

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
TOWNS & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
24 October 2012 (7.30 - 9.50 pm)**

Present:

Councillors Damian White (Chairman), Linda Hawthorn (Vice-Chair),
Osman Dervish, Linda Trew, June Alexander, Keith Darvill and
Frederick Thompson

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Wendy Brice-Thompson,
Councillor Michael Deon Burton, Councillor Paul McGeary and Councillor Garry
Pain Councillor Frederick Thompson (for Wendy Brice-Thompson) and Councillor
Keith Darvill (for Paul McGeary)

Councillor Lesley Kelly was also present

14 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 5 July and 14 August 2012 were
agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15 OLYMPIC LEGACY

Simon Parkinson, Head of Culture and Leisure, gave a brief presentation on
the impact and legacy of the 2012 Olympic/Paralympic games on Havering.

Members were advised that Havering had a ten point delivery plan which
included:

1. To improve the health and wellbeing of Havering residents;
2. To permanently increase opportunities to participate in sports, the
arts and other cultural activities;
3. To increase volunteering and involvement in the voluntary sector;
4. To organise a cultural programme linked to the four year Cultural
Olympiad;
5. To maximise job and training opportunities for Havering residents;
6. To ensure that local businesses benefited;
7. To secure sustainable transport, housing and regeneration benefits
that would positively contribute to sustainable development in
Havering;
8. To promote Havering as a visitor destination;
9. To stimulate interest in education and learning;
10. To maximise opportunities for community safety.

Members noted that since the games had finished there had been evidence of increased participation in sport and physical activity particularly in athletics and cycling.

Local initiatives, e.g upgrading leisure centres (including IFI at Hornchurch); Romford Leisure Development; 5-a-side centre; Romfest Fun Run; Havering Active for All; School Holiday Activities, Havering Active Olympic & Paralympic Sport Directory had all seen progress during and following the games.

Approximately 150,000 people had lined the torch relay route when it passed through Havering.

Lord Coe had recently visited Hornchurch Leisure Centre and had promised to return to the borough to open the Romford Leisure Development when completed.

Members were advised that efforts were being made to encourage volunteers and Games Makers to contact the Council so that their volunteering skills could be utilised again in the future.

Members noted that several emergency planning contingencies had been put into place in case the need had arisen during the games. Although the Games passed off uneventful it was felt that the contingencies left the Council better prepared for the future.

Members also noted that a total of 39 contracts had been awarded to Havering businesses, totalling £13.2 million through the CompeteFor scheme. It was noted that some local businesses had found the CompeteFor application process rather bureaucratic.

16 **REQUISITION OF EXECUTIVE DECISION - REVISED HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME AND NEW TENANCY STRATEGY**

Sue Witherspoon, Head of Housing and Public protection, advised that it was a new requirement of each housing authority, brought in by the Localism Act 2011, that a Tenancy Strategy be published covering the authority's approach to the use of fixed term tenancies, rather than lifetime secure tenancies. Housing associations operating in the borough were required to have regard to the Tenancy Strategy when setting their own tenancy policies. Given this influencing role of the Strategy, it also included details of the Council's approach to affordable rents, these being rents of up to 80% of local market rents, introduced in 2011. The draft Tenancy Strategy had been produced following thorough and detailed consultation with residents, registered providers (also known as housing associations or registered social landlords) and other stakeholders.

At present there were approximately 12,000 people on the Council's Housing Waiting List with only approximately 700 properties being let each

year. Therefore it had been agreed to introduce a residential qualification of two years thereby only allowing households in the borough to be able to register.

People in bands D and E were unlikely to be offered a property as the need in the higher bands was outstripping the amount of properties that were available. Under the new system the five bands would be replaced with a new Homeseeker band that allowed for priority to people who had been given a Community Contribution Reward by the Council.

Under the proposed strategy new tenants would be given fixed term tenancies of five years, or three years if there were children over the age of fifteen living at the property, which would be reviewed at the end of the period and renewed if there had been no change in circumstances.

During the debate regarding the requisition of the Cabinet decision members noted that the new fixed term tenancies would only affect new tenants and not existing ones.

Members were also advised that there were currently over 700 properties in the borough that were under occupied and that the Council had no way of asking people to downsize to smaller properties

It was agreed that additional initiatives were needed to tackle the problem of downsizing tenants to properties more suitable and that it was important to carry on building new properties in the borough to offset the loss of properties that had come about partly due to the success of the Right to Buy initiative.

The specific grounds of the requisition and officer responses were as follows:

1. To review the responses received through the various consultation processes;

Members noted that the proposals had been the subject of a extensive consultation process that had included residents, registered providers (also known as housing associations or registered social landlords) and other stakeholders.

2. To consider the delegation authorities contained in the recommendations within the Cabinet Report;

Officers advised that each case would be looked at on its merits. On occasions there would be no need for hard and fast rules so officers would use delegated powers to make a decision in exceptional circumstances in consultation with the Lead Member.

3. To consider the impact on tenants of the Guidance to housing associations on affordable rents;

In developing the Tenancy Strategy, assessments were carried out to determine the affordability of Affordable Rents set at 80% of market rents for local people earning median and on lower incomes. In addition, the Council did not want to restrict Affordable Rent properties to specific groups and for this reason, had provided an Affordable Rent Calculator on the East London choice-based lettings website so that people could assess whether they can afford the higher rent before bidding for properties.

Members noted that Council rents were set at approximately 30-35% of marketable value and Housing Association rents were generally set between 40-50% of marketable value.

Councillor Kelly advised that it made sense to have the affordable rent properties as it offered other options to residents and that even at 80% of marketable value they were still affordable for many.

4. To consider the impact on new tenants and their families of fixed term tenancy that comes to an end;

If the tenant was eligible for council housing (notably, if they did not have sufficient earnings / savings to afford other options) and the property was suitable, another five year tenancy would be issued for the same property, except if the rules for issuing a three year tenancy applied.

If the tenant was eligible for council housing but the property was not suitable, another five year tenancy would be issued for a different property, except if the rules for issuing a three year tenancy applied – this would most typically apply if the household was now under-occupied or no longer required the adaptations at the property.

If the tenant was eligible for council housing, a three year tenancy, whether at the same or different property, would be issued if there had been breaches of tenancy, typically rent arrears or anti-social behaviour.

If however the tenant was no longer eligible, no further tenancy would be issued, typically this would apply if the household had sufficient means to rent or buy privately given the options available in Havering at the time the tenancy ended.

5. To review the Community Contribution Reward arrangements within the proposed Allocation Scheme

The proposed strategy would see the introduction of a Community Contribution Reward for those in the Homeseeker band who:

- worked at least 16 hours a week

- volunteered at least 10 hours a month (or five hours if aged 70+ years)
- were Havering Council tenants wishing to downsize
- were serving or ex-services personnel
- needed to move to foster / adopt where this was verified and supported by Children's and Young Persons' Services.

Residents with a disability such that they could not meet any of these requirements would be given the Community Contribution Reward so as not to be disadvantaged solely because they were disabled.

The main aim of the Community Contribution Reward initiative was to influence people's behaviour and encourage people to become involved in their local communities.

Residents would have to apply for the reward and the reward would end after 12 months when the resident could then re-apply for it.

Members noted that there would be a targeted approach to fraudulent use of the reward.

Councillor Kelly advised that drawing up the proposals had been a difficult piece of work but overall the proposals had been well received. Although it would be some time before the Council would see the benefits of the proposals it was believed to be a fairer system for residents.

The Committee voted **NOT** to uphold the requisition by a majority of 4 votes to 1 with 2 abstentions. Councillor Darvill voted in favour of upholding the requisition. Councillors White, Dervish, Thompson and Trew voted against upholding the requisition. Councillors Alexander and Hawthorn abstained from voting.

17 **PARKS AND OPEN SPACES**

The report before members gave a detailed overview of the resources and performance levels of the Parks and Open Spaces Section. The report covered the scope of the many aspects of maintenance and tasks undertaken by the service. It also provided comparison figures with other providers and detailed the role of the Friends of Parks in the help they provided in maintaining their local parks.

The Open Space Service was asked to attend the Overview and Scrutiny Committee following questions from Councillors of the Committee, who requested details concerning the frequency of inspections and grounds maintenance tasks such as hedge cutting, litter collection, emptying dog bins and shrub bed maintenance. Further requests were made on issues surrounding lake cleansing programmes, tennis court maintenance and dog fouling problems.

Members noted that the borough's parks and open spaces were maintained by a company called Mayrise.

Council officers monitored approximately ten percent of the works carried out however several members felt that this was not a high enough percentage to be able to gain an insight as to whether a good standard of service was being received.

Members also noted that no more Green Flags were to be awarded to parks in the borough, the only possible exception was Raphael Park may in the future qualify for a Green Flag as there had been a commitment to funding for improvement works.

Members noted that the amount of complaints received regarding the borough's parks had been steadily falling and public satisfaction levels had increased from the mid fifties to nearly seventy five percent.

During the discussion members stated that they wished to see regular maintenance being carried out in the parks rather than sporadic concerted efforts usually just prior to an event or inspection taking place.

It was noted that some Friends of Parks groups had received external funding to help with improvements and that external funding was ongoing.

Members also agreed that it would be useful if in the future they could be advised of the nature of complaints the Council was receiving about parks and open spaces.

Chairman