

Public Document Pack

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TOWNS & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE Town Hall, Main Road, Romford 13 February 2014 (7.30 - 8.25 pm)

Present:

Councillors Linda Hawthorn (Chairman), Wendy Brice-Thompson (Vice-Chair), June Alexander, Barry Oddy, Garry Pain, Paul McGeary, Michael Deon Burton and Frederick Thompson

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Osman Dervish and Councillor Linda Trew.

+ Councillor Frederick Thompson substituted for Councillor Dervish.

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

51 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28 November 2013 and the minutes of the Joint (all) Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 23 January 2014 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

52 CABINET REPORT UPDATE - RAINHAM TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SCHEME - OPEN SPACE APPROPRIATION

In accordance to the Council's Continuous Improvement Model, the Committee received an update briefing on the Cabinet report that outlined the appropriation of land for highway purposes in order to construct an extension to Viking Way and facilitate a one-way system in Rainham Village.

In June 2009, Cabinet agreed the Rainham Compass regeneration programme, which included as one of its key improvement projects a traffic management scheme to allow one-way working and short-term parking on Upminster Road South, through the extension of Viking Way.

The proposal detailed the appropriation of 880 square metres of Open Space under the Local Government Act 1972, Section 122 (2A), Appropriation of Land for Highway purposes. The open space was situated at Rainham Recreation Ground and the appropriation was required to enable the extension of Viking Way to Upminster Road South as part of the £1.5m Rainham Traffic Management Scheme.

Following a consultation period of four weeks which ended on 15 July 2011 no objections or representations were received by the Council from local residents or shop keepers. On this basis Cabinet decided to implement the scheme which has since been delivered and is now operational.

The Committee noted the update.

53 PRESENTATION ON PARKING AND GARAGES PROJECTS

At the request of the Committee, Members received a briefing on the parking and garages projects from the Housing Services Manager - Homes & Housing and Project Officer - Parking & Garages.

The briefing informed the Committee that the project was established to focus on areas that affected Housing Revenue Account (HRA) land; in particular (i) access to it (ii) the effects of parking provision from new developments on residents and Homes & Housing Estates / land generally and (iii) maximising garage income.

During the information gathering process, data was collated from Estate wardens, Councillors, residents' suggestions/complaints, PCN data and also from partnership working with Traffic and Parking Control Services.

There were three strands to the approach to the project:

- Generic parking issues,
- Access Licences
- Garage Management

Generic Parking Issues

This involved collating evidence of issues and background information. Prioritising the issues according to severity, complaints/Members' Enquiries, blue badge holders. The project was piloted in the following three locations chosen and measured in addressing issues that were now underway.

- Waterloo
- Kingsbridge Circus
- St Helen's

Access Licences

The project was keen to protect Council's interests and assets whilst preventing easements claimed by prescription.

It identified that historically this had not been not managed effectively following benchmarking with other neighbouring boroughs who reflected a similar picture.

Fees setting which represented costs incurred by the Council to issue licence, chase those not paying licences, clarify what the licence is for and reinforce the benefits residents derive from the Council allowing their access. The project thus recognised that there was the opportunity to increase revenue.

Garage Management Strategy

The Committee was informed that the 52% voids garages in Briar Estate had been reduced following the Briar redevelopment and disposals.

In relation to maximising garage income the project identified best practice in Lambeth Council, where they quoted a voids rate of as low as 2% which they attributed to the following factors:

- Establishing a dedicated internal repairs team
- A small number of officers taking ownership of garage lets
- Refurbishing of 'moth-balled' sites

Going forward

The Committee was informed that the project continues to address parking issues in order of priority. The plan was to issue access licences to all residents who require one and ensure invoicing of all those that should be paying.

The overall aims of the projects were to tackle longstanding parking issues on HRA land and reduce void percentage of garage sites by managing them effectively whilst increasing revenue.

The Committee noted the presentation.

54 PRESENTATION ON THE CURRENT HOUSING BUSINESS PLAN AND THE IMPACT ON THE GOVERNMENT 'S PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE POLICY ON RENT

At the request of the Committee, Members received a briefing from the Head of Homes and Housing on the Government's proposed changes to the policy on rent and its impact on the Council.

The Committee was informed on how the Council currently set rent.

The briefing detailed that the current rent restructuring regime that started in 2002 provided that each property had a target or formula rent based on capital values and local incomes. The current formula was originally designed to bring Council and Housing Association rent levels nearer to each other.

The Committee was informed that under the current formula, the HRA had not yet met up with target rent levels. The Government's new proposal intended to end rent restructuring from 2015/16. This new proposal would therefore be a problem in Havering as the Havering's rent were yet to reach target rent levels.

The Committee noted the following impact on the HRA:

1. That identical properties side by side would have different rents as the Council was now offering new tenancies at the target rent whilst older tenants were catching up.
2. That following the closure of the consultation in December 2013, Havering was seeking an exemption from the new policy, to allow the Council to continue with the old regime as current tenants would never reach target rents on the basis of the restructuring. A response was still awaited from central Government.
3. That if the Council was to move to the new proposed scheme, it could potentially incur a very high loss in revenue.

The Committee noted the presentation.

Chairman