

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD
Havering Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
2 December 2020 (7.30 – 8.23 pm)**

Present:

COUNCILLORS

Conservative Group	Ray Best, Philippa Crowder, Judith Holt, Sally Miller, Nisha Patel, Christine Smith, Maggie Themistocli and Michael White (Vice-Chair)
Residents' Group	Ray Morgon
Upminster & Cranham Residents' Group	Linda Hawthorn and Christopher Wilkins
Independent Residents' Group	Natasha Summers and Graham Williamson
Labour Group	Keith Darvill
North Havering Residents' Group	Darren Wise (Chairman)

All decisions were taken with no votes against.

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

36 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Councillor Barry Mugglestone.

37 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

38 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 13 October 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

39 **PROTOCOL ON THE OPERATION OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD MEETINGS DURING THE PANDEMIC**

The Board noted the protocol on the operation of its meetings during the pandemic period.

40 **TOPIC GROUP UPDATES**

The Board agreed the following scope of the debt recovery topic group:

To understand the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on arrangements for and levels of:

- **Council Tax collection**
- **Business Rates collection**
- **Overall Council Debt**

To understand current officer strategy to increase collection rates and reduce outstanding debts and to investigate any changes to this as a result of the pandemic.

The topic group had recently met with officers and been advised that recovery of Council Tax arrears had been progressing satisfactorily although this would depend on when the national furlough scheme ended. Scrutiny had also commenced of business rates recovery and of accounts payable where some delays in payment had been encountered. Government financial assistance had been helping recovery rates at this stage. The impact of future redundancies among Havering residents was yet to be seen and the topic group had also sent a number of questions to the service for response.

The Covid-19 pandemic-flu plan and command structure topic group had held several very informative meetings re the impact of Covid-19 on the command structure. A meeting with representatives of the Police and the NHS had been postponed but was now planned to take place within the next two weeks. Members were grateful for a very good contribution to the review from public health officers.

The impact of Covid-19 on residential care homes and the third sector topic group had held useful discussions with the head of the Council's Joint Commissioning Unit. The group was planning to move on to look at the impact of the pandemic on the third sector and on its ability to deliver outcomes for the Council. The group was also due to meet shortly with care home providers and seek feedback on levels of PPE and other support that care homes had received from the Council. The group had also been advised that dedicated care home beds for Covid-19 patients discharged from hospital were available as an additional resource, paid for by the NHS.

The Board noted the position with the topic groups.

41 REVIEW OF THE FORWARD PLAN OF FORTHCOMING KEY DECISIONS

A Member raised concerns that points made by the Board during its recent pre-decision scrutiny of the Inclusive Growth Strategy had not appeared to be considered at the subsequent Cabinet meeting. Officers confirmed that agreed points made by the Board were provided to the relevant Cabinet Member but the precise process for doing this could be considered outside of the meeting. A suggestion was made that Cabinet reports selected for pre-decision scrutiny be made available to the Board at an earlier stage. Officers would investigate what was possible given the Council's reporting cycles.

Suggestions for future pre-decision scrutiny items included controlled parking zones and the parks strategy. Other possibilities included asset rationalisation and regeneration of the Hilldene area of Harold Hill. The Board was reminded that all Members received a notification when new items were added to the forward plan.

The Board declined to formally select any items for pre-decision scrutiny at this stage but Members were welcome to suggest these via the Chairman or the clerk of the meeting.

42 WORK PROGRAMME

A Member requested that the issue of the Council's corporate complaints policy be added to the Board's work programme with particular emphasis on whether the third stage of the process was required. It was agreed that consideration be given to setting up a topic group on this area, early in 2021.

43 NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Board was scheduled for 3 February 2021, dealing principally with scrutiny of the Council's budget proposals.

Chairman