

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
TOWNS & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SUB- COMMITTEE
Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
28 October 2014 (7.30 - 9.45 pm)**

Present:

Councillors Lawrence Webb (Chairman), Linda Hawthorn (Vice-Chair), +Ray Best, Michael Deon Burton, Frederick Thompson, Jason Frost and Jody Ganly

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Steven Kelly and Robby Misir.

Councillor Ray Best substituted for Councillor Steven Kelly.

Councillor Linda Van den Hende was present for part of the meeting.

13 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 2 September 2014 and the minutes of the Joint Overview & Scrutiny meeting held on 8 September 2014 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

14 PRESENTATION ON THE HAVERING LICENSING STRATEGY

The Committee received a presentation on the Licensing Strategy from the Public Protection, Licensing and Health and Safety Divisional Manager. This presentation provided an opportunity for the Committee to be informed on how the reshaped Licensing Strategy and the proposed consultation of the Statement of Licensing Policy.

The Committee was informed that the decision to develop a strategy originated from the Havering Night Time Economy costs and benefits report in 2010.

The draft strategy was developed by a group of Councillors, The Police, Officers representing Environmental Health, Licensing, Planning, Children, Young people, Street Care, Health and Wellbeing, Public Health, Regeneration, Community Safety, NHS, Ambulance Services, DAAT and Legal.

The draft strategy was consulted and the final strategy was adopted by Full Council on the 26 March 2014.

The following were the aims of the Strategy:

- Reduce irresponsible alcohol sales and consumption in our town centres
- Reduce alcohol-related crime in Romford
- Promote responsible drinking and tackle binge drinking
- Reduce availability of alcohol in the vicinity of schools during school hours
- Reduce the level of drug use in licensed premises
- Maintain a thriving and viable daytime and night-time economies which create the right balance between business and residential communities
- A Comprehensive strategy to assist Licensing Sub-Committees' decision-making

The Committee was informed that the Statement of Licensing Policy was a statement of how the Licensing Authority was going to consider licence applications in the borough. The policy had to be renewed every five years. A new policy would need to be produced next year in order to be in place for January 2016.

The following timeline for the new policy was outlined:

- Final policy to be agreed at Full Council December 2015
- Final policy to be agreed by Licensing Committee Nov 2015
- End of Consultation – August 2015
- Consultation starts - June 2015
- Licensing Committee to agree draft policy for consultation May /June 2015

The Committee was informed that the new policy would need to be drafted, published and circulated for consultation to all premises, stakeholders, Members and residents of the borough who would like to have some input in developing the draft policy.

Members were reminded that the policy needed to have regard to the guidance that was issued by the Home Office.

Following the presentation, Members agreed to form a joint working topic group with members of the Licensing committee to develop the draft policy that would be circulated.

The Committee **noted** that the Councillors Linda Hawthorn, Jason Frost, Frederick Thompson and Lawrence Webb would be joining selected Members from the Licensing Committee to form a working group.

15 **CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER 1 2014/15**

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

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

16 CONTRACTORS COMPLAINT INFORMATION

At its meeting on 2 September 2014, the Committee received a presentation on the Capital Programme, Members requested to be provided with a breakdown of individual Contractor Performances that detailed an analysis of local resident comments to the work carried out.

At the meeting, the Committee considered an individual table of Contractor Performance and sought further information from the service.

The following issues were raised by Members in respect of the Capital Programme Contractor Log that was tabled at the meeting.

1. Can a sub-contractor be blacklisted for poor quality of work?
Members were informed that the service had to go through the main contractor, the Committee sought clarification on how a black-listed sub-contractor is not able to get further work in Havering?
2. Whilst the Committee was reviewing the Wates log, a Member sought clarification on the significance of the colour coding on the notes on record?
3. The Committee asked if the service do a check of sub-contractor identity and accreditation.

The Committee noted the Capital Programme Contractor Log.

17 CABINET REPORT REVIEW - REVISED HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME AND TENANCY STRATEGY

In accordance to the Council's Continuous Improvement Model, the Committee received a presentation update on the Revised Housing Allocation Scheme and Tenancy Strategy

The Committee was informed that the report that went to Cabinet detailed a revised Allocations Scheme covering the eligibility for, and letting of, council housing in the borough. The revisions take account of the new freedoms and flexibilities afforded local authorities with regard to the letting of council homes brought in by the Localism Act 2011. The revisions had been informed by a thorough and detailed consultation with residents who were likely to be affected and stakeholders both within and outside the Council.

Members were informed that part of the strategy included the draft Tenancy Strategy which was a new requirement for each housing authority, brought in by the Localism Act 2011.

The Tenancy Strategy outlined the council's approach to the use of fixed term tenancies, rather than lifetime secure tenancies. This also affected Housing Associations operating in the borough who were required to have regard to the Tenancy Strategy when setting their own tenancy policies. Members gathered that given the 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 i.e. housing associations or registered social landlords and other stakeholders.

The Committee was informed of the impact of the new Allocations Scheme. That it had led to a large drop in the numbers on the Housing Register from 13,500 households down to 2,500

It had led to people who were contributing to the local community coming top on the bidding lists.

This had also provided greater possibility of adequately housed council tenants wishing to transfer being rehoused, for example, from a flat to a house.

Members were informed that the new allocation scheme had affected a large number of people were unhappy to be removed from the Housing Register. These were typically the following:

- people living outside of Havering
- people renting privately who would *like* to rent from the Council but their current home is adequate for their needs
- people living with family but are not overcrowded

An appeals process was put in place to address their concern and issues.

The presentation outlined to the Committee following the 2013 revisions, the following key amendments had been introduced in 2014:

- Definition of 'local people' – now five years' residency rather than two years
- Some working households, while they had enough room, struggle to live independently on low wages – new priority for housing
- Some people claimed 'trading on e-bay' and the like as 'working' – new requirement to demonstrate working for at least the minimum wage
- People with an Emergency Rehousing need often turned down offers – now, just one suitable offer would be made

The presentation outlined the following impact of the Strategy

That Tenancy given since 9 April 2013:

- 59% lifetime tenancy
- 1% three year fixed term tenancy
- 39% five year fixed term tenancy
- 1% non-secure tenancy

The Committee **noted** the presentation.

18 **CABINET REPORT REVIEW - HOUSING REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET**

In accordance with the Council's Continuous Improvement Model, the Committee received a presentation update on the Housing Revenue and Capital Budget.

The Committee was informed that since 2012 the position of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) had been different from previous years because of Self Financing HRAs. The HRA remained a ring-fenced account that was used to manage the Council's own housing stock. The proposed budget enabled the Council to manage the stock to a reasonable standard and to deliver the next phase of the Council's Decent Homes Programme. It further set rents, service charges and other charges for Council tenants for the year 2013/14.

The Committee was taken through some slides that outlined comparisons in income from the Housing Revenue Account in 2013/14 and 2014/15. Expenditure from the Housing Revenue Account 2013/14 and 2014/15 were also detailed.

The Committee was informed of the following issues for the HRA in 2014 – 2015, that were Rents & Service Charges related:

- The rent increase was 5.9%
- Average rents were now £90.80 although these were still the lowest in London
- Rents on empty properties went straight to target rents and this had generated an extra £0.5m this year
- Service charges covered costs

The presentation identified the following area of growth in 2014 – 2015 for the HRA

- Affordable Housing Team
- Mobility and under occupation programme
- Queen Street Villas
- Contribution to the capital programme, and completion in 2014/15

The Committee was provided with fact and figures on achievement in the Decent Homes programme. Approximately £38.7 million had been spent in the last 3 years on decent homes works, which had made 4567 homes comply with the decent homes standard. Another £33 million was expended on other housing projects.

The 2014/15 programme was valued at £44.86m with the following allocations

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

The presentation highlighted the following issues for the HRA Business Plan:

- The effect of Rents and Rent Policy
- Decent Homes – what would come after the programme?
- Right to Buy (RTB) numbers and consequences; the service had recorded a rise in tenants taking up the right to buy their homes and as a consequence a drop in numbers of council homes for rent.
- The effect of the Welfare Reforms
- Suitability of Sheltered Accommodation

In conclusion, the Committee noted that:

- The HRA had a healthy business plan
- The Decent Homes Programme would be at 97% completion by March 2015
- Threats that included RTB sales and welfare reform
- Opportunities included freedom to invest and build
- Decisions were to be made as part of the Council's budget in February 2015

The Committee **noted** the presentation.

Chairman