



TOWNS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT, 2010/11

SUMMARY

This report is the annual report of the Committee, summarising the Committee's activities during the past Council year.

It is planned for this report to stand as a public record of achievement for the year and enable members and others to note the Committee's performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council note the 2010/11 Annual Report of the Towns and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

REPORT DETAIL

During the year under review, the Committee met on seven occasions and dealt with the following issues:

1. OVERVIEW OF CULTURE AND LEISURE SERVICES

1.1 At its first meeting in July 2010, the Committee sought to develop an understanding of what services the Council offered to residents.

Members received a presentation from the Council's Head of Culture and Leisure Services. The presentation covered the following areas

- Library Services
- Council owned leisure centres
- Community Halls
- Health & sports development
- Arts
- Heritage

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- Parks and open spaces
- 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games
- Community engagement

- 1.2 As a result of the presentation, the Committee was able to consider areas for its work programme and it was decided to continue the work of the Living Ambitions topic group.

2. OLYMPICS/PARALYMPICS 2012 – THE EFFECT ON HAVERING

At its October meeting, the Committee received a presentation from the Council's Head of Culture & Leisure Services outlining the impact that the Olympics and Paralympics would have on the borough.

- 2.2 Members were advised that there was an annual budget of £50,000 for planning for the events but no additional posts had been created. Approximately twenty companies based in Havering had been awarded contracts for the supply of materials and help in building the main Olympic Park and associated venues.

3. HOMES IN HAVERING – TENANCY AGREEMENT REVIEW

Members of the Committee received a presentation, from the Council's Housing Needs & Strategy Manager and Homes in Havering's Head of Housing Services, detailing a review of tenancy agreements.

Members were advised that the last review of tenancy agreements had taken place nine years ago and part of the recent audit inspection had recommended that a review take place to ensure that the management of tenancies remained robust.

Homes in Havering (HiH) was undertaking the review as part of the existing terms of the Management Agreement with the Council.

It was proposed that following agreement that the Council's Cabinet would be asked to consider the approval of amendments to the tenancy agreement at its meeting in December 2010 and that subject to consideration of any further comments by Cabinet the new tenancy agreement would come into effect from 1 April 2011.

4. PETITION RE PROPOSED DEMOLITION OF SEVEN SHOP UNITS IN HILLDENE SHOPPING CENTRE

- 4.1 In October, members of the Committee considered a petition that had been submitted to the Council.

- 4.2 The petition dealt with the proposal to demolish seven shop units in the Hilldene shopping centre.

The demolition of the shop units was to make way for a new library in Harold Hill.

The Council was taking steps to relocate the seven shop-keepers in the shopping centre in comparable or in some cases better trading locations.

Officers advised that given the significant benefits of the new library proposal it was recommended that the Council continued to develop this important proposal, as such, the Committee decided to take no further action on the petition.

5. REVIEW OF “FRIENDS OF GROUPS” FOR PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

- 5.1 In December the Committee received a briefing from the Parks & Open Spaces Manager. They were advised that there were currently 21 Friends Groups in Havering of whom 10 had achieved Official Friends status. The presentation outlined the objective of the Official Friends Programme which was to improve the way in which the Council work with the Friends groups across Havering.

Details of the type of works undertaken by Friends groups was provided and members were invited to attend the next Parks Open Forum.

6. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

- 6.1 The Committee considered a report setting out the Council's responsibilities to assist people in the private sector, who need assistance to enable them to live in their own homes.

The provision of the Disabled Facility Grant (DFG) was governed under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. The range of works and adaptations were closely prescribed under the Act and subsequent amendments made under statutory instrument.

The award was mandatory provided that the relevant criteria had been met and was available for residents, including home owners, tenants and their families who were or could be considered disabled to make their home more suitable for independent living. The Committee were informed that there was a £30,000 ceiling on the level of mandatory grant.

- 6.2 Details of the budget for 2010/11 were provided together with an indication that an extra £400,000 was required to meet a shortfall in this year.

The officer provided details of the steps taken to improve the financial situation and the case for continued Disabled Facilities Grant support. The Committee were advised that a report had been submitted to the Cabinet that day to deal with possible solutions to the financial shortfall.

7. OVERVIEW OF PLANNING ENFORCEMENT IN HAVERING

- 7.1 In March the Committee received a presentation from the Council's Head of Development & Building Control. The presentation outlined the steps that the Council took to ensure planning breaches were dealt with.
- 7.2 Members noted that The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 defined "development" that required planning permission. Section 172 of the act read "where there has been a breach of planning control then the authority, if they consider it **expedient** to do so having regard to the provisions of the development plan and to any other material considerations, may issue a notice requiring the breach to be remedied." Thus the Council did not always consider it appropriate to issue a notice
- 7.3 Following the presentation Members agreed to the creation of a topic group to scrutinise planning enforcement in the borough. The topic group would focus on the reasons why enforcement action could be a lengthy process and deal with what the public perceived as delays in taking action.

8. BUDGET SCRUTINY

- 8.1 In both August 2010 and January 2011, the Committee met jointly with the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees in order to scrutinise aspects of the Council's proposed budget for the coming year. The meetings, chaired by the Chairman of the Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee, scrutinised several issues of relevance to this Committee. These included the sharing of ICT with London Borough of Newham and potential savings in shared procurement via the Council's participation in the East London Shared Services consortium.

9. OMBUDSMAN'S ANNUAL REVIEW

- 9.1 At its meeting in September, the Committee received the Ombudsman's Annual Review regarding complaints received about the Council in 2009-10. The Annual Review provided a summary of the complaints dealt with

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about the Council and included comments on the Council's performance and complaint handling arrangements.

- 9.2 The Committee noted that the Ombudsman received 114 complaints against the Council; advice was given in 28 cases and 32 were considered to be premature because the Council had not been given a reasonable opportunity to deal with them.
- 9.3 The Committee further noted that the Ombudsman made decisions on 59 complaints against the Council. Ten were outside the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman to investigate and another ten were closed for lack of grounds.

10. LIVING AMBITIONS TOPIC GROUP

- 10.1 Throughout the year the topic group has made several visits to activities and programmes provided throughout the borough.
- 10.2 Visits have included
- Havering Music School
 - Abbs Cross Music School
 - Library reading group
 - Havering sports centres
- 10.3 The Chairman of the Committee has also made several visits to sports centres and parks throughout the borough to check on the facilities offered and possible areas of improvement

11. INCLUSIVE AND ACTIVE 2

- 11.1 The Committee received a presentation from the Council's Health and Sports Development Co-ordinator - detailing the Inclusive and Active 2 project.
- 11.2 Inclusive and Active 2 was co-owned by the Greater London Authority, NHS London and Interactive and was supported by key regional and national agencies.
- 11.3 The scheme worked strategically to influence policy makers, opinion shapers and providers to achieve an increase in participation levels. The scheme supported both providers and strategy setters to ensure more opportunities existed for disabled people to participate in sport and physical activity and also supported those who directly worked with disabled people to advocate being active as a viable lifestyle choice.

12 LICENSING ENFORCEMENT

- 12.1 The Committee received a presentation from a member of the Council's Licensing team outlining licensing enforcement throughout the Borough.
- 12.2 The work of the team was to oversee all licensing activities of the Council which included both the Licensing Act 2003 and the Gambling Act 2005. The team also dealt with animal licensing which included boarding, breeding, pet shops, dangerous wild animals and zoos. Members were advised that the team also dealt with special treatment licences, street trading, poisons, Part B premises and the administration of the stray dogs collection contract.