

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PLACES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE
Council Chamber - Town Hall
4 October 2022 (7.04 - 8.34 pm)**

Present:

COUNCILLORS

Conservative Group	Robert Benham (Chairman)
Havering Residents' Group	David Godwin, Gerry O'Sullivan, Bryan Vincent and Laurance Garrard
Labour Group	Katharine Tumilty (Vice-Chair) and Patricia Brown
East Havering Residents Group	

Apologies were received for the absence of Councillors Osman Dervish and Brian Eagling.

All decisions were taken with no votes against.

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

1 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting were received from Councillors Brian Eagling, Osman Dervish, Natasha Sommers (substitute Councillor Patricia Brown) and Matthew Stanton (substitute Councillor Laurence Garrard).

3 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

4 EMERGENCY PLANNING & LAUNDERS LANE

The Sub-Committee were presented with a report that captured the Corporate Emergency Planning involvement with the long standing Launders Lane site issues. The report enabled Members to decide if they wished to undertake a more in depth scrutiny of the issues and seek other partners' perspectives and responsibilities.

It was explained that the summary would help members understand and seek assurances that the Council had undertaken its responsibilities, through the avenues available to it, namely enforcement and legal ones, to help resolve the impact on residents.

A brief history of the impacts from 2000-todate, from a Corporate Emergency Planning lens, highlighting known incidents, together with an overview of the upcoming work underway, related to reducing the disruption that Launders Lane created for the residents of Rainham and South Hornchurch announced by the Leader in response to the historic issues.

The summary provided:

- A background on the site named Arnolds Field (commonly known as Launders Lanes) however, this history is patchy, with dormant periods.
- The Emergency Response to the large fire in July 2019 including the cost implications
- The London Fire Brigades position on responding to fires at Launders Lane
- The Forthcoming Launders Lane Actions from the August and early September meetings held to listen to residents' concerns and identify appropriate actions
- Advice to Members that options may be limited and potentially expensive given the complicated history issues, ownership and enforcement limitations associated with this site.

The Sub-Committee discussed the situation, with a view to deciding that they wished to undertake further scrutiny work and it was **recommended** that the scope they would like was to examine the issues of this report further following more legal advice as well as more information on the cost and exposure/risks implications to the Council so further action could be decided thereafter.

5 HOUSING TARGETS AND LARGER HOMES

This item was not discussed and would come back to a future meeting in December 2022.

6 HOUSING REPAIRS PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Sub-Committee were presented with a report that provided an update on the new Repair and Voids contract with Mears.

It was explained that the Council's previous contract for delivering the responsive repairs works ended in March 2022 and following an extensive procurement Mears were appointed to a new 10 year contract to deliver the new service. The procurement exercise enabled Officers the opportunity to re-assess the requirements from the service, including improved use of

technology, better end to end journey for our customers, better system interfaces, more stringent KPIs and an improved Social value offer. It was to be noted that there were some staffing issues; however, the Council was working on proactive measures and solutions with Mears.

Queries were made by Members regarding complaints and complaints statistics and it was agreed these would be brought back to the Sub-Committee in a separate report. Officers further explained that the Council were looking to introduce a property MOT approach with Mears. This would involve a proactive approach whereby operatives would visit a property and undertake checks and minor repairs across the whole property, largely in low cost high use items such as window and door handles, kitchen door and drawer adjustments, taps and traps checks with the aim of eliminating the need for future responsive repairs. Initially high and low users would be considered for the repairs service and this approach would allow for the capture of stock condition data to inform future planned programmes of work.

It was requested that the MOT approach be brought back as a separate report to the Sub-Committee as well and in addition Members were asked to consider and submit any specific questions they had ahead of the report return to the Sub-Committee. **Action Point: Garry Knights was to bring two separate reports back to the Sub-Committee; one on complaints and complaint statistics and the other on the MOT approach.**

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

7 HOUSING RESIDENT SAFETY AND COMPLIANCE PERFORMANCE

The Sub-Committee were presented with a report that provided an update on the position of London Borough Havering (LBH) Housing services resident safety and compliance programmes against its statutory and regulatory duties.

It was explained that as agreed by Cabinet on the 16th February 2022 Places OSSC would be provided with a quarterly report on the Housing compliance performance as part of the internal governance approach and that performance was also scrutinised monthly by both the Compliance board and the Asset Management Sub Steering Group.

It was explained that LBH owned and managed circa 9,200 homes and circa 2,500 leasehold properties including circa 10 tower blocks and 1,000 medium and low rise blocks. LBH has a duty to ensure each of these properties are safe and meet all relevant statutory duties around testing and servicing equipment and meet the relevant consumer standards of the Regulator for Social Housing and the requirements of the Building Safety Act monitored by the new Building Safety Regulator Resident Safety around the six big compliance areas. These are considered as: Gas Safety, Electrical Safety, Lift Safety, Water Safety, Fire Safety and Asbestos. Also

alongside the main six areas there is a duty to ensure compliance across a number of other associated areas such as PAT testing, lightening protection testing, Dry Riser testing and Fire alarm testing. As new properties are brought on stream consideration needed to ensure that areas such as sprinkler and communal extract systems were included in compliance programmes.

It was to be noted that given the seriousness of resident safety all KPIs are set at 100% as shown in Appendix 1. After a significant programme of work LBH has been able to complete most programmes and ensure the relevant evidence was in place to support this position.

Furthermore, LBH had a small number of EICRs to complete, these were hard to reach properties and work was being done to resolve these. All action from the Building Safety Act are captured on the Action plan in appendix 2. The process of determining the appropriate future procurement strategy was being worked on across all areas of compliance, to ensure contracts that deliver a high level of performance whilst meeting the upcoming changes in technology. This strategy would go to cabinet ahead of procurement exercises commencing later this year.

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

8 UPDATE REPORT - COST OF LIVING CRISIS THE AFTERMATH OF COVID 19 AND THE IMPACT ON HOUSING DEMAND

The Sub-Committee were presented with a report that summarised what had been identified in previous briefings, on the impact COVID 19 had on homelessness demand. Furthermore, it was outlined that it was imperative the Council continued to develop the service and provide as many pathways to appropriate and suitable accommodation as possible. This would be possible through the following:

1. Increasing Private Sector Lease supply to stem the outflow of properties handed back to the landlord. Improving lease and property maintenance terms, reviewing the rents and providing better quality accommodation for residents.
2. Cabinet sign off to purchase 125 properties through Mercury Land Holdings (MLH) as well as bolster the number of properties sourced in the private rented market.
3. Introduction of 35 units of high complex needs accommodation for people who were sleeping on the streets, released from prison or hospital and had mental health, drug and alcohol as well as other combined complex needs preventing high cost interventions from acute services such as A&E.

It was explained that the war in the Ukraine was not anticipated and therefore there was no preparation for Ukrainian families fleeing their homes seeking refuge in the United Kingdom. The impact of the macro-economic forces caused record inflation and rising interest rates hitting London badly,

meaning that: tenants rents are unaffordable, landlords are exiting the market and the private rented sector market is drying up.

Furthermore, the Afghan Relocation Assistance Programme (ARAP) and Homes 4 Ukraine Scheme (H4UK), with the backdrop of the Home Office, exhausted hotel use across London to accommodate Afghan refugees and other asylum seekers they sort to meet the needs of Ukrainian Refugees with alternative accommodation vehicles. To date Havering Council had pledged to support eight Afghan families accommodating five. Further support was yet to be declared and until it was clear what the proposal for the fair share distribution plans looked like across London for Afghan refugees currently held in hotels and dispersal accommodation.

Homes4Ukraine Havering however, had facilitated the support for 319 fleeing guests through the sponsorship and family visa programme and had since collaborated with other local authorities sharing valuable insights and service infrastructure. However, the pressure was continuing to mount with sponsorships coming to the end of its 6 month plan and relationship breakdowns increasingly prevalent in the family visa scheme. As a result of the scheme the people of Havering had responded admirably to the humanitarian effort and alleviated some of the pressure to secure housing for refugees in the interim. Although there was an inability to move households on into longer term housing would have lasting consequences for children settling into the area. It was also anticipated that many hosts would ask their HfU guests to leave at the end of the initial six months of their commitment which would put additional pressure on homelessness services as the Council had a statutory duty to accommodate them.

The Impact on our MLH Scheme and private rented market was affected by rising inflation and interest rates which have damaged the viability of the Council's MLH scheme and the 125 units proposed could no longer be delivered.

Find your Own, the private rented sector had also taken a dramatic turn with the Council no longer able to deliver the 40 units of accommodation it was securing each month. This number has fallen drastically with landlords asking for premium rents, deposits, rent advances and additional incentive payments.

Therefore the Council was not able to secure private rented accommodation at the previous rates of 40 properties a month through the Find Your Own scheme and this had fallen by almost 60% with expenditure fallen from an all-time high of £118k per month to as low as £26k. This further illustrated the challenges in the market to secure available private rented properties.

Various questions were asked by Members and Officers explained that in terms of the allocation scheme for Council housing, this would be re-evaluated with the new administration and Members were welcome to take part in those conversations.

The Sub-Committee **noted** the significant pressures on Housing and its accommodation resources and were informed of the wider implications of housing and the impact on children's and families.

9 **AOB**

1. Frequency of meetings – would like to see more than quarterly.
2. Topic Groups – budget would allow 2 topic groups.
3. Arrange tour of the Borough to be arranged (waste facilities, libraries, sport centres, housing stock etc.).

It was suggested that frequency of meetings and topic groups are important; however, Members should remember the following guidance:

- Most Councils meet every 6 weeks and recommend how to focus work programme.
- Work effectively to recognise what the issues where what you want out of scrutiny and how to approach it.
- What are the issues, effective planning and then think of the frequency and don't rule out events and working independently outside.
- Prioritisation of issues and how you deliver.

Members agreed to have informal meetings in between the formal ones and liaise amongst themselves. Preplanning on the work programme would be required to give Officers the opportunity to bring reports to future meetings.

Chairman