

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
TOWNS & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE
Committee Room 2 - Town Hall
26 October 2016 (7.30 - 9.40 pm)**

Present:

Councillors Lawrence Webb (Chairman), Linda Hawthorn (Vice-Chair), Michael Deon Burton, Jody Ganly, Robby Misir, Frederick Thompson, and Julie Wilkes

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Steven Kelly and Carol Smith

11 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Committee held on 27 July 2016 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

12 HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION

The Sub-Committee received a presentation on progress in tackling the issues presented by Houses in Multiple Occupation. All such premises of 3 storey or over were licensed. Additionally the Council had introduced Article 4 Directions under planning.

The next step was to seek approval for borough wide additional licensing plus selective licensing of up to 20% of the Borough's Private Rented Sector housing on a 'worst first' basis (subject to public consultation).

Originally it was intended to target the three worse areas Gooshays, Heaton and Brooklands wards, but it was now proposed to target specific roads. A report would be submitted to Cabinet in November with costings before going out for consultation. The intention was to have everything in place by August 2017.

Officers advised that since the introduction of the Article 4 Direction the number of planning applications had fallen away, with just one application in the system awaiting submission to the Regulatory Services Committee.

The Sub-Committee **noted** the report.

13 ROMFORD MARKET TRANSFORMATION

Officers reported on progress with the plans for transforming Romford Market. Plans showing the proposed Market House in context were displayed. The current proposed design; a timber machine clad building had been costed. It was hoped that this would be an attraction which would

bring more people in to the market and the shopping centres.

Officers had held preliminary conversations with potential operators of the Market House, which included Café Rouge. The building would be capable of serving 70 covers at one sitting.

English Heritage, the Church, traders and local residents had been consulted on the proposals and were generally supportive. Officers expected to submit a planning application shortly having completed pre-planning negotiations.

A Market Transformation Officer had been appointed and was now in post, market management had been brought back in house and a new Market Manager appointed. Officers were looking at the market offer and the proposals were attracting fresh interest.

The Trader Pledge would be introduced and new traders were coming in. Officers would work with existing traders to encourage them to give up some prime spots on the market to allow new traders to build up a customer base.

As part of the promotion of the market planning permission had been sought for a temporary ice rink over the Christmas and New Year period, just one of a number of events designed to attract more visitors.

Further market research had been undertaken, a Business plan drawn up and an Operational Business plan being prepared. To improve the market offer the Council were looking to introduce free Wi-Fi across the market to allow traders to introduce contactless payment.

Officers were working with traders and the shopping centres to produce a Business Improvement District across the Town Centre.

Officers were aware of councillors concerns regarding the two empty large units in the Liberty and the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive had been in touch with the Liberty's owners to encourage them to tackle the issue. They had been invited to come over and visit Romford to discuss issues. An assurance had been received from them that they were actively looking at ways of letting the space formerly occupied by BHS.

The Sub-Committee **noted** the update.

14 **CABINET REPORT UPDATE - REVIEW OF CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO THE CONSULTATION ON YOUTH SERVICE PROPOSALS**

Officers had submitted a written report updating members on progress in implementing the proposals agreed by Cabinet in November 2015.

Consultation had been undertaken on the proposals at the backend of 2015 with staff having until 9 January 2016 to respond. The new structure had been put in place and staff invited to seek assimilation or redeployment, the process had been completed by April 2016 and the new service started 1 May 2016.

After the staff consultation it had been decided to integrate MyPlace and Youth Facilitation restructure proposals and complete one restructure at the same time. The intended savings of £516k from the Youth Facilitation restructure had been achieved and the full £100k for MyPlace had been achieved in 2016/17 rather than across 2016/17 and 2017/18.

A budget of £250k had been retained to support the work of the Youth Services team and a net budget of approximately £250k retained to deliver services at the MyPlace building. Additionally, £100k had been made available from the Housing Revenue Account to allow the Youth Service to work with young people living on Council estates. This work was ongoing.

Officers had been tasked to progress a procurement process to externalise the Youth Facilitation and MyPlace services. Work had started but had been put on hold whilst various issues around youth provision at the Robert Beard building were addressed. The Council had decided to move the Pupil Referral Unit to this building.

Planning Permission had been sought for the conversion of the former Youth Service space at MyPlace into a Nursery and officers were looking to introduce complimentary therapies to MyPlace.

Part time working was working and Youth Facilitation and MyPlace had been able to continue providing a valuable service. All participants were being encouraged to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh awards.

The Sub-Committee **noted** the report.

15 **CORPORATE PERFORMANCE UPDATE - QUARTER TWO**

Officers provided the latest Corporate Performance data for the 14 indicators which fall under the remit of the Sub-Committee. These related to the CLEAN and PROUD goals.

11 of the indicators had a RAG status of Green, 2 a RAG status of Amber and just 1 a RAG status of Red.

The red indicator related to the Percentage of other applications processed within 8 weeks (extension of time agreements were not included). The target was 80%, but we had only achieved 66%. This drop in performance had been down to an isolated issue regarding notification. It had impacted on the ability to determine a batch of householder planning applications within the usual 8 week period. These had been managed by the use of Extension of Time agreements.

The Sub-Committee asked for an assurance that the issue had been resolved and officers had stated that they believed it had been resolved but would provide more details after the meeting.

The two amber indicators related to the percentage of major applications processed within 13 weeks and the percentage of minor applications processed within 8 weeks. The Direction of Travel for both was in the right direction with a larger percentage being achieved in quarter two compared to quarter 1.

Consultation had now closed on restructure proposals which would facilitate the outsourcing of the initial part of the planning application process. When implemented this would streamline the process and had the potential to improve overall process. The Sub-Committee requested details of what this outsourcing would involve and whether or not officers would still have a sight of all plans.

The nine Proud indicators were all in the green. The percentages of repairs completed on time were below target but within tolerance. Officers indicated that they need to work with contractors to ensure the targets were met.

The average void to re-let times were excellent; the best in London and officers estimated that this brought in on average between £500k and £700k per annum.

The number of potential start-up businesses accessing advice via the Business Start-up Programme was improving following the engagement of Enterprise Nation to provide this advice. Enterprise Nation was confident they would catch up with the annual target by year end.

The final indicator related to the number of volunteers assisting in the running of library services. The Sub-Committee asked for more detailed information around the average number of hours worked by volunteers and the ratio of employed staff to volunteers required to open a library.

The Sub-Committees attention was drawn to the number of Homelessness decisions and acceptances. These had dropped significantly compared to previous years and quarter 1. Officers advised that this was a critical indicator. In quarter 1 there had been nearly 40 decisions, in quarter 2 just 20. A Bill was going through Parliament which would require Local Authorities to intervene earlier.

Officers advised that early prevention was more cost effective than rehousing. The traditional way of responding to a homelessness application was to wait until the bailiff's warrant was issued. In Havering we had started to respond earlier and this would be the way forward.

What was required was a sustainable way forward we did not want families to keep being made homeless. Officers informed the Sub-Committee that

they were working with the fraud team to ensure landlords who were evicting tenants so they could occupy the premises themselves did actually move in and live there.

The Sub-Committee **noted** the report.

16 **CABINET REPORT UPDATE - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

The Sub-Committee were advised that in September 2015 the Cabinet had agreed an expansion of the capital budget for the following three years as set out:

- 15/16 increase of £3.000m to £13.509m;
- 16/17 increase of £26.675m to £39.999m; and
- 17/18 increase of £19.767m to £28.714m.

A further report to Cabinet in June 2016 reviewed the impact of various changes on the HRA Business Plan and sought agreement to a revised 30 year plan with associated expenditure on existing stock and services and investment in development of new units.

Cabinet had agreed the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, the HRA Major Capital Works Programme and the proposed development of new council housing.

A further report to Cabinet on 12 October 2016 had firmed up on the HRA New Build Proposals. This report had identified the key sites and clarified the Councils ambition to provide 2500 units, 1500 of which would be new, the other 1000 replacements for those which would be demolished.

The report had also looked at the procurement process for preferred partners.

Officers had looked at new models of financing the programme, including the 'legacy' model. The challenge was not just to provide new homes but to ensure the infrastructure was in place to support the residents.

To deal with these issues a major traffic and parking study had been commissioned and the Council was investing in training up new planners to challenge developer's financial assumptions.

The Sub-Committee **noted** the report.

17 **REVIEW OF CABINET REPORT - ESTABLISHMENT OF COUNCIL OWNED HOUSING COMPANY TO DELIVER MARKET RENT AND MARKET SALE HOME**

The Sub-Committee was advised that in May 2015 the Cabinet had approved the setting up of a Housing Company to:

- Generate a financial return;
- Deal with housing demand;
- Ensure a good mix of housing; and
- To support the Council's regeneration aims.

Mercury Land Holdings was now up and running having recently acquired 65 units from Swan Housing on the Oldchurch site which should be available to rent by March 2017. To achieve critical mass the Company need a minimum of 200 units.

A second scheme was in the pipe line, the redevelopment of the former NALGO site in Hornchurch. A well designed scheme had been prepared and this would be submitted to planning shortly.

A third scheme was being developed which would redevelop the Como Street car park. A preferred partner had been identified but no scheme was in place yet.

The fourth proposal was the redevelopment of a number of brownfield sites in Rainham. A partner was being sought and Compulsory Purchase Orders would be served early in the New Year. This development was likely to include a mix of units for rent and for sale.

The Sub-Committee **noted** the report.

18 **TOPIC GROUPS**

The Sub-Committee were advised that the two current Topic Groups looking at ASB and the Green Belt were coming to a close.

Members were asked to consider which topics they would wish to deal with next.

The Chairman suggested a forensic look at Housing Repairs and another member suggested a look at the Friends of Parks.

Officers would email Members to ascertain who would wish to serve on the Topic Groups.

Chairman