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## **MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD Havering Town Hall, Main Road, Romford 15 September 2020 (8.00 - 9.40 pm)**

**Present:**

### **COUNCILLORS**

<b>Conservative Group</b>	Ray Best, Philippa Crowder, Judith Holt, Sally Miller, Nisha Patel, Christine Smith, Maggie Themistocli and Michael White (Vice-Chair)
<b>Residents' Group</b>	Ray Morgon and Barry Mugglestone
<b>Upminster &amp; Cranham Residents' Group'</b>	Linda Hawthorn and Christopher Wilkins
<b>Independent Residents' Group</b>	Natasha Summers and Graham Williamson
<b>Labour Group</b>	
<b>North Havering Residents' Group</b>	Darren Wise (Chairman)

Councillors Robert Benham and Joshua Chapman were also present.

### Officers present

Robert South, Director of Children's Services  
Ian Elliott, Programme Manager, Children's Services  
Patrick Odling-Smee, Director of Housing Services  
Alfreda Boateng, Housing Solutions Manager  
Denise Reece, Housing Solutions Rough Sleeping Lead Officer  
Sandy Hamberger, Assistant Director of Policy, Performance and Community  
Abdus Choudhury, Deputy Director of Legal Services  
Andrew Beesley, Head of Democratic Services  
Anthony Clements, Principal Democratic Services Officer  
Richard Cursons, Democratic Services Officer

### **12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Keith Darvill.

### **13 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

There were no disclosures of interest.

**14     PROTOCOL ON THE OPERATION OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD MEETINGS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS**

The protocol on the operation of Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings during the Covid-19 Pandemic Restrictions was noted by the Board.

**15     PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY PROTOCOL**

The Pre-Decision Scrutiny Protocol was noted by the Board.

**16     PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF A CABINET REPORT - HAVERING CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY**

The Cabinet Member addressed the Board and stated that Corporate Parenting was, in his view, one of the most important duties of elected Members. There were in excess of 400 Looked After Children in Havering and the Corporate Parenting Strategy would commission safeguarding training for Members which it was hoped all Group Leaders would support.

The strategy would be reviewed annually and a full review would be undertaken in 2023. Officers added that they had sought to keep the strategy brief and understandable.

The training available to Members would use real world examples to give an in depth understanding of the Corporate Parenting responsibility on Councillors. A former OFSTED inspector would be introduced to give an external input to much of the Councillor training. Training would be available to all Members with enhanced and bespoke training available for members of the Corporate Parenting Panel and the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

Progress with the Corporate Parenting Strategy could be considered as part of the work of the Children & Learning Overview & Scrutiny Sub-Committee with topic groups formed as appropriate. Members felt that as many Looked After Children as possible should be involved in the strategy.

Officers clarified that efforts were made to place a child with family members wherever possible and that foster care was only used as a last resort. The figure of more than 400 Looked After Children also included care leavers over the age of 18 although the overall numbers in the Havering care system had reduced. Children were however presenting with greater complexity, often due to their coming into care at an older age (12-13 years or greater) or at a moment of crisis. The number of care leavers had grown by 100% to more than 170 and the Council continued to have duties to this group up to the age of 25.

Performance indicators used were now consistent with the whole of London. It was noted that it was also important to track children who had not needed to go into care as a result of the Council's input. Benchmarking would be

undertaken across London Local Authorities as well as with Havering's statistical neighbours. The Council's would provide monitoring of the benchmarking data which could be shared with Members.

It was also confirmed that all Havering foster placements were regulated even though the sector was not fully regulated at a national level.

The Board AGREED unanimously that the following comments be passed back to the Cabinet Member as part of its pre-decision scrutiny of this item:

- **The importance of training in the Corporate Parenting role and in associated issues being made available to all Members and that Group Leaders encourage as many Members as possible to attend. Enhanced training should also be made available to Members in roles related to Corporate Parenting such as members of the Children and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee and the Corporate Parenting Panel.**
- **A wish to see as much involvement as possible of Looked After Children themselves in the strategy and its associated groups etc. This should not be limited to solely the Corporate Parenting Panel.**
- **The need for a sufficiently robust and consistent set of performance indicators to allow progress against objectives in the strategy to be reported on and scrutinised.**

## **17 PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF A CABINET REPORT - PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS & ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2020 - 2025**

The Cabinet Member addressed the Board and advised that he planned to build on the ambition to end long term rough sleeping in the borough by 2022. There was also a wish to reduce the numbers of people living in temporary accommodation and to develop ways to support people who did become homeless. The strategy also sought to provide good value, integrated services that deliver excellent customer care.

An integrated outreach team would be provided to assist rough sleepers. This would provide a safe environment, healthcare and pathway management to rough sleepers. Work would also be undertaken to improve the hospital discharge process and to develop a homelessness charter for local businesses. A new, high quality family welcome and assessment centre would be opened for the homeless under the strategy.

The strategy would be funded principally via grant funding and officers accepted that there would be severe financial implications for the Council if this funding was not to be continued by central government. Officers also confirmed that a great deal of work had been undertaken to establish if

homeless people had local connections with Havering. Work would also be undertaken with a homeless person's 'home' borough if required and Members agreed it was important that there was a clear policy to deal with this situation.

A total of 12 people had been identified in March as rough sleeping in Havering and a total of 35 homeless had been accommodated at the start of lockdown, in a hotel in Ilford. All but three of these had now been found accommodation. Homeless accommodation provided during the Covid-19 period had been paid for by the Government but this cost was normally covered via the benefits system. Benefits claims were still able to be submitted, even if a person did not have a permanent address. Staff sought to engage with the homeless and offer care and support but it often took time to build a relationship.

The level of budget available for this work depended on Government funding although officers felt that there was only a minimal risk to funding for this work as it was a Government priority. Staffing levels were an issue for all Councils although efforts were ongoing to build the homelessness team including using apprenticeships, training etc. There were currently sufficient staff numbers in place to implement the strategy. Any evictions that would restart were likely to be for anti-social behaviour rather than rent arrears. The eviction notice period had also been extended for six months.

It was confirmed that the service now had powers to use prevention measures to stop people becoming homeless. Work was therefore put in place with clients before an eviction may have taken place. An action plan would be developed with a client to try to prevent homelessness. Similar work was also undertaken with organisations representing ex-service personnel who were given priority for housing allocation schemes.

It was clarified that the Council did not have a statutory duty to support groups such as 'couch surfers' but advice and support would be provided. Members also felt it was important that the Equalities Impact Assessment for the proposals was fully considered.

The Board AGREED unanimously that the following comments be passed back to the Cabinet Member as part of its pre-decision scrutiny of this item:

- **To flag the risk to the strategy if Central Government funding was not to be continued.**
- **The need for a clear policy for homeless people in Havering who come from other boroughs.**
- **The importance of having sufficient staff capacity to ensure the successful operation of the strategy.**
- **That the Equalities Impact Assessment of the strategy be fully taken into account**

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**Chairman**

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