

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PLACE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE
Appointment Centre Room 10 & 11, Town Hall, Romford
26 March 2024 (7.00 - 9.40 pm)**

Present:

COUNCILLORS

Conservative Group David Taylor (Chairman), Ray Best and Jason Frost

**Havering Residents'
Group** Gerry O'Sullivan and John Wood

Labour Group Matthew Stanton and Mandy Anderson

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

47 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received for the absence of Councillors Brian Eagling and +Katharine Tumilty. Councillor Mandy Anderson substituted for Councillor Tumilty.

48 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Councillor Jason Frost declared a non-pecuniary interest on the pre decision scrutiny item on Climate Change Action Plan 2024-27.

49 MINUTES

The minutes of the sub-committee meeting held on 14 December 2023 and special meeting of 23 January 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

50 PLANNING ENFORCEMENT REVIEW OF RESOURCES

The Sub-Committee received a report following the recommendation of the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) review of resources for the Enforcement function within planning had been undertaken.

The report detailed that the review had been completed, setting out the current issues within Planning Enforcement and making recommendations in relation to recruitment, enforcement plan, business support, interaction with planners and performance monitoring and performance.

The report informed the sub-committee of the following issues identified:

- Significant backlog of cases: Historically, case levels have been very high, but there has been successful effort over recent years (particularly when fully staffed) to reduce the number of cases on hand. Despite this, the current number of cases on hand (604) exceeds the number of cases received in each of the last two years (469 22/23 and 414 23/Feb 24). At present there are over 300 cases which are over a year old, which is a significant number of the total caseload.
- The number of cases per officer being very high: The number of cases per officer makes it difficult for officers to manage cases in order to respond in a timely manner to new cases received and ultimately to resolve cases (the problem identified by the LGO). Members seeking updates which itself contributes to the officer workload. The consequences of high officer workloads contributed to the backlog of cases.
- Notices served reflects staffing levels: A high number of notices served was not necessarily an indication of a good or efficient service albeit it is currently the only planning enforcement 'performance' indicator that central government monitors. Based on previous statistics, it is considered about 60 notices a year would be expected to be served and that a manageable workload per officer would be in the order of 80.

Members were informed that the specific reasons why the LGO sought a review of the service was that at present the planning enforcement team in the planning service does not have the resources to carry out its functions.

The report detailed the following action plan to address this issue:

Recruitment to vacant Establishment Posts: Recruitment would enable reduction in officer workloads and allow more timely resolution of complaints or the taking of formal action. Recruitment would be dependent on agreement of the Recruitment Panel and ensuring that sufficient budget is available. Timescale: To begin progress from April 2024.

Adoption of Enforcement Plan: An updated enforcement plan has been drafted and will form part of an overall Enforcement Policy for the Planning and Public Protection Directorate for approval this year. Timescale: Policy adopted by December 2024.

Explore Additional Business Support: Explore scope of business support needs across Place, which the Planning and Public Protection Directorate forms part of. Timescale: Ongoing as part of review

Greater Interaction between Enforcement and Planning Officers: Better interaction would result in increased learning and development for officers; prioritisation of retrospective planning applications and making better informed decisions as to whether to invite planning applications to regularise any breach. Timescale: From April 2024

Expand Reporting on Performance to Lead Member and Planning Committees: Currently, only numbers of cases received and closed and notices served is reported to the committees each quarter. It was recommended that in addition, current case load, including number of open cases per officer be included in any reporting so issues of backlog and output can be more easily identified and reported on. Timescale: From April 2024

Following the presentation and discussion the sub-committee **noted** the content of the review and the actions recommended.

51 **CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY**

At the request of Members, the revised Havering Climate Change Action Plan (HCCAP) 2024-27 was presented under the pre-decision scrutiny arrangement.

The report falls under the auspices of the Sub-Committee and form a key decision to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 10 April.

The report outlined impacts and causes of climate change that have been recognised by the council. It was stated that in the report that the Council had developed strategies and goals to address these impacts and mitigate the effects of climate change.

The sub-committee noted that the costs of annually reviewing the Havering Climate Change Action Plan that would be contained in the existing corporate financial provision. Members indicated to receive an update in 6 months' time.

Following presentation and debate the sub-committee made the following comments and recommendations that would be passed to the Cabinet for consideration for inclusion in the action plan.

That the sub-committee support the Approval and adoption of the revised HCCAP 2024-27.

The Sub-Committee also ask that:

- Could Cabinet consider an action around promoting greywater and rainwater harvesting.
- Could Cabinet consider how the plan may incorporate green energy generation.

Chairman