

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
TOWNS & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SUB- COMMITTEE
Committee Room 2 - Town Hall
20 March 2018 (7.30 - 8.05 pm)**

Present:

Councillors Lawrence Webb (Chairman), Linda Hawthorn (Vice-Chair), Robby Misir and June Alexander

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Steven Kelly, Frederick Thompson, Jody Ganly, Michael Deon Burton and Carol Smith

48 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No interest was declared at the meeting.

49 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

50 QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER THREE

The Sub-Committee received a presentation that outlined the five corporate performance indicators for Quarter 3 that related to the Towns & Communities.

The following areas for improvement were detailed in the report:

- The number of Stage 1 complaints closed within the target timescale for all non-ASB Housing complaints was below target. For the year to date, 319 out of 404 (79%) of Stage 1 complaints were closed within 15 days against a target of 95%. The Acting Assistant Director of Housing was aware of the fall in performance and had instigated a new, structured approach to achieving targets, with milestones and warnings incorporated into the process.
- There were five Stage 2 complaints that were not closed within the target timescale during Quarter 3 resulting in the year to date outturn being below target.

- The overall outturn took into account the performance of the contractors used for maintenance and gas repairs to the end of Quarter 3. Gas contractor performance was at 98.42% (within target). A total of 4,694 gas repairs were completed within the target timescale out of 4,769 repairs completed.
- Maintenance contractor performance was being monitored through regular contract management meetings as well as separate monthly service improvement meetings.

The report informed the Sub-Committee that an improvement plan had been implemented and a series of corrective actions instigated by the contractor, which included an allocation of extra resources to manage the number of out of target orders; scrutinising employee productivity, and reviewing supply chain management to ensure timely completions.

The Sub-Committee noted the contents of the report and presentation.

51 REVIEW OF CABINET REPORT - HOUSING SCHEME FOR THE BUY-BACK OF EX COUNCIL PROPERTIES

The Sub-Committee received an update report in accordance with the Council's Continuous Improvement Model, on the decision taken at Cabinet on 23 September 2015 to instigate a scheme for the repurchase of ex Council properties sold through the Right to Buy (RTB) programme.

The report informed that the scheme was designed to maximise the opportunity to use retained right to buy receipts, in conjunction with Housing Revenue Account (HRA) resources to increase the available rented stock.

The Sub-Committee noted that the scheme was only used to acquire ex Council dwellings. The type of accommodation was driven by the information from activity associated with the Housing Register.

The acquisition of ex Council properties offered a number of benefits, as part of a wider programme to deliver increases in housing units that included:

- Supporting the sustainability of the HRA through replenishment of stock and replacement of rental income lost through RTB sales.
- Management and maintenance arrangements that were already in place for such properties and in many instances the properties were leasehold with the council as freeholder.

- It allowed for quicker application of RTB receipts to increase stock holdings when compared to new build schemes, which supports the maximum application of RTB receipts within allowable timescales.

The Sub-Committee also noted the acquisition would assist in mitigating the general fund pressures on temporary housing accommodation by increasing the supply of affordable housing.

- The dwellings were normally offered at a reduction to the local market due to their location.

The report detailed that the scheme was launched with an initial mail shot to relevant properties, which produced some interest but was limited in number. In order to maintain the scheme, officers monitored the housing market to identify any ex council stock being sold in order to make contact. The Council was well placed as a prospective purchaser as it was effectively a cash buyer.

The Sub-Committee noted that with the commencement of an extensive consultation around the regeneration programme have resulted in greater interest and success.

The report noted that since the scheme commenced the Council have acquired 61 properties, mainly flats and maisonettes, primarily two and three bedroom in flatted arrangements. It was stated that these properties were in the highest need pressure associated with housing demand.

The report indicated that the average costs of each unit acquired was about £277,000.00 and the council have utilised five million pounds of RTB receipts.

The Sub-Committee was informed that the scheme would continue to provide additional housing units either as replacement units or short life accommodation on estates identified for regeneration.

The Sub-Committee noted the update report.

52 REVIEW OF CABINET REPORT - ESTATE IMPROVEMENTS - HIGHFIELD ROAD

In accordance with the Council's Continuous Improvement Model, the Sub-Committee received an update on the regeneration on the Highfield Road estate, Collier Row.

The Sub-Committee noted that the scheme approved by Cabinet in January 2015 was designed to bring forward improvements to the various blocks associated with the estate and regeneration of the area.

It was stated that the housing estate in Collier Row consisted of 339 units of accommodation. A steering group of residents and council officers were involved at all stages of the process and the partnership between the council, residents and contractors was established and key aspects of concern was highlighted and used to design the strategy of physical and community improvements.

The report indicated that following an extensive survey of the estate and discussions with residents, a programme of communal improvements was drawn up which gave the estate a facelift, an improved appearance and better environment.

The proposed works included:

- External decorations to the blocks
- Concrete and balcony repairs and renewal of screens, where required
- Decoration of block entrances and stairs
- Upgrade to the door entry systems
- Improvements to the car parking and paths
- Landscaping and planting
- External wall insulation to non-traditional houses
- Improvements to the bin stores and waste disposal areas
- Improvements to the boundary walls and fencing

The Sub-Committee noted that during the course of the consultation with residents a detailed re-assessment was undertaken of any building fabric related issue. This was at the request of residents so that whilst contractors were on site the opportunity could be taken to:

- If applicable, bring forward any future planned works
- Minimise disruption to residents
- Achieve better value for money based on economy of scale.

The report indicated that residents were informed that only allocated resources within the overall capital programme could be utilised. The allocated resources within the overall programme were utilised to carry out the following works:

- Refurbishment of windows in communal areas
- Upgrading of block and dwelling entrance doors and door entry systems
- Provision of refuse enclosures
- Replacement of soffits and gutters
- Repairs to main roofs
- Replacement of aging flat roofing.

The report informed that the original budget approved was for £1.853 million which was supplemented by £600 thousand of the previously approved

budget for works to non-traditional houses. The properties affected by these works were already included within the overall borough wide programme. The total cost of works associated with the scheme was £2.465 million. The Sub-Committee was informed that there had been an overspend of about £12 thousand on the main budget which was absorbed within the overall capital programme.

The Sub-Committee noted that all works were completed successfully and the external appearance of the estate and aspects associated with environmental management greatly improved. The physical work had encouraged local residents to continue with community engagement activities, helping to reduce vandalism, anti-social behaviour and improved the lettability of properties.

The Sub-Committee was informed that with regards to the proposals to rename blocks and the estate, the proposal was the subject of considerable consultation with local residents. It was proposed to re-name the blocks on the estate, and the estate itself after countries which are part of the British Overseas Territories, dominions or where the Queen is Head of State, as part of the improved community cohesion but this was not supported by residents and as a consequence the proposals were not taken forward.

The update report concluded that the work on the estate and the formation of the community group had made a significant impact on the identity and appearance of the estate. The improvement programme provided a focus for engaging with the residents, and engendered a feeling of pride in the community, the estate and the borough.

The Sub-Committee commended the delivery of the programme of works in partnership with residents.

The Sub-Committee noted the update report with no further action proposed.

Chairman

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