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MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TOWNS & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SUB- COMMITTEE Town Hall, Main Road, Romford 18 August 2015 (7.30 - 9.35 pm)

Present:

Councillors Lawrence Webb (Chairman), Linda Hawthorn (Vice-Chair), June Alexander, +Ray Best, Michael Deon Burton, Jody Ganly, Steven Kelly, +Carol Smith and Linda Trew.

+ - Substitute Member

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Robby Misir and Frederick Thompson. Councillor Carol Smith substituted for Councillor Thompson while Councillor Best substituted for Councillor Misir.

Through the Chairman, announcements were made regarding emergency evacuation arrangements and the decision making process followed by the Sub-Committee.

5 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6 REPORT OF THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR LANDLORD TOPIC GROUP

The Sub-Committee received a report from the Private Rented Sector Landlord Topic Group that contained the findings and recommendations that emerged following the Topic Group scrutiny of the subject selected by the Sub-Committee in July 2014.

The Topic Group Lead Member explained that the Group had considered options of introducing methods to monitor and control the activities of private rented sector landlords in the borough.

The Sub-Committee noted that the scope of the Topic Group comprised analysing information to identify hotspots of demographic trends and private rented sector activity.

The Sub-Committee also noted that the Topic Group's recommendations were based on intelligence and evidence of good practice and included identifying an appropriate Licencing Scheme for Havering.

The Sub-Committee **agreed** that the report of the Topic Group be passed to Cabinet for further decision.

7 HOW ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IS DEALT WITH IN THE BOROUGH, SPECIFICALLY RELATING TO COUNCIL TENANCIES

At its meeting on 23 June 2015, the Sub-Committee agreed to receive a briefing report on Anti-Social Behaviour and Council Tenancies.

The report informed Members of progress with combating Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) within the Council's housing stock.

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) was a broad term used to describe the day-to-day incidents of crime, nuisance and disorder, from litter and vandalism to public drunkenness or aggressive dogs, to noisy or abusive neighbours.

It was noted that such a wide range of behaviours meant that responsibility for dealing with anti-social behaviour was shared between a number of agencies, but particularly the Council and the Police.

The Tenant & Leaseholder Services Manager informed the Sub-Committee that dealing with the root causes of ASB had to be the best solution for long-term change.

The Sub-Committee heard that a review of the current Housing Tenancy Terms and Conditions was in progress. The project was at an early stage and would include a full and extensive consultation process.

Members noted that dealing with ASB within the Council's housing stock was a significant part of the Council's overall ASB strategy but it should not be looked at in isolation as the Council's Crime and Disorder strategy comprised a number of separate methods that were available to tackle ASB.

The Sub-Committee was informed that the recently enacted Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 had introduced a series of new powers to assist with combatting ASB. One aspect was the amendment to the Housing Act 1985 in respect of secure tenancies (as used by Councils) to provide for absolute possession of a property, where ASB or criminal behaviour had already been proved in another court. This also enabled social landlords to expedite possession proceedings where another court had proven significant anti-social behaviour or criminality in the locality of the property.

This included situations where a Tenant or their visitor was found to be:

- In breach of a Court Undertaking and / or Civil Injunction;
- In breach of a Court Ordered Criminal Behaviour Order;
- Convicted of Breaching a Noise Abatement Notice;
- Subject to a breach of a Closure Order.

The Sub-Committee also noted the service had a Prevention and Diversionary Strategy for dealing with Council tenants. Members noted that the service took an intelligence led approach to identify hot spots and to target resources.

The services worked closely with partner agencies to both prevent and resolve ASB alongside the Community Engagement Team who had organised a number of events such as Job Clubs and other initiatives to help reduce unemployment and to provide diversionary projects to prevent ASB such as the Football Academy and 'Family Boot Camp' schemes.

During a brief discussion, Members noted that:

- Non-payment of council tax could not be included in a tenancy agreement
- The Council could still take action against a council tenant on anti-social grounds under any circumstances
- The Council was aware of the serious issue of substance abuse such as use of laughing gas on council estate.
- Noise nuisance was about 30% of the caseload of Neighbourhood Officers

Following the presentation, Members agreed to form a working group to understand the issues, review cases and contribute to the current review project.

The Sub-Committee **noted** that the Councillors Linda Hawthorn, Jody Ganly, Linda Trew and Lawrence Webb would comprise the working group.

8 **A REVIEW OF HOW WELL COUNCIL HOUSING MANAGES MAJOR WORKS TO PEOPLES HOMES**

At the request of the Sub-Committee, the Housing Property Services Manager provided Members with a review sample of cases where problems had occurred during the course of the delivery of major works projects to Council owned stock.

The Sub-Committee noted that the piece of work also outlined measures that were undertaken to remedy issues as they occurred, what themes were common and lessons learnt as a result of the completed examination.

The presentation focused on two projects for the case study; the refurbishment of kitchen and bathrooms in occupied premises in various locations and the retrofit of insulation and associated refurbishment work to non-traditionally constructed houses. Both projects were completed during the 2014/15 Decent Homes Backlog Funding (DHBF) programme.

The review identified that in the case of the kitchen and bathroom contract, a series of common themes associated with poor performance was experienced during the project, these included:

- Disruption and inconvenience caused by the works
- Failure to adhere to agreed timescales for works
- Poor quality of finishing
- Lack of respect to residents
- Inability to communicate
- Failure to keep promises to rectify problems in a timely manner

The case studies had also noted the lessons learnt from both issues of poor performance and where one of the projects had delivered a successful outcome for both residents and the Council.

The Sub-Committee noted the following in the areas of good practice, derived from the insulation to non-traditional housing contract:

- Longer preparation time to engage in supply chain scrutiny – main contractor's sub-contractor selection.
- Contractual enforcement of terms and conditions in sub-contractor's selection
- Detailed guidance to residents on the disruptive nature of the works and service adjustment arrangements which can be accommodated – shift workers, adjoining owner notices etc.
- On site presence of contractor's site managers in a single locality to allow for residents to access face to face in the event of a problem.

The case study covering the kitchen and bathroom project outlined that the issues associated with difficulties were largely attributable to unsatisfactory contractor performance.

The Sub-Committee noted that language barriers among contractors working on site were a major concern not only from a communication perspective but also from a health and safety viewpoint.

The case study further identified a weakness in the pre survey process undertaken by the Council initially, and later by the contractor. The current processes only focused on potential matters affecting progress and did not cater for issues which impacted on the well-being of the resident.

The service was currently amending the pre survey process to have greater emphasis on matters such as safe storage of resident's belongings, working patterns etc.

During a brief discussion, the Sub-Committee agreed to form a working group to undertake a forensic examination of issues that were raised by tenants.

The Sub-Committee **noted** that Councillors June Alexander, Michael Deon Burton, Linda Trew and Lawrence Webb would form the working group with officers.

9 **CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT - ANNUAL (2014/15)**

The Sub-Committee considered a report that set out the Annual Corporate Performance information that was presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 8 July 2015.

The Sub-Committee **agreed** to note the Annual report.

10 **URGENT BUSINESS**

The Sub-Committee agreed that an update report on the planned new Romford Leisure Centre be included on its work programme.

Chairman

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