

Towns and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee Summary of Work Undertaken 2016/17

INTRODUCTION

This report is the annual report of the Sub-Committee, summarising the Sub-Committee's activities during its year of operation ended May 2017.

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 June Alexander
Councillor Michael Deon Burton
Councillor Jody Ganly
Councillor Steven Kelly
Councillor Robby Misir
Councillor Carol Smith
Councillor Frederick Thompson

During the year under review, the sub-committee met on four occasions and dealt with the following issues:

1. Volunteer Expansion Programme – Library Services

The Sub-Committee received an update on the Library Service. It was noted that with the support of Members, all libraries had remained open, although opening hours had to be reduced.

As part of the recent Libraries restructure, which included the reduction in hours, the Library Service embarked on a partnership model involving staff and volunteers working alongside each other to a much greater degree than they had previously.

Libraries had an excellent history of working with members of the community and it now had approximately 300 signed up volunteers.

The roles volunteers covered were mainly as reading buddies, summer reading challenge (SRC) and ICT support. Volunteers would offer between one or two hours at a time and for SRC in the summer months.

The Sub-Committee noted that the aim of the new model was to increase the roles that volunteers were able to provide support with. This in turn would support libraries to remain open and for existing services and activities to continue to be provided by either staff or volunteers. There were 12 different task roles for volunteers.

Following an earlier recruitment campaign, the service had recruited an additional 120 volunteers from the community and a further 50 volunteers undergoing checks and training.

The Sub-Committee was informed that many of the volunteers were retired members of the community who also had other commitments and activities that they pursued; it was often difficult to encourage volunteers to sign up for more than one session per week of about two hours.

The Sub-Committee noted that another part of the restructure programme was for volunteers to undertake the Housebound Service (HBS). The new model entailed that the service would be provided by volunteers; including the choosing of books and delivering to customers' homes and returning books to the library. It was noted that the arrangement would require the biggest commitment as often customers do not see many people throughout the day or week.

The Sub-Committee was informed that the service had developed guidance and procedures for a Community Managed Library. It was envisaged that established community organisations or groups of volunteers would form Friends of Groups to open libraries beyond their core hours to provide a basic level of service and activity to the community.

So far, only one organisation had indicated an interest in such a service.

The Sub-Committee noted that a volunteer was able to outline a preference of which library they preferred to be engaged.

The Sub-Committee **NOTED** the position.

2. Update on Friends of the Parks

At the a request of the Sub-Committee, a report on Friends of Parks groups who volunteer and work in partnership with the Public Realm service to assist with the improvement and development of public spaces was outlined.

It was mentioned that there were currently 18 Friends of Parks groups across the borough; nine of the groups had achieved official Friends Group status. These

included relatively new ones at Hall Lane Mini Golf Course and Upminster Hall Playing Field.

The Sub-Committee noted that the official Friend's status was a voluntary application that a group could achieve if the criteria were met and in return the Council would provide the group with additional support.

The report outlined that the work of a well-organised volunteer group could be extremely beneficial to both the volunteers and the park in which they work. Volunteers acquired new skills, met new people and gained a sense of achievement and ownership of the park. The park itself benefited through the work the group completed which may include practical tasks, receiving funding for improvement work, or holding events to increase public awareness and enjoyment of the park.

Since the first group was established in Havering around 2002 there were now many volunteer groups in existence working in the parks in Havering. Each group was different in the way it had been formed and the work it carried out, but they all are effective and make a real difference.

The Sub-Committee noted that many of the groups had been active in their parks and open spaces, working with the Parks department to help clear unwanted vegetation, remove rubbish, paint railings and raising money for capital works. Some groups periodically organised fun-days and other such events to help promote their sites.

A survey of all the groups was carried out in 2016 and the service identified that there were 174 active members of friends groups.

The Sub-Committee **NOTED** the report.

3. Houses in Multiple Occupation

The Sub-Committee received a presentation on progress in tackling the issues presented by Houses in Multiple Occupation. All such premises of 3 storey or over were licensed. Additionally the Council had introduced Article 4 Directions under planning.

The next step was to seek approval for borough wide additional licensing plus selective licensing of up to 20% of the Borough's Private Rented Sector housing on a 'worst first' basis (subject to public consultation).

The Sub-Committee noted originally it was intended to target the three worse areas Gooshays, Heaton and Brooklands wards, but it was now proposed to target specific roads. A report was submitted to Cabinet in November 2016 before going out to consultation. The intention was to implement the policy by August 2017.

The Sub-Committee **NOTED** the position.

4. Update on 2 metre high front walls and appeal decision

At request of Council, the Sub-Committee reviewed the issue of a two metre front wall which had been erected at the front of a property in the borough to consider any action that could be taken as a consequence. The Sub-Committee was informed that following the decision to refuse a lawful use certificate the owner of the premises had lodged an appeal. The inspector appointed to hear the appeal had upheld the council's position.

The Sub-Committee noted that all attempt to open negotiation with the owners to reach an equitable solution to date had proved impossible as the owners had not engaged.

The Sub-Committee indicated to officers that a deadline should be set for the owners to engage, and once this passed to proceed with enforcement action that required the reduction of the wall to no more than 1 metre in height.

5. Cabinet Report updates

In accordance with the Council's Continuous Improvement Model, the Sub-Committee received presentation updates on the following Cabinet reports. Following the officers update, the Sub-Committee decided not to take the individual items any further:

- **Rainham Compass**
- **Article 4**
- **Recommendations relating to the consultation on Youth service proposals**
- **Housing Revenue Account Development Programme**
- **Establishment of Council owned Housing Company to deliver market rent and market sale home**
- **Havering Local Plan**
- **Socialbuy**
- **Attestation of Parks Protection Officers**
- **Literacy Strategy for Havering**

6. Topic Group Update

The Sub-Committee currently had a Topic Group running and another about to commence scrutiny:

- **Housing Repairs Topic Group**
The Chairman has asked for interested Members to indicate participation of the review group to undertake a forensic look at Housing Repair.
- **Green Belt Topic Group**
The aim of the Topic Group was to scrutinise and better understand the process involved in Green Belt land designation within the Local Plan system. The Group had undertaken a tour of the designated green belt land across the borough.

The Group was recently provided with a briefing note that gave an update on the approach to the Green Belt Study that was being undertaken as part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan.

- **Anti-Social Behaviour in Council Tenancy Topic Group**
The Topic Group completed its review and submitted a report to the Sub-Committee.

The Group was opportune to participate in the review of the Tenancy Agreement for council tenants.

The Sub-Committee had agreed that the following recommendation of the Topic Group be submitted to Cabinet:

- The Topic Group supported the Housing Services and Public Protection operating a joint service dealing with statutory noise nuisance consistently. This would be via a shared Nuisance Information Pack advising residents of the new procedure. There were various legal remedies that could be used such as Section 80 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Crime & Policing Act 2015; additionally, the Housing Service could also use Tenancy Terms & Conditions to deal with some issues relating to noise nuisance.
- It was also recommended that a Policy and Procedure be produced and implemented defining the new joint service. The document would demonstrate how the Council was dealing with noise nuisance in a consistent and as far as was possible tenure neutral manner for all residents.

The Topic Group had agreed that in regular communication with all tenants there would be a notice added highlighting any evictions for ASB and a gentle reminder of tenants own obligations.'

The Sub-Committee were particularly keen that every effort be made to communicate to tenants the actions which the Council have taken to deal with ASB in Council Tenancies.

The Sub-Committee agreed that the report and recommendations be submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

7. Any other Business

At a recent meeting of the Individuals Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee, it was suggested that a joint meeting between Individuals and Towns & Communities Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committees be arranged in order to scrutinise the issues of homelessness strategies in Havering and the services available from hostels locally.

A meeting date was to be organised with the two Chairmen and appropriate officers.

Performance Indicators

At its meeting in July 2016, the Sub-Committee received a report of the Performance Indicators within its remit for Quarter 3 and 4 of 2015/16. The report detailed Corporate Performance Indicators under the remit of the Sub-Committee. These related to Regulatory Services, Policy and Performance, Culture & Leisure, Housing, and Economic Development. It was noted that each indicator was given a red, amber or green (RAG) rating.

The Sub-Committee noted that the following indicators ended the year with a red or amber RAG status:

- The percentage of major applications processed within 13 weeks and minor applications processed within 8 weeks were below target and lower than during both the previous quarters and the previous year.
- The third indicator related to the percentage of appeals allowed against refusal of planning permission.

Quarter 1

The Sub-Committee noted the areas that required improvements under the Clean goal. The planning application process; to ensure planning applications were processed in the required times. These included the promotion of the pre-application advice offer, quick turn-round of the validation process when application was received, neighbour notification, officer visit/report and better timing of the committee date. The Sub-Committee was informed that in the case of major planning applications, better pre-planning was now taking place.

It was also noted that there were proposals being considered regarding outsourcing of the initial part of the planning application process that would streamline the process with the potential to improve overall performance.

The Sub-Committee was made aware of the improvement areas required under the Proud goal that related to the number of potential start-up businesses accessing advice via the Business Start-up Programme that was below target. This was attributed to a gap in service provision whilst a new contractor was procured. The provider started in May 2016 and was confident that performance would improve throughout the year.

Quarter 2

At its meeting in October 2016, the Sub-Committee noted that eleven of the indicators had a RAG status of Green, 2 a RAG status of Amber and just 1 a RAG status of Red.

The red indicator related to the Percentage of other applications processed within 8 weeks which had a target of 80%, but the service achieved 66%. The 2 amber indicators related to the percentage of major applications processed within 13 weeks and the percentage of minor applications processed within 8 weeks.

Quarter 3

At its meeting in January 2017, the Sub-Committee received the Quarter 3 Performance Indicators that detailed eleven of the indicators (78.6%) had a RAG status of Green while three indicators (21.4%) had a RAG status of Red.

The Sub-Committee noted that the red indicators related to the percentage of major applications processed within 13 weeks. The Major applications often required a legal agreement which could take the application beyond the target 13 week period. Various activities were now taking place to process planning applications in the required times. These included:

- increased promotion of Planning Performance Agreements for significant major applications
- promotion of the pre-application advice offer
- quick turn-round of the validation process when application is received

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:

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

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Minutes of meetings of Towns and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee