

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD
Havering Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
5 February 2015 (7.30pm - 8.50 pm)**

Present:

COUNCILLORS

Conservative Group	John Crowder, Philippa Crowder, Jason Frost, Steven Kelly, Robby Misir, Dilip Patel and Carol Smith
Residents' Group	Nic Dodin, +Barbara Matthews and Ray Morgon
East Havering Residents' Group'	Gillian Ford (Chairman) and Linda Hawthorn
UKIP Group	Patricia Rumble and Lawrence Webb (Vice-Chair)
Independent Residents' Group	David Durant and Graham Williamson

An apology for absence was received from Councillor June Alexander.

+Substitute members: Councillor Barbara Matthews (for June Alexander).

Unless indicated all decisions were taken with no votes against.

The Chairman reminded Members of the action to be taken in an emergency.

**11 CALL IN OF A KEY CABINET DECISION - ESTATE IMPROVEMENTS
HIGHFIELD ROAD**

A Cabinet decision was agreed on 21 January 2015, the decision taken was to:

- Agree to establish a Residents' Steering Group to oversee the improvement deliver programme, and comment on the proposals.
- Agree to consult the residents on the possibility of renaming the Highfield Road estate and the individual blocks to names which reflected the celebrations due to take place on 9 September 2015.
- Approve the expenditure of £1.853m from the HRA capital programme of 2015/16 to carry out the improvements detailed in the appendix attached to the report. This approval would be subject to Council ratification.

- Authorise officers to invite tenders from appropriate building firms to carry out the proposed works.

In accordance with Paragraph 17 of the Overview and Scrutiny Rules, a requisition signed by two members representing more than one Group (Councillors Ray Morgon and Lawrence Webb) had called in the Cabinet decision of 21 January 2015.

Reasons for the requisition:

The reasons for the 'call-in' were:

- The full cost, process (including timescales) and implications in re-naming the Highfield Road estate had not been fully disclosed for both residents and the Council.
- No evidence had been provided to demonstrate that the area was neglected and suffered from a lack of demand for Council or private housing.
- No details had been provided on the re-alignment of priorities and why such a decision was required.
- No evidence is provided to demonstrate the poor environment of the entire estate.

The Cabinet Member for Housing addressed the questions raised in the requisition in order and invited questions from Members of the Board afterwards.

In relation to point number one of the requisition the Cabinet Member advised that the original £130,000 set aside had been a prudent provision and the final cost would be known following consultation with other services such as the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority and the London Ambulance Service.

In reply to point two members were advised that a recent site visit had taken place with members of the Residents' Steering Group which had shown that the estate suffered from neglect and highlighted the fact that no investment had taken place on the estate in over nine years whereas other areas in the borough had benefitted from considerable investment.

In response to item three the Cabinet member commented that no re-alignment of priorities had taken place. No priority survey had been undertaken but the estate had been identified as receiving no investment for a substantial period of time.

In reply to item four the Cabinet Member advised that he was more than happy to visit the estate with members and arrange for them to talk to

residents about the poor environment of the estate and demonstrate how the entire estate would benefit from investment.

In response to a question, Members were advised that an Asset Management Strategy was currently being worked on.

During the debate members agreed that there should be some way of commemorating the Queen's anniversary as the longest serving monarch but there was some confusion as to why just one directorate and one area of the borough had been chosen to celebrate the anniversary.

The re-naming of the blocks of flats would involve residents having to make arrangements regarding the name change and would seem an unfair burden to place on residents.

It was suggested that perhaps officers could speak with housing developers who had current projects within the borough and ask if they would be willing to name blocks or roads with names that would celebrate the anniversary as part of a joint venture between the developer and the Council.

In response to a question regarding the lack of tangible evidence that the estate suffered from a lack of housing lettings, the Cabinet Member for Housing commented that there were levels of deprivation in the area although these had not yet had a significant effect on housing lettings without investment problems could arise.

Members noted that it was self-evident that the estate suffered from some deprivation, as the number of Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit claims, were higher than in similar areas across the borough. Although benefit claims did not affect the condition of the buildings, although the blocks had benefitted from significant Decent Homes investment this had not been matched with upgrade works to the external fabric of the blocks.

Members commented that although the estate would probably benefit from a name change, similar to how the Mardyke/Orchard Village had, it would be prove to be a costly change and would be a burden on residents.

The Cabinet member for Housing confirmed that the estimate of £130,000 previously discussed was to be taken from the overall budget of £1,853,600 which could be accommodated within the 2015/16 financial year however the name changes would only take place following consultation with the residents.

In reply to a question regarding the overgrown areas on the estate it was agreed that whilst that was a maintenance issue that needed addressing the blocks needed periodic investment.

Officers confirmed that although Decent Homes works had been carried out in 2011 the estate was part of a cyclical maintenance programme that had had no exterior works for approximately nine years. All the works planned

for the blocks were to be completed at the same time as “*scales of economy*” made more sense when carrying out numerous works to the blocks.

Members also made comment that the previously mentioned Mardyke/Orchard Village re-development had been more than just a re-naming exercise and that perhaps re-generation of the whole Collier Row area should have been considered similar to the Harold Hill Ambitions programme that had taken place. A number of other properties in the Collier Row area would benefit from re-generation particularly as the area had a high number of non-traditionally constructed dwellings.

Members were advised that several official borough-wide events were planned to celebrate the Queen’s anniversary these included a Civil Service that was being arranged by the leader of the Council with all political groups being invited to attend.

In reply to a further question regarding a Collier Row ambitions type programme members were advised that although in theory the idea would be fantastic to re-generate the whole of Collier Row there was simply not enough funding to be able to undertake a scheme of that size. Consultations had been carried out with the residents of the Highfield Road estate who had felt that their area had been neglected and even though funding had been promised previously it had never materialised. Members again questioned the suitability of selecting one small area for improvement works but were advised that there was a lot more Council housing in Harold Hill which made the Ambitions programme more suitable.

In response to a question regarding possible re-imburement to residents who were left out of pocket due to the name changes members were advised that the costs to residents would be minimal and there was no intention to re-imburse costs.

Members were advised that the Highfield Road estate had a particular Royal connection and that all eleven members of the Steering Group backed the name changes, however the name changes would not be imposed on the residents otherwise people would not take ownership of them.

Members were advised that the Steering Group had come about following Housing’s Engagement Team holding an open event for local residents.

The Chairman gave a brief explanation of the requisition process and how the matter would move forward should the requisition be upheld or dismissed.

A motion was proposed to withdraw the consultation process which was lost by 7 votes 8 with 1 abstention.

The proposal that the requisition (proposed by Councillors Morgon and Webb) be upheld (and therefore the matter be referred to the Cabinet member for further consideration) was LOST (by 5 votes to 11)

Councillors Ford, Kelly, Morgon, Webb and Rumble voted to uphold the requisition.

Councillors J Crowder, P Crowder, Frost, Misir, Patel, Smith, Matthews, Dodin, Hawthorn, Durant and Williamson voted not to uphold the requisition.

12 **REVISIONS TO THE COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

The report before Members considered a number of changes to the draft financial strategy in response to the public budget consultation.

Members were advised that the results from the consultation process had been reported extensively to Cabinet on 21 January 2015. In response to the consultation Cabinet requested that a number of the budget proposals be reconsidered. The proposed revised options were summarised in the report.

During a brief debate members received clarification from officers on the following points:

Changes to Parks Parking

Parking charges would include parks within sporting grounds

Libraries

That the alternative budget proposal submitted from Library staff had been considered but was not consistent with the Council's new business practice of using a combination of staff and volunteers. The alternative proposal had also not allowed for cover during periods of annual leave and sickness. The proposed business practice of using staff and volunteers was one that was widely used across the country with successful results.

No questions were asked regarding the Queen's Theatre and Youth Services.

