standard.

It was suggested that members may wish to visit the blocks to see for themselves what works were needed and it was **AGREED** that a site visit for the Committee be arranged where members could meet with officers and discuss the proposals.

Chairman