



Towns and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee Annual Report 2021/2022

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

Members,

This year again has been difficult for all our residents including those in council-run properties, social care and all other public services.

I would firstly like to thank all of the staff at the Council who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to maintain the high standards our residents are used to. They have done a superb job in ensuring that all residents in our Borough, including the most vulnerable have had access to homes throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Ray Best

Chairman of Towns & Communities Overview & Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

REMIT AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

Towns and Communities deals with planning and building control, the town centre strategy, licensing, housing retained services, parks, housing allocation, leisure, arts and culture.

REVIEW OF ACTIVITY

This report is the annual report of the Sub-Committee, summarising the Sub-Committee's activities during its year of operation ended March 2022.

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 Ray Best (Chairman)

Councillor Robby Misir (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Keith Darvill
Councillor Tony Durdin
Councillor Paul Middleton
Councillor Gerry O'Sullivan
Councillor Timothy Ryan
Councillor Carol Smith
Councillor Christopher Wilkins

During the year under review, the sub-committee met on 4 occasions and dealt with the following issues:

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Throughout the year the Sub-Committee continued to receive the Quarterly Performance Reports that illustrated the growing demands on Council services and the context that the performance levels set out in the reports had been achieved within.

HOUSING WHITE PAPER

The Sub-Committee was updated on the Housing White Paper. The report set out the Government's 'Charter for Social Housing Residents' (White Paper) in November 2020. There were seven key priorities for providers of social housing and new powers for the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) and Housing Ombudsman, to hold social landlords to account.

They were listed as follows:

- To be safe in your home.
- To know how your landlord is performing.
- To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly.
- To be treated with respect.
- To have your voice heard by your landlord.
- To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in.
- To be supported to take your first step to ownership.

It was explained that the safety bill legislation was nearing completion; however, it was still being debated. The housing consumer relations bill was another one to watch and these bills were particularly important for governance and scrutiny.

It was noted that there were more complaints from housing association residents generally regarding anti-social behaviour because their residents were not monitored in the same way as Council tenants. Therefore, all social landlords needed to address this issue across the board. It was explained that housing association tenants didn't have access to Councillors. However, with this new legislation housing associations would be pushed to publish performance.

The cost of compliance would be around £18m initially.

HOUSING DECARBONISATION TARGET

The Sub-Committee was updated on the Housing Decarbonisation Target. The report set out to provide an update on the decarbonisation activity and forward plan for the HRA housing stock.

It was explained that in order to significantly reduce the Council's carbon footprint and in turn minimise the climate, economic and social impacts which would flow from increased temperatures, the Council aimed to make direct changes in its HRA Housing stock.

The assessment identified spending of £23k per property which would achieve an 87% carbon reduction. Officers explained this would include insulation and windows, and was classified as a fabric first approach. A total spend of £276m would be required across the entire stock and when costs were removed for Decent Homes type programmes (already in the business plan) there would be a need to identify circa £200m.

The remaining 13% carbon reduction would require significant additional investment in deep retrofitting properties; however, it was felt that the decarbonisation of the electrical grid and improving technology would close the gap.

A full road map for each property to ensure that a clear programme of activities to achieve the 2030 and 2040 targets and ensure the HRA business plan includes sufficient monies would be developed. This would ensure that the most appropriate investment decisions were made across the portfolio.

External funding streams were also being investigated to see if there could be a reduction on the impact on the HRA. There was a bid submitted for £1.0m through the Social Housing Decarbonising Fund (SHDF) which would allow a number of the poorest performing properties to be brought up to a C Band and a delivery vehicle has been planned should the bid be successful.

The Council would find out whether the bid for funds was successful in February 2022. There was a total of £80m available but lots of competition. However, regardless of whether the Council were successful they would continue works as planned because there would be further future bids available. Future updates on all bidding would be provided at future meetings on a 6 monthly basis period and added onto the work programme.

It was explained that if they did everything that was on the plan now it would cost £200m. However, since the plan would be continuous, developing and evolving over time with new technologies. etc., officers believed costs would possibly decrease with a wait and see strategy to maximise value for money.

REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

The Sub-Committee was updated on the repairs and maintenance service. The report provided an update on the procurement of the new contract.

It was explained that LBH had a legislative duty to undertake repairs and maintenance works to its properties owned and managed by the HRA. Breyer Group who were awarded the contract several years ago have experienced significant challenges throughout the term. Mainly due to poor specification, contract management and poor performance by the contractor.

However, through a proactive approach by both Breyer the Council officers, LBH performance had significantly improved and has now been operating at or around the required KPIs in regards to repairs completed on time and those completed “right first time”. There have been more issues over the last few months for various reasons and officers are managing Breyer closely during the full demobilisation of the contract. As a contingency, the Council has a number of smaller contractors that can be relied on should there be a need in the coming months.

There had been a complete undertaking of a fully compliant procurement exercise to secure a new contractor on a 10 year contract that would provide a better continuity of service and allow for ongoing improvement and investment in service delivery. Mears have been appointed and a significant amount of time was invested in understanding customer’s views and preferences for the new service and this has considerably improved the specification and KPIs within the new contract. Gas services would remain the same and all properties had been serviced and were safe.

It was further explained that Mears and Council staff (call handlers) would be working out of the same site and this integrated model approach would enable better service through communication and technology. An incentive would be given to the contractor for setting targets and KPIs to allow extra benefits to them. An online portal would also be available to residents to book and review appointments.

The Sub-Committee received another update on the performance for the Council’s contractor Mears at a subsequent meeting and it was explained that that a number of subject specific meetings took place each week and included overall service delivery, IT and Communications. These meetings further helped clarify the scope and extent of the service and removed the ambiguities. A full activity tracker was provided and there had been significant works undertaken by the teams from Havering and Mears. Full commencement of full service was on target for Monday 4th April. The model they were currently working towards was for jobs to be done in less than 10 days and appointments would be offered on Saturday mornings along with the weekday 8am-8pm times.

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

None.