

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
TOWNS & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SUB- COMMITTEE
Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
27 July 2016 (7.30 - 9.45 pm)**

Present:

Councillors Linda Hawthorn (Chair), Steven Kelly, Frederick Thompson, June Alexander, Jody Ganly, Michael Deon Burton, +Meg Davis, +Viddy Persaud and +Patricia Rumble

Apologies were received from Councillor Lawrence Webb (Councillor Pat Rumble substituting), Councillor Robby Misir (Councillor Viddy Persaud substituting) and Councillor Carol Smith (Councillor Meg Davis substituting).

There was a member of the public present during the meeting.

1 THE SUB-COMMITTEE TO NOTE CHANGES TO ITS MEMBERSHIP FOLLOWING ANNUAL COUNCIL

The Sub-Committee noted changes to its membership that had been made following the Annual Council meeting.

2 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Committee held on 3 March 2016 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3 CABINET REPORT UPDATE - RAINHAM COMPASS

In accordance with the Council's Continuous Improvement Model, the Sub-Committee received a briefing on the Rainham Compass Project from the Programmes & Projects Manager - Economic Development.

The presentation reviewed some of the programmes that had been successfully delivered such as:

- Rainham Village Transport Management System and public realm improvements
- Rainham Library, learning and community centre - a new community and cultural facility for local people,
- Rainham Station Interchange

- Rainham Primary School– integrated children's' centre and education provision
- Rainham Hall Gardens restoration; creation of a community open space in the heart of Rainham Village
- Orchard Village – demolishing unpopular tower blocks and creating decent homes for local people
- High quality employment space on Easter Park, a 30 acre business park owned by the GLA for over 1,000 local jobs
- New Tesco distribution centre on Beam Reach 5, a 90 acre employment site owned by the GLA, creating 800 local jobs
- The re-election of the London Riverside Business Improvement District to support business growth in the strategic employment area
- Wildspace – a new community park, reconnecting the Rainham community back to the river and the marshes, connecting people to green space
- Improvement to the A1306 road

The Sub-Committee **noted** that, overall the Compass programme had delivered a steady rise in local residents' satisfaction with their local area and environmental improvements to local parks and open spaces, and that the Rainham Compass had been followed by the new Rainham and Beam Park Housing Zone.

4 **CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORTS Q3, Q4 & ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16.**

The Sub-Committee received the Performance Indicators within its remit for Quarters 3 and 4 of 2015/16. It noted that each indicator was given either a red, amber or green (RAG) rating.

The report detailed 24 Corporate Performance Indicators under the remit of the Towns and Communities Overview & Scrutiny Sub-Committee. These related to Regulatory Services, Policy and Performance, Culture & Leisure, Housing, and Economic Development.

One of the highlights of the presentation that was highly commended by the Sub-Committee was the increase in the number of parks with Green flag status from nine to eleven. The Sub-Committee was also informed that in the 2017/18 financial year, a further 3 Green Flags would be applied for.

The presentation also highlighted that the Empty Homes and Lettings Team was heavily involved in improving the overall re-let times and void processes. The monitoring and pilot schemes which were undertaken improved re-let times exponentially, leading to an average re-let time of 11.9 days (best in the country) by the end of 2015/16. This was a 64.4% improvement on the 2014/15 average re-let time of 33.4 days.

The following three indicators ended the year with a red or amber RAG status:

The percentage of major applications processed within 13 weeks and minor applications processed within 8 weeks were below target and lower than during both the previous quarter and the previous year. It was explained to the Sub-Committee that the performance against both these indicators would have exceeded target if Extension of Time Agreements were treated as “in time” for the purpose of reporting against the indicators. In addition various activities were in place to improve performance including better pre-planning of applications and pre-application advice, a quicker validation process, and the committee target dates being better planned to keep planning applications within the agreed timeframe without needing an extension of time agreement.

The third indicator that was below target related to the percentage of appeals allowed against refusal of planning permission.

The Sub-Committee **noted** the report.

5 PRESENTATION ON QUARTER 1 2016/17

The Sub-Committee received a presentation that outlined the Quarter One performance indicators specific to the sub-committee.

The report detailed 14 corporate performance indicators that related to the CLEAN and PROUD goals. All indicators had been given a RAG status.

- In summary:
 - 11 indicators (79%) had a RAG status of Green.
 - 3 indicators (21%) had a RAG status of Red.

The Sub-Committee noted the areas that required improvements under the Clean goal. This included planning application process; various activities were in place to ensure planning applications were processed in the required times. These included the promotion of the pre-application advice offer, quick turn-round of the validation process when application was received, neighbour notification, officer visit/report and better timing of the committee date. In the case of major planning applications, better pre-planning was also taking place.

There were proposals currently been considered regarding the outsourcing of the initial part of the planning application process. This would streamline the process and had the potential to improve overall performance.

The presentation also highlighted the improvement area under the Proud goal. It related to the number of potential start-up businesses accessing advice via the Business Start-up Programme that was below target. This was attributed to a gap in service provision whilst a new contractor was procured. Enterprise Nation started in May and were confident that performance would improve throughout the year. The contractor would

deliver workshops, coaching, one-to-one health checks, online webinars, master classes and podcasts to local businesses.

The Sub-Committee **noted** the presentation.

6 VOLUNTEER EXPANSION PROGRAMME - LIBRARY SERVICES

At the request of a Member, the Frontline Services Manager, Library Service provided an update on the Library Service

It was mentioned that with the support of Members all libraries have been allowed to remain open, although opening hours had to be reduced.

As part of the recent Libraries restructure, which included the reduction in hours, the Library Service embarked on a partnership model involving staff and volunteers working alongside each other to a much greater degree than they have previously.

Libraries had an excellent history of working with members of the community and it started the process with approximately 300 signed up volunteers.

The roles volunteers covered were mainly reading buddies, summer reading challenge (SRC) and ICT support. Volunteers would offer between one or two hours at a time and for SRC in the summer months.

The aim of the new model was to increase the roles that volunteers were able to provide support with. This in turn would support libraries to remain open and for existing services and activities to continue to be provided by either staff or volunteers. There were 12 different task roles for volunteers.

Following an earlier recruitment campaign, the service had recruited an additional 120 volunteers from the community and a further 50 volunteers were undergoing checks and training.

The Sub-Committee was informed that many of the volunteers were retired members of the community who also had other commitments and activities that they pursued; it was often difficult to encourage volunteers to sign up for more than one session per week of about two hours.

The Sub-Committee noted that another part of the restructure programme was for volunteers to undertake the Housebound Service (HBS). The new model entailed that the service would be provided by volunteers; including the choosing of books and delivering to customers' homes and returning books to the library. It was noted that the arrangement would require the biggest commitment as often customers do not see many people throughout the day or week.

The Services Manager informed the Sub-Committee that the service had developed guidance and procedures for a Community Managed Library. It was envisaged that established community organisations or groups of volunteers would form Friends of Groups to open libraries beyond their core hours to provide a basic level of service and activity to the community.

So far, only one organisation had indicated an interest but at present do not have the resources.

In response to a Member enquiry, the Sub-Committee was informed that a volunteer was able to outline a preference of which library they preferred to work in.

Following a comment that travellers had invaded a library car park, a Member suggested that the by-laws that applied to the Park enforcement team required a urgent review. It was also mentioned that an alert number should be advertise for members of the public and that a restructure of the working arrangement in order that the service could provide a 24 hours service be considered.

The Sub-Committee **NOTED** the position.

7 UPDATE ON FRIENDS OF PARKS

Following a Member request, the Sub-Committee received the report with information on Friends of Parks groups who volunteer and work in partnership with the Public Realm department, to assist with the improvement and development of their spaces.

The Parks Development Manger outlined that there were currently 18 Friends of Parks groups across the borough and nine of the groups had achieved official Friends Group. These included relatively new ones at Hall Lane Mini Golf Course and Upminster Hall Playing Field.

The official friend's status was a voluntary application the groups made and if the criteria were met, the Council would provide the group with additional support.

The report outlined that the work of a well-organised volunteer group could be extremely beneficial to both the volunteers and the park in which they work. Volunteers acquired new skills, met new people and gained a sense of achievement and ownership of the park. The park itself benefited through the work the group completed which may include practical tasks, receiving funding for improvement work, or holding events to increase public awareness and enjoyment of the park.

Since the first group was established in Havering around 2002 there were now many volunteer groups in existence working in the parks in Havering.

Each group was different in the way it had been formed and the work it carried out, but they all are effective and make a real difference.

The Sub-Committee noted that many of the groups had been active in their parks and open spaces, working with the Parks department to help clear unwanted vegetation, remove rubbish, paint railings and raising money for capital works. Some groups periodically organised fun-days and other such events to help promote their sites.

A survey of all the groups was carried out earlier this year and the service identified that there were 174 active members of friends groups.

The Sub-Committee **NOTED** the position.

8 ROMFORD MARKET UPDATE

The Sub-Committee was briefed by the Business Development Manager on the current position of the Market Transformation programme as the issue was a standing item on its agenda.

The Sub-Committee was informed that that an assessment of designs was carried out on the programme. This involved an independent review by market management and food and beverage experts to support part of the initiatives for the Market Place. A review by key stakeholders such as St Edwards Church, Historic England, retailers and traders was also undertaken.

The following key dates for the programme were detailed:

- September 2016 – stakeholder engagement including all Member briefing, trader and retailer meetings and public consultation
- October 2016 - planning application
- November/December 2016 – appointment of a contractor
- January 2017 - Initiate construction

The Sub-Committee gathered that part of the operational management involved Trader engagement and a weekly newsletter to keep all stakeholders informed.

A quarterly all trader meetings took place to ensure communication was both ways most importantly with the current research into new stalls and cover.

The next steps were to develop a Trader contract/pledge and undertake an assessment of current issues such as health & safety, traffic management, electricity, repairs and maintenance.

It was stated that a trial of the new market layout was proposed for autumn 2016. This would also include plans for Christmas Market. The service was considering Improvements to call handling and office administration and feasibility into efficiencies in waste management, stall storage assembly and breakdown.

In order to develop the branding and marketing for the market, the service was exploring a potential delivery options for WiFi in Market Place and an Initial work to identify traders who wanted to develop their own website was on-going.

The Sub-Committee noted that the next steps were to undertake further 'customer' market research and the creation of an annual calendar of events, promotions and activities for Romford Market. Other plans included update on the website for the Market and exploring funding and delivery of new Market App with the GLA.

The Sub-Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

9 **ARTICLE 4 UPDATE**

In accordance with the Council's Continuous Improvement Model, the Sub-Committee received an update report on the Article 4 Directions. The Article 4 Directions came into force on 13 July 2016.

The effect of the Directions would be monitored in terms of enforcement activity and housing supply in the Borough. Planning applications submitted as the result of the Article 4 Direction would be assessed against current planning policies in the London Plan and Havering Local Development Framework. The results of any planning appeals would also be monitored. As part of the local plan preparation, a revised policy for HMO's would be formulated and consulted upon.

The Sub-Committee **noted** the report

10 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Sub-Committee agreed its work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year.

Chairman

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