

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE
Council Chamber
2 August 2023 (7.00 - 8.55 pm)**

Present:

COUNCILLORS

Conservative Group	Jason Frost (Chairman), Timothy Ryan (In place of Judith Holt) and Christine Smith
Havering Residents' Group	Laurance Garrard, Jacqueline McArdle, Bryan Vincent and Julie Wilkes
Labour Group	Mandy Anderson, Patricia Brown and Frankie Walker (Vice-Chair)
Also in attendance	David Taylor, Mandy Anderson and Matthew Stanton (Chair and Members of Places OSSC) and Gerry O'Sullivan (Chair of O&S Board)

53 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Lucy Goodfellow and Councillor Judith Holt.

54 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interests.

55 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

56 WENNINGTON FIRE 2022 - SUPPORTING VULNERABLE PERSONS, RECOVERY PROCESS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The Sub-Committee, along with Places Overview & Scrutiny Sub-Committee colleagues, were presented with information following the Wennington wildfires on 19th July 2022.

Before the presentation started, the Sub-Committee noted a letter by Rev'd Peterson, Vicar of Wennington Parish Church who could not attend the meeting.

Officers of the council began by giving their presentation where it was explained to members that the fires experienced were the worst local catastrophe in over 600 years with 18 houses totally destroyed and 1 left inhabitable. 200 residents were displaced which included 100 council staff, all of which were invited to attend 'one stop shops' for help, for example GP consultations. Of the 200 displaced residents there were a large range of disabilities which had all been catered for. It was also noted that a high number of personal documents, for example passports, birth and marriage certificates, deeds for homes, had been destroyed and the Council was working with residents to reobtain them.

A fire recovery board had been established a week after the fire with a high level of communication between the Council and the effected residents. Officers undertook regular walkabouts within the affected community to uphold the communication. The Council collaborated with multiple providers to arranged free gas and electric checks. A full position on the repair and rebuilding of homes could not be given due to some of the affected homeowners not having the correct, or any insurance. A mechanism for donations was agreed and the money was split across all affected residents based on criteria which was deemed largely successful.

It was noted that the Council had suffered a direct cost of around £100,000 but this would not be reimbursed by central government as it was not enough of a cost to meet the criteria which displeased Councillors.

In the aftermath of the fires, the Council alongside volunteer groups searched for lost or displaced pets for residents and helped them collect personal belongings from cars within the affected areas. Members of the Sub-Committee were pleased to hear how helpful the Council had been and commended the local ward Councillors on how they reacted to the situation given the fact they had only just been elected as new Councillors.

After the Council officers gave their presentation, the Sub-Committee welcomed officers from the London Fire Brigade (LFB) who also presented information to the Sub-Committee.

It was explained that on the day of the fires, the LFB received 2469 calls and attended 359 incidents which is a huge increase of the average. The LFB declared the Wennington site a major incident which is extremely rare. The LFB officers described the equipment used to contain and put out the wildfire, which included a hose with pre-prepared holes to create a wall of water to preserve life and buildings. LFB firefighters undergo enhanced wildfire response training and the LFB have introduced wildfire officers, of which Havering have 2, and 30 tactical advisors. Members were pleased to hear learnings had been made by the LFB from fire brigades across Europe.

It was discussed that increased local bin collections and a clamp down on disposable barbeques would hopefully lead to a decrease in fires of the same nature and the LFB continually hold checks of fire hydrants to ensure their database is as up to date as possible. The LFB could not confirm the

cause of the Wennington fires as it had been declared as inconclusive and when questioned on this by members, confirmed that this was due to there being too many theories on the cause after investigations had taken place.

The LFB confirmed that Havering is at 100% staff, 100% of the time but some incidents require Havering to call on Essex and vice versa. Members questioned if foam could be used to tackle fires of this sort but it had been ruled out due to being detrimental to the Environment.

The Sub-Committee noted the presentations and, the Chair Cllr Jason Frost proposed 2 recommendations. Both were seconded by Cllr Tim Ryan and agreed unanimously:

- 1) Request Council Officers explore the option producing a policy to set up an emergency fund or obtain insurance for any future emergencies similar to the one experienced in Wennington.
- 2) Investigate good practice at other London and National Local Authorities and also any other Local Governments overseas.

Chairman