

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
TOWNS & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SUB- COMMITTEE
Committee Room 3B - Town Hall
20 June 2017 (7.30 - 8.45 pm)**

Present:

Councillors Lawrence Webb (Chairman), Linda Hawthorn (Vice-Chair), Frederick Thompson, Jody Ganly, Michael Deon Burton, Carol Smith and June Alexander

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Steven Kelly and Councillor Robby Misir

32 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Committee held on 19 April 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

33 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE UPDATE - QUARTER FOUR

The Sub-Committee was provided with the latest Corporate Performance data for the 14 indicators which fall under the remit of the Sub-Committee. These related to the Clean and Proud goals.

The report detailed that nine related to the PROUD goal and five to the CLEAN goal. Nine of the RAG indicators had a status of green, three had a RAG status of Amber and two a RAG status of Red.

The Sub-Committee noted the following areas that required improvements with the CLEAN goal:

- That Major applications often required a legal agreement which could take the application beyond the target 13 week period.
- That various activities were taking place to process planning applications in the required times. These included an increased promotion of Planning Performance Agreements for significant major applications and promotion of the pre-application advice offer.
- The report also indicated that there were separate proposals still progressing to outsource the initial part of planning

application process which had the potential to improve overall performance. Planning service restructure had been completed and went live in June 2017, savings identified from the new structure would contribute towards the outsourcing model.

- Member were informed that that the performance figures for planning applications processed in the required timescales do not include extension of time (EoT) agreements. Taking extension of time agreements into account, performance was significantly better, however, the service was looking at ways to reduce reliance on EoT agreements.

The Sub-Committee also noted the following areas that required improvements with the PROUD goal:

- The percentage of housing repairs completed on time was below target for 2016/17. During the course of 2016/17 several assurances were given by the contractor about improving performance which did not come to fruition. In direct response the Council issued a detailed Recovery Plan for the service with a deadline of March 2017 for performance to achieve 95%. This was achieved and the outturn for March was 95.4%. This improved performance should continue into 2016/17.
- During 2016/17 Housing Services started the stock regeneration programme. The programme had an effect on the void re-let times (where lower was better) as properties were ring-fenced for decanting tenants requiring support to move. The average void to re-let time excluding regeneration properties was 13.4 days, which was below target (14 days).
- There were 65 units under construction for Mercury Land Holdings at the end of 2016/17 against a profiled target of 100 at the Oldchurch Hospital Site in Romford. A further 44 units at 75 North Street in Hornchurch were due to start construction during Q4. However due to delays in obtaining planning permission, construction had been delayed. The developments would all be private rented flatted accommodation.

In addition, the Sub-Committee agreed to put forward the following three Performance Indicators that would be monitored from Quarter 2 onwards during 2017/18:

- Complaints relevant to the Towns & Communities
- Housing Repairs

- Contractor liaison with residents during housing regeneration works

The Sub-Committee **noted** the performance information for quarter four.

34 REVIEW OF CABINET REPORT - REVISED HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME AND INTRODUCTION OF NEW HOMELESSNESS PLACEMENTS POLICY

The Sub-Committee received a report that provided an update following Cabinet approval in June 2016 for Housing Services to implement a revised Housing Allocations Scheme and new Homelessness Placements Policy.

The report informed Members that the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme was used to determine which households were offered housing assistance in Havering and to explain how vacant social housing properties were let. The revised scheme provided a fair and transparent framework for determining priority between those in housing need.

The key objectives of the revised Housing Allocations Scheme were to:

- To provide a fair and transparent system by which people were prioritised for social housing.
- To help those most in housing need.
- To recognise residents who make a contribution to a local community.
- To make the best use of Havering's social housing including those of our partner Registered Social Landlords.

The new scheme introduced the following changes in key policy areas and the impact of each area detailed whether the desired objectives have been achieved.

- Qualifying Criteria: Extending the residency period to a continuous period of residency from 5 to 6 years

Since the implementation period July 2016 to March 2017, 198 (10%) applicants were declined from joining the housing register because they did not meet the 6 year continuous residency criteria. The policy change had shown to have had a low adverse impact, with relatively low numbers of new applications rejected.

- Qualifying Criteria: Financial circumstances - income threshold increased from £27,500 to £36,000

The change in household income increased the income level to £36,000. This was based on the fact that rents on private sector properties had increased and become unaffordable for household with less than

£36,000. Evidence shows residents were benefitting from the change because the number of applications rejected due to income has reduced.

Following the policy change, for the period July 2016 to March 2017, only 58 applicants (average of 6 a month) were rejected due to having household income higher than the threshold. Support was also being offered to rejected applicants to find homes in the private rented sector at levels they can afford.

- **Qualifying Criteria: Unacceptable behaviour**

Since the date of policy implementation to date, no applicant had been rejected from joining the housing register as a result of unacceptable behaviour, it was noted that the change was likely to have acted as a deterrent for any applicant with a history of unacceptable behaviour from submitting an application.

- **Restricting the housing register to those applicants who can demonstrate a housing need**

Members were informed that following the policy implementation, 353 tenants were removed from the housing register after the transitional period as they were living in a suitable home. In addition, since the implementation period to March 2017, 1510 applicants (75% of those rejected) were declined from joining the housing register as they were suitably housed. Every household on the housing register now has a housing need for alternative accommodation.

- **Reduced Housing Priority 6**

It was noted that in order to ensure that the Council meets its obligations under the homelessness legislation and the Housing Act, a reduced priority band (RP) was introduced for accepted homeless households who do not meet the 6 year residency period.

Following the policy implementation, around 46% of residents in temporary accommodation who were on the housing register were awarded the 'Reduced Priority' band. Most of the applicants are in private sector leased accommodation that meets their need. Over the period July 2016 to March 2017 only one allocation was made to a household on the RP band.

- **Policy Change 7 – One Offer Only Policy**

The report outlined that the change in policy was meant to encourage applicants to make informed decisions before placing a bid for a property. Since the implementation of this change, refusals had reduced to 45.

- Policy Change – Sheltered Housing Eligibility Criteria

The Sub-Committee noted that under the previous scheme there was no eligibility criterion for Sheltered Housing. The change was made to ensure that the lifestyle of those residing in sheltered accommodation was compatible with the scheme. Residents who met the following criteria could be housed in sheltered accommodation:

- People aged 60 years and over or aged 55-59 requiring a high level of support due to frailty, ill health or restricted mobility
- A person in need of the housing support provided by the scheme
- Single or joint applicants

Since implementation of the change, 51 residents aged 55-80 has expressed a wish to move into sheltered accommodation; it represented 13% (402) of all older residents on the housing register.

Applicants also have a right to request a review if they do not agree with the placement. In terms of the settled private rented sector properties in Harlow, a total of 15 reviews were received, of which 13 were dismissed and 2 were upheld (for the 2 upheld, they were made alternative offers within Havering.

- Policy Change 8 – Priority Banding System

The change in policy was to simplify the priority banding system to five priority bands with clear criteria to make it easier to administer and explain to residents how allocations operated.

- Policy Change 10 – Choice based lettings and assisted bidding

Further to a Cabinet agreement to continue to operate a Choice Based Lettings system by advertising properties through the East London Lettings Company, the change limited the circumstances of when assisted bids / direct offers could be made and it was agreed that any properties being directly offered would not be advertised. It was also agreed that the aim would be to retain access to 70% of properties through bidding. For the period July – March 2017, 77 out of the 408 (19%) lettings were made through direct offers.

Members noted that since the policy change, the Council has embarked on a large regeneration programme in the borough affecting 12 council sites. Consequently, direct offers were being made to tenants on the regeneration programme and therefore form a greater proportion than the 30% previously intended. The impact of the regeneration scheme was being monitored.

The Sub-Committee **noted** that the policy objectives of both the Housing Allocations Scheme and Homeless Placements Policy have been achieved.

35 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE

The Sub-Committee agreed its annual report 2016-17 and further agreed that the report be referred to full Council.

36 DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE

The Sub-Committee agreed the work programme for the year commencing June 2017 as presented.

Chairman