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## **MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TOWNS & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SUB- COMMITTEE VIRTUAL MEETING 22 September 2020 (7.30 - 9.45 pm)**

### **Present:**

Councillors Keith Darvill, Paul Middleton, Gerry O'Sullivan, Christopher Wilkins, Robby Misir (Vice-Chair), Timothy Ryan, Carol Smith and Ray Best (Chairman)

Councillor Viddy Persaud was also present for the meeting

### **17 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

Councillor Christopher Wilkins declared a pecuniary interest in agenda item 8 and absented himself from the meeting during discussion of the item.

### **18 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2020 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

### **19 QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The report before Members set out the Council's performance against indicators within the remit of the Towns and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Quarter 1 (April to June 2020).

Due to COVID-19, performance was not reported according to the original reporting schedule in order to prioritise service delivery. Performance for Quarter 4 2019/20 would be reported with Quarter 1 2020/21 to provide the opportunity to understand performance in this period.

Officers advised that it was important to note that though service delivery was returning to business as usual, there would be still be an impact on performance due to COVID-19.

Q4 19/20 Performance ratings were available for 10 of the 11 indicators. 3 were Red (off target), 1 was Amber and 6 were Green (on target)

Q1 20/21 Performance ratings were available for 10 of the 11 indicators. 2 were Red (off target), 1 was Amber and 7 were Green (on target)

Appended to the report was the data for 10 of the 11 indicators.

Officers advised that there had been no housing complaints in Q1 as the complaints reporting procedure had been suspended. The complaints procedure had re-started at the end of August.

Rent arrears for Council owned properties had gone up during the Q1 this had mainly been due to a very large number of tenants claiming Universal Credit for the first time and the five week delay for tenants to start receiving payments.

Void properties turnaround had improved vastly. The Council had stopped the letting of properties at the beginning of April as per Government guidance.

Officers advised that there was a new lettings plan in place. Normally the Council would let approximately 5 or 6 properties a week. The plan would up the number to 10 per week which would free up some space in the temporary accommodation sector as it was expected that a number of evictions from privately rented properties would be happening over the coming weeks.

In response to a question relating to empty properties on the Waterloo Road estate, officers responded that people had been moved in to the properties but had now been moved out as demolition was due to commence in October.

At present the Council had access to approximately 20 properties in the private sector and approximately 50 units of Council owned stock.

Officers advised that during the lockdown the Government had changed the local housing allowance levels to a higher level so tenants could get their full rent paid by the housing element of Universal Credit. All new Universal Credit claimants had the option of having their housing element payable direct to their landlord.

Members also considered the performance indicators for major planning applications, minor planning applications and other planning applications

Members **noted** the contents of the report and appendix

## 20 **HOUSING REPAIRS & GAS SAFETY**

Members considered a report which sought to provide the Sub-Committee with an update on the provision of responsive repairs and carrying out gas safety checks to Council owned and managed housing stock. Following on from the initial report from July 2019.

With regards to responsive repairs the current contract with Breyer expired in March 2019 and approval was obtained to extend the contract for a further two years until March 2021 to enable re-procurement.

Through a more active contract management approach, focussing on the partnering approach which was originally envisaged for the contract, the Council had been able to see continued improvement in the repairs service.

The repairs completed right first time had continued to exceed target and demonstrated the commitment to improving the customer experience.

During the Covid=19 period the service moved to an essential repairs service only, ensuring all emergency health & safety works were completed and essential services were maintained to all residents

The contractors implemented all of the relevant safe working and PPE requirements and worked with residents to ensure the safety of tenants and the operatives was maintained throughout the lockdown period. Where residents expressed concerns, the service either worked with them to undertake works in a manner in which they were comfortable or rescheduled the works.

In relation to gas servicing the Council's contractors K&T and Stonegrove had continued to perform at high levels and the service had introduced some more proactive approaches to engaging with residents to help obtain access to properties.

Due to the health & safety nature of gas servicing the service continued to deliver the full programme throughout the lockdown period. K&T implemented the full safe working protocols going over and above to ensure residents safety.

The service was able to maintain extremely high levels of compliance and had very few residents who expressed reluctance for operatives to enter their homes to undertake the service.

Where residents were concerned the service worked with them, explaining exactly what would take place, the cleaning regimes, the social distancing regimes and the timescales involved and took into account any special concerns/request they had.

In response to a question relating to compliance policies, officers advised that the policies were currently going through the governance procedure and once completed would be placed on the website so residents and Members could view them.

The Sub-Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

**21 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT SCHEME TWO TO  
EXPAND ADDITIONAL LICENSING FOR HOUSING IN MULTIPLE  
OCCUPATION AND INTRODUCE SELECTIVE LICENSING**

The report before Members detailed the proposed introduction and operation of a selective private landlord licensing scheme in Romford Town and Brooklands wards and an additional, house in multiple occupation (HMO) scheme in Cranham, Emerson Park, Hacton, Hylands, St Andrews and Upminster based on the Private Rented Sector (PRS)

Following a period of public consultation and the evidence collated, which both supported the case for the introduction of a selective licensing scheme in these two wards due to poor housing conditions and anti-social behaviour.

There was also a significant proportion of smaller HMO's in the proposed area which were being poorly managed which led to one or more particular problems, either for those occupying the HMO's or for members of the public e.g. poor housing conditions and/or anti-social behaviour (ASB).

Licensing reduced overcrowding in HMOs by setting a limit on the number of tenants permitted. Landlords were provided with a set of conditions their properties should meet in return accommodation was managed better as a result of specific licence conditions and landlords would become more accountable as named licence holders.

Targeted enforcement action with financial penalties for non-compliance to drive out criminal landlords which would in turn create a 'more level playing field' for well behaved landlords and would make the market fairer for all

Since March 2018 the service had carried out 31 Multi-agency operations focusing on unlicensed properties, Issued 105 legal notices requiring improvements related to poor conditions, Issued 204 financial penalties for failing to licence and breaches in conditions and sent 2,500 letters to owners of unlicensed properties warning them to licence their property.

The report also detailed the fees payable for licences, Licences were issued a five year period.

Cabinet would consider the representations received in response to the consultation on the selective licensing and additional HMO licensing scheme

The report was welcomed by all Members and several Members had points that they wished to be considered within the report.

It was agreed that Members email officers direct explaining their comments which would be included in the final draft that would be considered by Cabinet in October.

Members **noted** the report and the appendices attached.

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**Chairman**

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