

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TOWNS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 5 July 2011 (7:30pm – 10:30pm)
Havering Town Hall

Present:

Councillors Fred Osborne, (Chairman), + Clarence Barrett, Wendy Brice-Thompson, Osman Dervish, Linda Hawthorn, Paul McGeary, Garry Pain, + Jeffrey Tucker and Keith Wells.

+ Clarence Barrett substituted for Councillor Barbara Matthews.

+ Jeffrey Tucker substituted for Councillor Michael Deon Burton.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barbara Matthews and Michael Deon Burton.

Also present were Councillors Keith Darvill, Denis O'Flynn, and Michael White.

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chairman announced the arrangements to be followed in the event of the building needing to be vacated as the result of an emergency

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 April 2011 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2. HOMES IN HAVERING/HOUSING RETAINED SERVICES

The Committee received two presentations, firstly from Sue Witherspoon – Head of Housing and Public Protection and secondly from Kevin Hazelwood, Director of Property Services of Homes in Havering (HiH).

The first presentation outlined how the current allocations system worked and explained how the Government's Localism Bill would change how allocations were managed in the future.

Members noted that at present the Council operated using open waiting lists which had limited exclusions on the persons that could apply.

New proposals would allow local authorities to decide on who could register on waiting lists and authorities could exclude on published criteria such as residency or financial ability.

Members were also advised that at present the Council had a statutory duty to investigate and make decisions on homelessness. Under the new proposals the Council would have a discharge of duty into the private rented sector where minimum twelve month tenancies would be given to applicants.

Members were advised the Localism Bill was currently going through the House of Lords and was expected to become law in November with the powers in place in April 2012.

The second presentation detailed the Council's Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) and its current work.

Members were advised that the ALMO was created as a delivery mechanism to improve service standards, oversee property upgrading and meet the government Decent Homes Standard.

The local authority remained the property owner, legal landlord and normally sole shareholder. The housing management functions were contracted to the ALMO which was meant to operate with a significant degree of autonomy from Council control and was the most popular and fastest route to accessing funding for the provision of decent homes.

Areas covered by the Management Agreement included

- Housing management.
- Rent collection, repairs, voids, tenancy management.
- Leasehold Management.
- Environment & estate services .
- Decent Homes/Stock Investment.

Members noted that the following services were retained and managed by the Council Housing Register

- Homelessness
- Lettings
- Strategy & policy
- Affordable Housing development
- Mobile support service
- Adaptations for owner occupiers
- Private rented housing enforcement

Members were advised that the ALMO was currently reviewing housing related services including

- Service charge review
- Review of tenancy conditions
- Resident consultation arrangements
- The management agreement
- The Councils regeneration programmes i.e. Harold Hill Ambitions; Rainham Compass

Members noted that Decent Homes was a standard to be achieved for all public sector landlords. The works involved a complex relationship between building components condition and or age to achieve a decency rating.

In November 2010 the Government had changed the rules relating to backlog funding which meant that money was available to all local authorities with more than 10% non-decent homes. All Councils expected to deal with 10% non decency through their own resources. There was also no longer a requirement for any stars to be awarded to an ALMO to secure funding.

The Committee noted that the funding was now available to all local authorities, not just those with ALMOs. £1.6 bn had been made available over four years to make 150,000 homes decent, however this figure had been reduced from £3.2bn.

It was noted that funding was back loaded – and only monies agreed for the years 2011/12 & 202/13 were secure.

The Council had bid for £67 million in back funding but had only secured £62 million.

Officers advised that the opening position for non decent homes 2010/11 was 5831 - 57.1% of the Council's stock. During the year 442 homes were made decent (4.34%)

In 2011/12 the amount of newly arising non decent homes was 885 (8.75%) meaning that the opening position non decent homes for 2011/12 was 6339 (62.1%).

Members were advised that the current national Housing Revenue Account (HRA) housing subsidy system was due to be abolished in April 2012 and be replaced with a devolved self-financing system which would allow authorities to retain all rent and capital receipts (excluding right to buy sales). This would enable a single national one-off adjustment in which housing debt was redistributed between HRAs locally. In the longer term this would provide resources to ensure adequate management and maintenance of the Council's stock.

Self financing would lead to an increase in both the Management and Maintenance Allowance and the Major Repairs Allowance The main advantage of self financing was that the Authority was no longer reliant on the annual subsidy settlement and could plan future spend easier.

Members were advised that a detailed service improvement plan covering responsive repairs had been drafted and a formal review of the ALMO's Partnership Agreement with its maintenance contractor Morrison Facilities had been carried out.

During discussions Members reported that there were delays in updating Councillors on the progress of repair works which sometimes caused difficulties when updating residents who had complained to their Councillor. Officers agreed that they would pass the Committee's concerns back to the ALMO Management Team.

The Committee **noted** the presentations and thanked the officers for their input.

3. REPORT OF THE TOWNS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – LIVING AMBITION TOPIC GROUP.

Members noted the report of the Towns and Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee topic group and agreed that the recommendations be referred to Cabinet for discussion.

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

The Committee decided on the motion of the Chairman that the public should be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the ground that it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information within the meaning of paragraph 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.