

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PLACES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE
Appointment Centre Rooms 10 & 11
14 September 2023 (7.00 - 8.50 pm)**

Present:

COUNCILLORS

Conservative Group	David Taylor (Chairman), Ray Best, Jason Frost and Osman Dervish
Havering Residents' Group	David Godwin, Gerry O'Sullivan and Natasha Summers
Labour Group	Matthew Stanton and Mandy Anderson (In place of Katharine Tumilty)
East Havering Residents Group	Brian Eagling

30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received for the absence of Councillors Sue Ospreay and Bryan Vincent.

31 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interests.

32 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reminded members of the actions to be taken in case of an emergency.

33 MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

34 HOUSING REPAIRS AND VOIDS UPDATE

The Sub-Committee was presented with a report on Housing repairs and voids.

It was explained to members by officers that the performance of the service was at the correct level to meet the contractual targets however small and

large voids had not met their targets due to the condition of the properties. Members noted the Council took on over 100 voids at the start of the contract and this had been reduced to just over 50.

Officers discussed the challenges surrounding the housing stock as many houses were built in the early 1940s which are now difficult to manage, however, the Council were insulating external walls to prevent mould whilst aiming for net zero carbon. It was explained to members that a large problem faced with voids is the financial impact on the council of hiring skips to clear out possessions that have been left at the property. In total, the council had 738 void properties across all types within the last year but assurances were made by officers that target would still be aimed for regardless of the amount of voids the Council had.

Officers explained to members that properties were 100% gas compliant which was better than neighbouring boroughs but gas heaters were to be slowly phased out for electric heaters for futureproofing reasons.

The Sub-Committee made no recommendations and noted the report.

35 **GREEN FLAG AWARD - HAVERING'S PARKS**

The Sub-Committee was presented with a report on the Green Flag awards for Havering's parks.

Members received an oral representation from a member of the Friends of Raphael & Lodge Farm Parks group as agreed by the Chairman prior to the meeting.

Officers explained to members that the green flag awards process was done annually. However, the awards could not judge all 16 parks every year so 10 parks were judged one year and the remaining 6 the year after. It was explained that the judging takes place in the summer months and the parks were judged on 24 different criteria across 7 areas. It was also explained that a 'mystery shop' exercise could be carried out which is an unannounced visit however there would be less criteria and comments as opposed to formal judging.

Members were delighted to note the Council had never failed an assessment since 2007, however, noted the concerns raised by the Friends of Parks group representative regarding the irregularity of the grass cutting and the poor sewage and drainage when there are severe weather storms. Officers responded to the concerns raised and assured members that working groups between the Council and volunteer groups were being developed.

Members requested information on the criteria for smaller parks and green spaces to receive the Green Pennant and London in Bloom awards.

The Sub-Committee made no recommendations and noted the report.

36 **STATE OF CHILDREN'S AREA - HAVERING PARKS**

The Sub-Committee was presented with a report on state of children's play areas within Havering Parks.

An oral representation was once again given by a member of the Friends of Raphael & Lodge Farm Parks group.

Officers explained the process of assessing the risk of play areas which involved 3 checks; a basic visual, an operational and an annual independent check. Members noted only skate parks were assessed as high risk due to the nature of the activities within those specific areas. Members also noted that play areas are subject to damage and vandalism, of which some damage can be repaired by in-house Council teams however some damage requires specialist contractors but officers were looking at the feasibility of having the specialist work done in-house. It was highlighted to members that there was a dedicated phone, text and website that the public could contact if they wished to report damage or vandalism including graffiti.

Officers explained that there had been a significant increase in the use of play areas across Havering but acknowledged that there was little new equipment and little improvement to the existing equipment. Members recognised the need of the Council to provide play equipment that was manufactured from more sustainable and natural materials to meet the net zero carbon targets. Council officers described to members that contractors were challenged to design new, innovative and inclusive play equipment with an example of the basket swings given as a good example of inclusive play. Members noted the lack of communication between the Council and Disabled groups within the Borough and asked for officers to look into bridging that gap.

The Sub-Committee made no recommendations and noted the report.

Chairman