

TOWNS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15

INTRODUCTION

This report is the annual report of the Sub-Committee, summarising the Sub-Committee's activities during its year of operation ended May 2015.

It is planned for this report to stand as a public record of achievement for the year and enable Members and others to have a record of the Committee's activities and performance.

SUB-COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Lawrence Webb (Chairman)
Councillor Linda Hawthorn (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Michael Deon Burton
Councillor Jason Frost
Councillor Jody Ganly
Councillor Steven Kelly
Councillor Barbara Matthews
Councillor Robby Misir
Councillor Frederick Thompson

WORK UNDERTAKEN

During the year under review, the Sub-Committee dealt with the following issues:

Introduction to Overview and Scrutiny – At its July 2014 meeting the sub-committee received a presentation giving an insight into how Overview and Scrutiny worked in Havering. The difference between Executive decision and those made by the Council. That Overview and Scrutiny was the function by which Council decisions, or indeed any actions taken in connection with Council functions, can be reviewed and/or scrutinised. The factors for successful scrutiny Topic Groups were outlined and it was noted that the more tightly and realistically framed that the recommendations are, the more likely they are to be adopted/implemented.

Introduction to service areas within the sub-committee's remit – Members received presentations on the services within the remit of sub-committee. These included all services covered by Culture and Leisure, Regulatory Services, Housing and Community Safety. The Head of Services outlined their respective services objectives and how the services operated in order to meet these objectives.

The Head of Service, Culture & Leisure explained that the services main objectives were to transform lives through participation in, and enjoyment of culture.

The sub-committee was informed that the Corporate Policy & Diversity team provided support to the new administration in developing the Council's priorities and strategic plans for the future. The team's responsibilities also included maintaining the corporate performance framework and developing the 'Corporate Brain' intelligence function. Other services within Corporate Policy and Community Manager Team included the Community Engagement and Energy Strategy Team. The Head of Homes and Housing outlined the service area to the sub-committee. Members were informed that Homes & Housing Services comprised of 256 permanent staff and an additional 40 agency staff. That the service had the responsibility to manage all Council homes that consisted of:

- 9,938 social rented homes
- 2,260 leasehold properties
- Let 616 homes last year
- Spent £31m capital programme

The Head of Regulatory Services introduced the service area to the subcommittee detailing that the operational framework of the Regulatory Services was to carry out statutory based duties and powers. The teams provided an advisory, operational and enforcement function whilst working with a strong legal base to support activities of the respective teams.

At its meeting in September 2014, the Head of Economic Development Services. outlined the services objectives and how the service operated in order to meet these objectives. The sub-committee was informed that the service had a five year target part of which was to deliver Romford 2020 as an increasingly vibrant and prosperous Town Centre.

Work Programme - The sub-committee agreed to set up the following two Topic groups:

1. Social Inclusion in relation to future development to meet the needs of the diverse community
The Group comprised Councillors Alex Donald, Steven Kelly and Linda Hawthorn.

It was later decided not to undertake the scrutiny review on the above subject matter.

2. Landlord Accreditation Scheme
The Group was to be led by Councillor Jason Frost with Councillors Jody Ganly and Linda Hawthorn as members.

The Landlord Accreditation Scheme Topic Group report was to be considered by the sub-committee at the 22 April meeting.

Councillor Guide on Fire Safety - At its meeting in September 2014, the subcommittee received a briefing from the Director of Property Services, Homes & Housing on the briefing information on Councillor Guide on Fire Safety. The subcommittee was informed on the steps that Homes & Housing had taken to ensure safety of council residents in LBH properties.

The sub-committee was informed that the Homes & Housing had developed a Fire Action plan since the release of the findings ensuring a random check of windows in council is carried out.

Housing Capital Programme & Contractor Performance. At the request of the subcommittee, Members received a presentation on that detailed the programme context of the housing capital programme. The Capital Programme 2014 – 15 was in the second and final year of the programme to deliver decent homes from the decent homes grant. The sub-committee was informed that at the completion of the 2014/15 programme, the decent homes grant would result in a level of 97% decency council homes in the borough.

Presentation on the Licensing Strategy At its meeting in October 2014, the subcommittee received a presentation on the Licensing Strategy from the Public Protection, Licensing and Health and Safety Divisional Manager. This presentation provided an opportunity for the sub-committee to be informed on the reshaped Licensing Strategy and the proposed consultation of the Statement of Licensing Policy.

The sub-committee was informed that the decision to develop a strategy originated from the Havering Night Time Economy costs and benefits report in 2010. The draft strategy was consulted and the final strategy was adopted by Full Council on the 26 March 2014.

The sub-committee was informed that the Statement of Licensing Policy was a statement of how the Licensing Authority was going to consider licence applications in the borough. The policy had to be renewed every five years and a new policy would need to be produced next year in order to be in place for January 2016.

The Committee was informed that the new policy would need to be drafted, published and circulated for consultation to all premises, stakeholders, Members and residents of the borough who would like to have some input in developing the draft policy. Following the presentation, Members agreed to form a joint working topic group with members of the Licensing committee to develop the draft policy that would be circulated.

The Committee noted that the Councillors Linda Hawthorn, Jason Frost, Frederick Thompson and Lawrence Webb would be joining selected Members from the Licensing Committee to form a working group.

Presentation on London Enterprise Panel At the request of the Committee, the Head of Economic Development, Culture & Community gave a presentation on the London Enterprise Panel (LEP).

Members gathered that part of the LEP Growth Deal, an initiative “London New Homes Bonus” (NHB) was to fund the Growth Deal. The presentation detailed the following programme that the service identified would provide maximum growth as part of the Growth Deal Project.

- Romford Town Centre
- Supporting retail businesses
- Havering business incubator hub
- Care Havering
- Build Havering
- Renewable energy investment

The sub-committee was informed that the service was looking to agree final allocations for each project area (to new total of £1.369m). Following this, the next action plan was to develop delivery plans for each of the six project areas for a prompt start on 1 April 2015.

The following preparatory works were outlined to the sub-committee:

- Romford Market Review (May 2015).
- Business and landlord engagement in Romford (Jan 2015)
- Recruitment of a Romford Growth Manager (April 2015)
- Market shaping and business development research into the local care and support market (March 2015)
- Number of renewable energy feasibility studies (March 2015)

Council Continuous Improvement Monitoring – Progress of three cabinet reports –
In accordance with the Council’s Continuous Improvement Model the subcommittee received updates on the following reports in January 2015:

In accordance to the Council’s Continuous Improvement Model, the Committee received a presentation update on the Revised Housing Allocation Scheme and Tenancy Strategy.

The Committee was informed that the report that went to Cabinet detailed a revised Allocations Scheme covering the eligibility for, and letting of, council housing in the borough. The revisions take account of the new freedoms and flexibilities afforded local authorities with regard to the letting of council homes brought in by the Localism Act 2011. The revisions had been informed by a thorough and detailed consultation with residents who were likely to be affected and stakeholders both within and outside the Council.

In accordance with the Council’s Continuous Improvement Model, the Committee received a presentation update on the Housing Revenue and Capital Budget.

The Committee was informed that since 2012 the position of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) had been different from previous years because of Self Financing HRAs. The HRA remained a ring-fenced account that was used to manage the Council's own housing stock. The proposed budget enabled the Council to manage the stock to a reasonable standard and to deliver the next phase of the Council's Decent Homes Programme. It further set rents, service charges and other charges for Council tenants for the year 2013/14.

The Committee was taken through some slides that outlined comparisons in income from the Housing Revenue Account in 2013/14 and 2014/15. Expenditure from the Housing Revenue Account 2013/14 and 2014/15 were also detailed.

The Committee was informed of the following issues for the HRA in 2014 – 2015, that were Rents & Service Charges related:

- The rent increase was 5.9%
- Average rents were now £90.80 although these were still the lowest in London
- Rents on empty properties went straight to target rents and this had generated an extra £0.5m this year
- Service charges covered costs

The presentation identified the following area of growth in 2014 – 2015 for the HRA

- Affordable Housing Team
- Mobility and under occupation programme
- Queen Street Villas
- Contribution to the capital programme, and completion in 2014/15

At its meeting in January 2015, the subcommittee received a presentation that updated on the Culture Strategy.

The subcommittee was taken through the Culture Strategy 2012-2014 and the updated on the progress against the Action Plan. The subcommittee was informed that the Culture Strategy was driven by a very simple ambition: "To transform lives through participation in, and enjoyment of culture"

The Strategy was based on the following objectives:

- Objective 1: Health and Wellbeing - Support a high standard of mental, physical and emotional health for all by increasing the number of people taking part in sport and Physical Activity and accessing the natural environment
- Objective 2: Learning and Development - Support learning opportunities for all, by enabling people to take part in new activities, ensuring development pathways are in place and providing access to coaching, officiating, leadership and club development training
- Objective 3: Towns and Communities - Enriching our towns and communities, through investment and engagement in culture, and

delivering a high quality, safe, pleasant, visually interesting landscape and townscape for our residents.

The sub-committee noted that the following progress against the Action Plan from each of the objectives.

- 31 actions had been achieved (65%)
- 13 actions partially achieved (27%)
- 4 actions not achieved (8%), but 1 of these was because the action was no longer required.

Corporate Performance Reports 2014/2015 In accordance with the Council's Continuous Improvement model the subcommittee received a quarterly report that set out the Council's Corporate Performance Indicators.

At its meeting in September 2014 the sub-committee received details of service performance information for 2013/14 Quarter 4 and 2013/14 Annual reports and on October 2014 the Quarter 1 2014/15 report. The report provided Members with specific performance indicators that related to the work area of the subcommittee.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks:

None – narrative report only.

Legal implications and risks:

None – narrative report only.

Human Resources implications and risks:

None – narrative report only.

Equalities implications and risks:

Whilst the work of the Committee can impact on all members of the community, there are no implications arising from this specific report which are a narrative of the Committee's work over the past year.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Minutes of the meetings of Towns and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee 2014/15.