

TOWNS & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

REPORT

4 July 2013

Subject Heading:

Annual Report 2012/2013

CMT Lead:

Ian Burns
Acting Assistant Chief Executive
01708 432442

Report Author and contact details:

Taiwo Adeoye
Committee Officer
01708 433079
taiwo.adeoye@havering.gov.uk

Policy context:

Under the Council's Constitution, each Overview and Scrutiny Committee is required to submit an annual report of its activities to full Council.

Financial summary:

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

SUMMARY

This report is the annual report of the Committee, summarising the Committee's activities during the past Council year.

It is planned for this report to stand as a public record of achievement for the year and enable members and others to note the Committee's performance.

There are no direct equalities or environmental implications attached to this covering report. Any financial implications from reviews and work undertaken will be advised as part of the specific reviews.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Committee note the 2012/2013 Annual Report and authorise the Chairman to agree the final version for Council.
2. That the Committee agree the report be referred to full Council.

REPORT DETAILS

During the year under review, the Committee met on seven occasions and dealt with the following issues:

1. REQUISITION OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Committee considered the following three requisitions during the year.

CAR PARKING CHARGES IN PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

In August 2012, the Committee considered a requisition of an Executive Decision on the Car Parking Charges in Parks and Open Spaces.

The Committee was informed that a number of alternatives options, as explained in the Cabinet report, had been considered but rejected as they did not meet the dual aims of encouraging more genuine use of the car parks by public users and achieving the agreed MTFS savings.

It was explained that the collection of money from the meters and enforcement at the car park sites could be met from existing car park resources and patrols. This would be covered by a Service Level Agreement between Parking and Culture & Leisure.

It was felt that the introduction of charges would increase the overall number of genuine park users using the car parks. Officers would seek to obtain figures from Streetcare to check if usage of the car parks had in fact increased.

It was explained that changes to the borough-wide parking tariffs could only be made via Cabinet and these charges were currently subject to a five-year assurance level. Officers would check when this assurance period was due to run out. Members felt that parking charges in parks in other parts of the country were in general much higher than in Havering.

The Committee voted NOT to uphold the requisition by a majority of five to three.

REVISED HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME AND NEW TENANCY STRATEGY

In October the Committee considered a requisition on the revised housing allocation scheme and new tenancy strategy.

The Committee was informed that it was a new requirement of each housing authority, brought in by the Localism Act 2011, that a Tenancy Strategy be published covering the authority's approach to the use of fixed term tenancies, rather than lifetime secure tenancies. Housing Associations operating in the borough were required to have regard to the Tenancy Strategy when setting their own tenancy policies. Given this influencing role of the Strategy, it also included details of the Council's approach to affordable rents, these being rents of up to 80% of local market rents, introduced in 2011. The draft Tenancy Strategy had been produced following thorough and detailed consultation with residents, registered providers (also known as housing associations or registered social landlords) and other stakeholders.

At present there were approximately 12,000 people on the Council's Housing Waiting List with only approximately 700 properties being let each year. Therefore it had been agreed to introduce a residential qualification of two years thereby only allowing households in the borough to be able to register.

Under the proposed strategy new tenants would be given fixed term tenancies of five years, or three years if there were children over the age of fifteen living at the property, which would be reviewed at the end of the period and renewed if there had been no change in circumstances.

Members noted that the new fixed term tenancies would only affect new tenants and not existing ones.

Members were also advised that there were currently over 700 properties in the borough that were under occupied and that the Council had no way of asking people to downsize to smaller properties

It was agreed that additional initiatives were needed to tackle the problem of downsizing tenants to properties more suitable and that it was important to carry on building new properties in the borough to offset the loss of properties that had come about partly due to the success of the Right to Buy initiative.

The following grounds of the requisition were:

1. To review the responses received through the various consultation processes;
2. To consider the delegation authorities contained in the recommendations within the Cabinet Report;
3. To consider the impact on tenants of the Guidance to housing associations on affordable rents;
4. To consider the impact on new tenants and their families of fixed term tenancy that comes to an end;

5. To review the Community Contribution Reward arrangements within the proposed Allocation Scheme

Members noted that there would be a targeted approach to fraudulent use of the reward.

Councillor Kelly advised that drawing up the proposals had been a difficult piece of work but overall the proposals had been well received. Although it would be some time before the Council would see the benefits of the proposals it was believed to be a fairer system for residents.

The Committee voted NOT to uphold the requisition by a majority of 4 votes to 1 with 2 abstentions.

DISUSED LAND ADJACENT TO MELVILLE ROAD ALLOTMENTS, RAINHAM - REQUISITION OF CABINET DECISION

At its meeting in December 2012 the Committee considered a requisition of a Cabinet decision that concerns a site comprising of 2.13 acres of land adjoining Melville Road allotments that had remained unused for 24 years.

Cabinet had agreed that the land was surplus and that 1.53 acres be disposed of for residential development and an area of 0.6 acres be retained for the creation of additional allotment plots.

Members were advised that any disposal of land would be subject to the approval of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

During the debate members questioned as to whether the needs of the community had been considered before any decision had been taken and that careful consideration needed to be taken on the balance of need for residential housing and those who wanted plots on the allotment.

The Committee voted NOT to uphold the requisition by a majority of 7 votes to 2.

2. HOMES IN HAVERING

The Committee received a presentation in July 2012 from the Head of Housing and Public Protection confirming that the Council and Homes in Havering (HiH) remained separate organisations.

The ALMO had been set up originally as it was the option chosen, after consultation, to receive and administer the Decent Homes funding from the Government. The HiH Board was made up of four Councillors, four tenants and four independent directors.

The Council undertook a consultation with tenants between October 2011 and February 2012 with an offer to tenants and leaseholders indicating that the Council control would allow costs savings of at least £300,000 per year by for

example combining Council and HiH call centres. The Council had also undertaken to maintain the quality of service and to deliver the Decent Homes programme.

The results of the consultation had also indicated that 31% of tenants had wanted to keep HiH and 48% wished to return to Council control while 19% had not indicated a preference. This had resulted in Cabinet deciding in March 2012 to bring HiH back into the Council with a target to achieve this by 1 October 2012.

The committee was informed that all permanent HiH staff would transfer to the Council on the same terms and conditions. There would be around 150 permanent staff transferred with a further 20-30 staff on fixed term contracts which would be extended to the end of March 2013. The TUPE protection period would last two years but reorganisations could still be undertaken during this period.

There would not be many changes for tenants as a result of the transfer and there would be no change to the tenancies themselves. The HiH Board would be abolished and a residents' forum set up with the proposal that this be chaired by the relevant Cabinet member.

The new organisation would be called Havering Homes and Housing Service although the only immediate changes as regards branding etc would apply to letterheads and signage at the Chippenham Road building.

The Committee was informed that the termination agreement had been reached amicably with a unanimous vote of the Board in favour.

The repairs contract with Morrisons expired at the end of July 2013 and would shortly be retendered. It was also clarified to the Committee that Morrisons normally used a sub-contractor for void properties.

There were approximately 2,500 leaseholders in Havering with around 20% of properties sub-let to others. Leaseholders were also consulted and favoured coming back into the Council. Leaseholders would have two representatives on the residents' forum.

3. JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS AND PREPARATIONS FOR THE OLYMPIC GAMES

The Committee received a presentation from the Head of Culture and Leisure services on the Jubilee events that was held in Havering for over a four week period. These events included the Big Dance Weekender event in Hornchurch which attracted both older people and children trying out ballroom dancing and an open air cinema.

A diamond jubilee market and the Romfest event were held over a weekend in June. Other activities included a carnival procession, a fun run and sports festival at Raphael Park as well as the lighting of a beacon in Havering Atte Bower and a concert at Langtons which was attended by 2-3,000 people.

There had been approximately 90 street parties across the borough which was more than many other boroughs. Two open spaces – Brittons Playing Fields and Park Lane Recreation Ground were to be designated as Queen Elizabeth II Playing Fields. This would give the sites extra protection in the planning process and would mean it would be very difficult to develop housing on the sites in the future. Veolia had agreed in principle to fund £25,000 of improvements at each site and the Council was also bidding for national funding for this work.

Olympics Preparation

The Head of Culture and Leisure Services also reported on the preparation for the Olympics that a total of £16.5 million of Olympic contracts had been won by Havering businesses. That robust planning had been undertaken for major incidents during the Games period in order to ensure the safety of Havering residents.

As regards day to day impact, there were no Olympic training venues in the borough although the A13 through Havering was part of the Olympic Route Network with the A12 as a back up route. It was possible that one lane of the route may be set aside for travel to Hadleigh Farm in Essex, the venue for the Olympic mountain bike event.

The Committee was informed that local businesses had received a lot of advice from Transport for London regarding arrangements during the Olympic period and a number of workshops had been held. Only a few Council services would be affected by the Olympics with possible issues for services such as street care and safeguarding.

The Council was trying to purchase two torches for display in Havering Museum and the local studies centre.

The Committee was also informed that about four hundred unaccredited Chinese media would be based in Havering during the Olympics and had hired the former Albermarle Youth House as a media centre. The journalists would be encouraged to spend in the local economy and it was therefore hoped to bring an overall benefit to the borough.

4. HAVERING MUSEUM

The July meeting of the Committee was held at the Havering Museum. Members undertook a visit to the museum and received a brief talk from the staff on the main features of Havering Museum that had now been open for two years.

The Committee was informed that the campaign to build the museum had in fact started in August 1999. That few people felt they lived in Havering as a place, preferring to say they lived in e.g. Collier Row. As such, the museum had been designed with a separate pod for each of the five towns – Hornchurch, Upminster, Rainham, Romford and Havering Village.

Members then toured the museum noting that it included a children's learning zone, reception area and a shop selling the largest selection of local history books in Romford. The displays also included audio recollections of local residents as well as interactive screens in each pod.

5. OLYMPIC LEGACY

At its meeting in October 2012, the Committee received a presentation from the Head of Culture and Leisure Services that highlighted the impact and legacy of the 2012 Olympic/Paralympics Games on Havering.

The Committee was informed that Havering had the following ten point delivery plan:

1. To improve the health and wellbeing of Havering residents
2. To permanently increase opportunities to participate in sports, the arts and other cultural activities
3. To increase volunteering and involvement in the voluntary sector
4. To organise a cultural programme linked to the four year Cultural Olympiad
5. To maximise job and training opportunities for Havering residents
6. To ensure that local businesses benefited
7. To secure sustainable transport, housing and regeneration benefits that would positively contribute to sustainable development in Havering
8. To promote Havering as a visitor destination
9. To stimulate interest in education and learning;
10. To maximise opportunities for community safety

Members noted that since the Games finished there had been evidence of increased participation in sport and physical activity particularly in athletics and cycling. This also included local initiatives such as upgrading leisure centres. Lord Coe visited Hornchurch Leisure Centre and had promised to return to the borough to open the Romford Leisure Development when completed.

Members noted that several emergency planning contingencies that had been put into place in case the need had arisen during the games has left the Council better prepared for the future.

Members also noted that a total of 39 contracts had been awarded to Havering businesses, through the CompeteFor scheme. It was noted that some local businesses had found the CompeteFor application process rather bureaucratic.

6. PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

In November the Committee considered a report that detailed an overview of the resources and performance levels of the Parks and Open Spaces services. The report covered the scope of the many aspects of maintenance and tasks undertaken by the service. It also provided comparison figures with other

providers and detailed the role of the Friends of Parks in the help they provided in maintaining their local parks.

The report stated that the borough's parks and open spaces were maintained by a company called Mayrise and that council officers monitored approximately ten percent of the works carried out. Members of the committee were of the view that this was not a high enough percentage to be able to gain an insight as to whether a good standard of service was being received.

The Committee also noted that no more Green Flags were to be awarded to parks in the borough, with the only possible exception of Raphael Park which may in the future qualify for a Green Flag as there had been a commitment to funding for improvement works.

Members noted that the amount of complaints received regarding the borough's parks had been steadily falling and public satisfaction levels had increased from the mid fifties to nearly seventy five percent.

The committee requested to receive regular maintenance update of works being carried out in parks rather than sporadic concerted efforts usually just prior to an event or inspection taking place. Members also agreed that it would be useful if in the future they could be advised of the nature of complaints the Council was receiving about parks and open spaces.

7. TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

At its meeting in December 2012 and February 2013 the Committee received a presentation from the Council's Regeneration Manager on the regeneration of the borough's town centres.

Following the presentation the Committee agreed to undertake a tour of town centres.

The Committee recently visited Romford Town Centre accompanied by ward councillors.

Other visits are planned for 3 July to tour Hornchurch, Elm Park and Rainham. Following on would be a final leg on 17 September to tour Collier Row, Hilldene and Upminster.

8. TRANSPORT FOR LONDON - TRAFFIC ISSUES WITHIN HAVERING

At the request of the Committee, Members received a briefing from representatives of Transport for London (TfL) on traffic issues within Havering.

During the presentation Members were informed that several junction upgrades were being introduced along the A12 including the provision of a cycle path alongside the pavement between Whalebone Lane and Gallows Corner.

That cameras were now installed at the Mawney Road junction of the A12 to deter drivers from performing illegal U-turns.

Members of the committee raised the problem of litter between the Barley Lane junction and the Mawney Road junction of the A12, the TfL representatives undertook to deal with the removal of the rubbish.

Members also commented about the amount of road repair equipment that had been left behind at the side of the road between the junctions of Mawney Road and North Street. TfL representatives also undertook to arrange for the materials to be removed.

During a discussion regarding the turning patterns at the junction of the A12 and Gubbins Lane members of the committee were advised that the Council was currently carrying out studies to see if a problem existed with cars crossing each other incorrectly.

Members also stated that several mesh barriers had been removed along the A12 near Harold Court Road. TfL representatives advised that several tranches of street furniture removal had taken place but if it was now deemed unsafe then a feasibility study could take place to see if the furniture needed to be re-introduced.

9. COMMUNITY SOCIAL HALLS/ROMFORD LEISURE DEVELOPMENT

At its meeting in February 2013, the Committee received a presentation from the Head of Culture and Leisure Facilities updating on the sale of the community halls and the Romford Leisure Development.

Members noted that the following two social halls that had been discussed at a previous meeting had now been leased. The New Windmill Hall had been re-leased in August 2012 and Tweed Way Hall had been re-leased in October 2012 to outside organizations

The Committee was informed that Dukes Hall had now closed and plans were being made to dispose of the site.

Members noted that Morrisons Supermarkets planned to build a superstore, petrol garage and residential properties on the site of the current Romford Ice Rink. As part of the deal the Council would acquire a plot of land situated on the corner of Grimshaw Way in Romford on which it was proposed to build a leisure centre that would include a 25 metre swimming pool, an ice rink and gymnasium.

The proposed development would required planning permission and the plans were passed at the Regulatory Services Committee on 14 March.

In response to a question regarding the possibility of a temporary ice rink being opened whilst works on the new leisure development were taking place, officers advised that investigations had taken place but it had proved financially prohibitive to open a temporary ice rink.

10. SERVICE PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

At its meeting in February and May 2013 the Committee received details of service performance information. The report provided Members specific performance indicator that related to the work area the committee.

At the May 2013 meeting the Head of Development & Building Control provided the committee with an insight on the steps being taken to remedy the situation that related to Planning Services applications which missed its target.

11. THE COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL STRATEGY

In January 2013, the Committee met jointly with the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees in order to scrutinise aspects of the Council's Financial Strategy for the coming year. The meeting, chaired by the Chairman of Children and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee, scrutinised several issue of relevance to this Committee

The following comments have been submitted by members of staff:

Financial implications and risks:

Narrative Report Only – not applicable.

Human Resources implications and risks:

Narrative Report Only – not applicable.

Legal implications and risks:

Narrative Report Only – not applicable.

Equalities and Social Inclusion Implications and Risks:

While issues and the work of the Committee can impact on all members of the community, there are no implications arising from this specific report which is a narrative of the Committee's work over the past year.

Background Papers – None.