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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
TOWNS & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
21 December 2011 (7.30 - 9.00 pm)**

Present:

Councillors Frederick Osborne (Chairman), Linda Hawthorn (Vice-Chair), Wendy Brice-Thompson, Paul McGeary, Ray Morgon, Garry Pain, Keith Wells and Robert Benham

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Osman Dervish

+Substitute members: Councillor Robert Benham (for Osman Dervish)

Councillor Lesley Kelly was also present.

14 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2011 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15 SHELTERED HOUSING IN HAVERING

Sue Witherspoon, Head of Housing and Public Protection gave a presentation on sheltered housing in the borough.

Members noted that retirement housing was intended specifically for older people, usually over 60. The housing tended to be in a scheme of about 20 to 40 self contained flats or bungalows. All properties benefitted from an alarm system and there were usually associated services, including regular visits from mobile staff. Most properties also had communal areas such as shared lounge, laundry and garden.

Extra care housing provided assisted living for older people and aimed to continue to accommodate older people even when increasingly frail. Aspects included physical design – eg bathrooms and kitchens adaptable for disabled people and also often provided on site care services. The key aspect, was that it avoided the need for residential care.

At the time of the meeting 522 people on the Housing Register were over 65, 238 over 75 and 70 were over 85.

The wards in the borough with higher proportions of older people and with higher rates of deprivation amongst older people, i.e. those with higher

numbers of older people living in deprivation, were Gooshays, Heaton and St Andrews. The wards with the greatest number of older people receiving social care were Gooshays and Heaton wards, followed by St Andrews. The greatest concentrations of older people applying for social housing were found within Gooshays and Heaton wards, with other isolated but dense concentrations in Havering Park, Brooklands, Rainham and Wennington and Cranham. The most popular areas that older applicants for social housing wished to move to were Romford and Hornchurch, followed by Gidea Park and Harold Wood.

Presently in the borough there were 20 schemes of sheltered housing which consisted of 768 units, of which 107 were empty. In terms of extra care housing there were 3 schemes (including Squirrels Heath which was being built) comprising 186 units.

Members noted that improvements to some schemes were underway as part of the Decent Homes funding works programme. Improvements were taking place at Cole Court, Charlbury Crescent and Cockerburn Court.

It was also noted that some schemes were being disposed of such as Albyns Court where the tenants were consulted in July 2011 and Delderfield North where tenants had been consulted in June 2011.

In the future the service aimed to improve buildings to Decent Homes Standard and only invest where there was a long term demand. The ultimate aim was to provide more extra care and reduce the number of sheltered properties in the borough.

Committee members thanked the officer for her presentation.

16 **REPORT OF THE LIVING AMBITIONS TOPIC GROUP**

Members considered a report which had been re-submitted to the Committee in a slightly revised and expanded form following initial feedback from Cabinet members.

Following discussions it was **RESOLVED** that the report be re-submitted to the Cabinet for noting with the following additions and amendments:

- 1) Information supporting should include the total book-spend of £215,000 and highlight the large print budget of £23,000
- 2) Recommendation 2 to show that that there was not an additional cost as the reading groups would be working with existing staff.
- 3) Recommendation 5 should read that the sign erected in Cottons Park had cost £3,500 and had been funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Consideration should be given to updating signage in parks as and when the parks were considered for improvement works.

- 4) Recommendations 6 and 7 to be removed from the report as they had already been introduced and were currently in action.

17 **REPORT OF THE PLANNING ENFORCEMENT TOPIC GROUP**

Members considered a report which detailed the findings of the Planning Enforcement Topic Group.

Patrick Keyes, Head of Development and Building Control, thanked the Committee for the work they had carried out in scrutinising planning enforcement and commented that staff had welcomed the scrutiny.

Members noted that officers had acknowledged the findings set out in the report and were already working at addressing the recommendations made.

Members also wished to place on record their thanks for the officers who had assisted them during the Topic Groups scrutiny.

It was **RESOLVED** that the contents of the report be noted and as there were no recommendations that needed Cabinet approval that the report be circulated to Cabinet only for noting.

18 **NAPIER AND NEW PLYMOUTH HOUSES**

The Chairman advised members that a site visit to Napier and New Plymouth Houses had taken place earlier in the month.

Officers had advised during the site visit that two proposals were currently being considered regarding the future of the blocks.

One option was to refurbish the blocks and the other was to demolish the blocks and provide new housing.

Officers had advised that the final cost implications of both proposals would be available in the early part of 2012 and would be presented before the Committee for their consideration.

Chairman

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