

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
TOWNS & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
2 September 2014 (7.30 - 9.05 pm)**

Present:

Councillors Lawrence Webb (Chairman), Linda Hawthorn (Vice-Chair), Steven Kelly, Frederick Thompson, Jason Frost, Robby Misir and Jody Ganly

Apologies for absence was received from Councillor Alex Donald. Councillor Michael Deon Burton was absent.

6 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 1 July 2014 was agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

7 INTRODUCTION TO SERVICE AREAS WITHIN THE COMMITTEE'S REMIT - PRESENTATION BY HEAD OF SERVICE

The Committee received a presentation from the Head of Economic Development Services.

The Head of Service, Economic Development outlined the services objectives and how the service operated in order to meet these objectives.

The Committee was informed that the service had a five year target part of which was to deliver Romford 2020 as an increasingly vibrant and prosperous Town Centre.

That Romford was a place with good transport infrastructure, employment opportunities and a vibrant community. It had a good mix of high street shops, some restaurants, cafés, a traditional market and the museum.

That most of the shopping centres in Havering had a low vacancy rate, in Romford it was 6.47 compared to the national average of 12.4 %. It was recorded that over 25 million people visit Havering Town Centres.

The Committee was informed growth was required if in 2020 Romford was to remain a town where families settled, businesses flourished and visitors were welcomed.

The Head of Service outlined that in order to ensure Romford Town was a vibrant economic area part of the responsibility of the service was to support the new Crossrail station and environment in Romford.

It was explained that the service was working with Crossrail to deliver a high quality station design and station gateway development by bidding for TfL Complementary Measures funding

The Service aims to achieve public realm improvement valued at about £5 million, in addition to the new station with a southern entrance in Romford. These improvements would lead to vitality and viability of the town centre and increase commercial business rates capital funds for the council.

The Service detailed its objectives for delivering high quality housing in Rainham. It was explained that strong partnership with the Greater London Assembly (GLA) and the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham would ensure viability/contamination studies are completed and sites in the area come to market.

The service was also supporting Havering Town Centres, developing partnerships, attracting funding and delivering an annual programme of events. These programmes include also the delivery of specialist markets, promotional activities and town centre events.

The Committee was informed that the service was also involved in Improving the Skills Levels of Havering's residents, improving the match of skills provision to business needs and implementing a Harold Hill skills and employment programme.

The service had developed a Skills and Employment Strategy and built relationships whilst developing funding opportunities with Havering College and other partners.

Members gathered that these initiatives would improve accessibility to labour market for long term unemployed and improve skills attainment particularly in Harold Hill

The service also outlined its objective for London Riverside in 2020 to support the delivery of twenty new Businesses with £1 billion of private investment

The Committee was informed that the involvement of the service related to:

- Agree land use strategy and improvement to public realm;
- Building on partnership with the GLA to promote and market development opportunities;
- Improving bus links into area;
- Supporting businesses to resolve Broadband infrastructure issues;
- Working with the Business Improvement District to improve security and environment in the area; and

- Supporting the further development of CEME and links to manufacturing industries.

The Committee was informed that residents of the borough would benefit from an increased Business rate base and better value added businesses within the London Riverside Area.

Members gathered from the presentation that the service had successfully attracted and delivered £3 million of new investment in Havering's green and blue infrastructure.

The Head of Service detailed that the service had been able to support, develop and submit bids for green infrastructure development to the Lottery, GLA, Veolia North Thames Trust (VNTT) and EU. The service was also involved in the developing of partnership and overarching green and blue strategy and its operating plan.

It was explained that this involvement had led to improvement in green infrastructure in the borough. This had also provided residents' use and access to open space and the natural environment.

In response to a Member's enquiry, the Head of Service explained that funding had been allocated for station improvement at Romford and Harold Wood.

The Committee noted the presentation

8 COUNCILLOR GUIDE ON FIRE SAFETY

The Director of Property Services, Homes & Housing presented the briefing information on Councillor Guide on Fire Safety, informing the committee on steps that Homes & Housing had taken to ensure safety of council residents in LBH properties.

The Committee was informed that the Homes & Housing had developed a Fire Action plan since the release of the findings ensuring a random check of windows in council is carried out.

A two yearly fire risk assessment of council building in conjunction with the Fire Service. A review of clutter policy to keep corridors clear. The service was also looking to provide external storage for mobility scooters. In response to an enquiry the Director of Property Services explained to the committee that there was a regime to check emergency lighting regularly. That is was now part of the responsibilities of the Estate Inspection team to check alarms and other lightings.

The Committee was informed that it was part of the tenancy that was signed to inform new tenant on safety and fire regulation in their building.

Members were also informed that there was a stay put in your flat policy in case of a fire issued to resident.

The Committee noted the briefing information.

9 CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND CONTRACTOR PERFORMANCE

At the request of the Committee, the Director of Property Services, Homes & Housing gave a presentation on the Housing Capital Programme & Contractor Performance.

Members were informed that since the release of the performance table, two of the contractors had not been offered new decent homes contracts.

The presentation detailed the following as the programme context of the housing capital programme.

That the Capital Programme 2014 – 15 was in a second and final year of the programme to deliver decent homes from the decent homes grant.

The Committee were informed that at the completion of the 2014/15 programme, the decent homes grant would result in a level of 97% decency council homes.

The programme had so far achieved:

- Spent £38,719,000 in the last 3 years on decent homes works;
- 4,567 homes now comply with standard; and
- £33,058,868 had been spent on “other” projects.

The Director of Property Services, Homes & Housing informed the Committee that the 2014 programme was £44.86m in value with the following allocations

- £34.6m Decent Homes (inc £23m grant);
- £4.26m of upkeep works; and
- £6.0m of improvements/remodelling and development works

While the 2013/14 programme had been £33.5m in value with the following allocations

- £26.9m Decent Homes (inc £15m grant);
- £4.71m of upkeep works; and
- £1.89m of improvements/remodelling and development works

The Committee were informed that the programme content to be delivered included:

- Decent Homes - kitchens, bathrooms, windows, roofs etc.;
- Large scale projects – Non Traditional Houses/ Napier & New Plymouth;
- Flats Above Shops – first steps towards addressing issues with these blocks;
- New Build programme – match funding, “change of use” projects; and
- Investment & Upkeep – major voids, aids and adaptations, structural repairs etc.

The Director of Property Services, Homes & Housing informed the committee that the arrangement to select contractors for the programme was governed by the delivery strategy and approved by Cabinet in February 2013 following the return of council homes from the Almo.

Members were informed that the services made an emphasis for local companies and local supply chain to be involved in the delivery of the decent homes programme.

The presentation detailed the following issues and performances of the four contractors on the programme.

- Had problems during 2013/14 with particular contractors;
- Dissatisfaction expressed by Leaseholders relating to section 20 process;
- Detailed assessment undertaken to understand reasons so remedies could be implemented;
- The service focused on ensuring a positive outcome for residents with concerns;
- Many of the issues related to the Kitchen and Bathroom replacement contracts;
- These contracts represented 25% of the programme by value and 40% by the number of units involved;
- Five contractors were involved with various allocations awarded;
- Involved a range of dissatisfaction issues;
- Failure to adhere to agreed time scales for works;
- Poor quality of finishing;
- Lack of respect to residents;
- Inability to communicate with residents; and

- Failure to keep promises to rectify problems in a timely manner.

The Committee were informed that the following actions were taken to bring matters to conclusion for residents by the service and bring contractual pressure on the contractors, these were:

- Issued Contract Default Notices to Lakehouse and Wates;
- Ceased using Morrison Partnership for these works (as contract was coming to an end)
- Conducted face to face meetings with senior officials of Wates and Lakehouse and expressed service dissatisfaction in the strongest terms;
- Instructed the provision of corrective action plans from Lakehouse and Wates;
- Increased the levels of supervision associated with the Kitchen and Bathroom contracts by employing an additional Clerk of Works to focus on work in progress inspections;
- Directed all Resident Liaison Officer (RLO) resources onto the issues with Lakehouse and Wates and daily site tours were conducted to locations where correction works are taking place;
- Reiterated to residents with issues with any contractor to contact the Capital Works Team if the contractors RLO's failed to keep their undertakings;
- Formally instructed the LHC to suspend Lakehouse and Wates from working on any frameworks for LB Havering;
- Established a "service desk" for aspects associated with progress or other issues with the programme;
- Used our case tracking system which does not conclude a case until a resident confirms matters have been addressed;
- Revisited s20 notifications to leaseholders and clarified position. Standard letters had since been re-worded;

- Reviewed all aspects of contracting process, including
 - Contract documentation – specifications and requirements were clear and unambiguous;
 - Supervision – regular progress meetings held and dedicated on site supervision present;
 - Contractor selection criteria – governed by Contract Procedure Rules.

Members were informed that since the release of the performance table, two of the contractors had not been offered new decent homes contracts.

The Director of Property Services explained that the outstanding 3% of homes was proposed to be brought to decent homes standard under the 2015/16 HRA Capital Works budget.

The Committee was also informed that in order to maintain these homes as decent homes, the service was adopting the decent homes standard guidance in order to gauge the lifespan of installed kitchens and windows.

The Director of Property Services was requested to provide the committee with a breakdown Contractor Performances & activities and an analysis of dissatisfaction relating to each contractor.

The Committee noted the presentation.

10 **CORPORATE PERFORMANCE - QUARTER 4 2013/14**

The Committee considered a report that set out the Council's performance against the Living Ambition Goal for Quarter Four (January to March 2014).

The Committee without any discussion agreed to note the Performance Indicators report for Quarter Four.

11 **CORPORATE PERFORMANCE ANNUAL 2013/14**

The Committee considered a report that set out the Annual Corporate Performance information that was presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 30 July 2014.

The Committee without any discussion agreed to note the Annual report.

12 **URGENT BUSINESS**

Under Urgent Business

The Chairman of the Landlord Licensing Scheme Topic Group gave an update to the Committee on the first meeting of the Group. The Group had requested further information on the London Landlord Accreditation Scheme (LLAS) following the release of the 2008 document and data on the hot spot areas in the borough where public sector leasing and private housing existed.

The Chairman informed other Members present that he had requested and received a list of Key and Non Key Decisions from March 2014 to date taken by Cabinet members and Senior Officers in order to review the decisions and consider if there was a need for any scrutiny work to be undertaken. The information would be circulated in order for Members to review and suggest a list of about fourteen short listed decisions for the Committee to include on the work programme.

Chairman