

## **Places Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee Annual Report 2024/2025**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This report is the annual report of the Sub-Committee, summarising the Sub-Committee's activities during its year of operation ended May 2025.

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.

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The areas scrutinised by the Committee are:

- Housing & Accommodation Services
- Land & Property Services
- Planning
- Building Control
- Business Services
- Inward Investment
- Asset Management
- Property Services
- Facilities Management
- Sports
- Leisure
- Arts
- Music
- Libraries
- Heritage
- Parks & Open Space
- Highways
- Parking & Traffic
- Waste & Recycling
- Climate Change
- Transport & Infrastructure
- Public Protection & Licensing
- Emergency Planning
- Technical Services

## **SUB-COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

Councillor David Taylor (Chairman)  
Councillor Matt Stanton (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Osman Dervish  
Councillor Ray Best  
Councillor Phililppa Crowder  
Councillor Laurance Garrard  
Councillor Robby Misir  
Councillor John Wood  
Vacant

## **REVIEW OF ACTIVITY**

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

### **VERBAL UPDATE - BANK HOLIDAY REFUSE COLLECTION**

The Sub-Committee received a verbal presentation from the Director of Environment regarding the waste collection issues on the 6th of May Bank holiday. Apologies were extended for the disruption caused to the service and inconvenience to residents.

The Sub-Committee was informed that Urbaser, the waste management company, had been taken over by FCC. It was stated while some changes were anticipated, many of the senior staff from Urbaser remained in place.

The Director of Environment informed Members that discussions with FCC regarding contractual adjustments, such as parent company guarantees, were ongoing. Officers assured the sub-committee of its continued partnership with FCC.

It was mentioned that previously, under Serco, a catch-up service operated, with collections delayed by a day after bank holidays but under the current contract, collections occur on bank holiday Mondays (except during Christmas/New Year) to simplify the process for residents. Communications were consistently issued to inform residents of this arrangement.

The Sub-Committee was informed that a misalignment in terms and conditions for waste collection staff on certain bank holidays led to the disruption. During the transition from Serco to Urbaser (now FCC), due diligence regarding the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE) was conducted by the contractor. However, the terms for bank holiday collections had not been finalised.

It was stated that previous bank holiday collections were completed successfully, ongoing consultations about contractual changes during the Easter period were not fully resolved by the May Bank holiday. This led to some staff, with union support, opposing the new terms, which resulted in insufficient resources on 6th May 2024.

The Director of Environment stated that the Council was informed of the issue at short notice, with efforts been made to minimise resident inconvenience by updating communications through the call centre, website and other channels. The information that was sent to residents informed that collections would be delayed by one day due to the shortage of resources for the 6th May rounds.

The Sub-Committee was informed that the Service worked proactively with its communications team to address the situation and ensure residents were informed about the adjusted schedule. The situation underscored the importance of finalising contractual agreements during contractor transitions to prevent similar issues in the future.

In response to a Member enquiry, on resident communication and disruption. It was stated that messages were sent through the call centre and other channels to inform residents of the disruption to waste collection services. It was acknowledged that the disruption was unexpected and caused inconvenience, especially as the service was relatively new.

With regards performance management and monitoring, Members were informed that a comprehensive performance and client management system was in place to monitor service delivery. Issues during the disruption period were escalated to the UK Operations Director for Urbaser (now FCC) and discussed in regular client management meetings.

It was stated that these meetings addressed service failures, mitigation strategies, and contractual provisions for rectifying issues, including performance deductions and monetary penalties. Since the May incident, no further issues were reported. Regular checks with the Urbaser management team confirmed the resolution of previous issues.

Members noted backup plans, including agency staff and additional resources, were in place to address any future challenges, such as staff sickness.

Waste collection service performance was measured by missed collections per 100,000. The service reported a figure of 38 per 100,000, equating to a success rate of over 99%.

It was noted that this performance was significantly better than that of the previous contractor, Serco, which had a missed collection rate more than double the current figure during its latter stages. Despite the improvements, it was noted that missed collections were still being reported by residents. Efforts were ongoing with Urbaser to reduce these incidents.

The Sub-Committee was reassured that performance indicators across all services under the integrated contract, including waste collection, street cleansing, litter removal, and bin emptying, were being actively monitored and discussed.

A question was raised regarding the performance rate of 99% achieved by Urbaser compared to the earlier performance of Serco during their active contract period (prior to extensions). Officers did not have the exact data on Serco's performance during that time but agreed to forward the information to the committee for comparison.

It was noted that Urbaser was still in the early stages of the contract, with a period of mobilisation during which performance indicators were being developed. Officers offered to provide performance data for Serco's last two years alongside Urbaser's current performance for a more detailed comparison.

A request was made for data on graffiti removal, including how much graffiti was being removed across the borough and the responsiveness of the service. Officers offered to return at a later date with comprehensive key performance indicator (KPI) data once the reporting suite had been fully developed.

A Member requested for statistics on missed collections, such as by bin type (e.g. recycling bins, green bins at specific locations like New Green and Park Rise). Officers confirmed that it would be possible to provide this breakdown and agreed to supply the committee with the latest information.

Officers assured the Sub-Committee of their willingness to return with detailed performance reports on various aspects of the integrated contract, including waste collection, graffiti removal, and other services.

## **HOUSING RESIDENT SAFETY AND COMPLIANCE PERFORMANCE UPDATE**

The Sub-Committee received an update report on the position of Housing Services Resident Safety and Compliance programmes against its statutory and regulatory duties under the Building Safety Act 2022 from the Assistant Director of Housing Property Services.

The report provided an update on the Services current activities on the approximately 9,400 homes and 2,500 leasehold properties, including around 15 tower blocks and over 1,000 medium- and low-rise blocks. housing programs that the Council owns and manages.

The Assistant Director of Housing Property Services explained that as a landlord, LBH fulfilled its statutory duty to ensure that each of the properties was safe and met all relevant statutory requirements. This included regular testing and servicing of equipment, adhering to consumer standards set by the regulator for social housing, and compliance with the Building Safety Act as mandated by the building safety regulator.

Members noted that appendix one of the report detailed the compliance features, both old and new. The first heading related to Fire Safety. It was noted that there were no "switch on" notices applications received, which was positive, and there were also no outstanding logs. The Services remained in regular contact regarding the overall safety of everything.

The report also noted that fire risk assessments were conducted on a risk-based cycle, typically between one to three years, and at present, 100% of the properties had an updated assessment. The report also highlighted that dry riser testing was up to date, with 100% of the necessary certifications in place.

In terms of fire alarm testing, as of last month, 95.45% of alarms were tested in July. The only block outstanding at that time was the recently completed New Green and Path Rise, which had since been added to the schedule, and the fire alarms were tested there on the 6th of August, bringing the figure back up to 100%. This update confirmed that all was in good order.

The Sub-Committee was informed that the Service needed to register some of its buildings with the Building and Safety Regulator due to their high-risk status. Fifteen buildings, defined as being over seven stories or at least 18 meters high, were registered with the building safety regulator. Additionally, in May the Building and Safety Regulator building safety regulator requested building safety case files for five of these buildings. The Council successfully submitted these files to the Building and Safety Regulator and were awaiting the outcome of these submissions.

Communal door checks had been undertaken in 13 out of the 15 high-rise buildings. The two remaining buildings, Park Rise and another unnamed building, were not yet occupied, and door checks were scheduled to commence once they were occupied.

For flat entrance doors and general needs, door checks were completed in 244 properties, but 298 properties encountered multiple no-access issues, indicating that access had been attempted three times or more. This issue was now being addressed as part of the KMT contract, which was also part of the Landlord's gas safety record and inspections. The KMT contract allowed for simultaneous door and gas safety inspections, which was intended to improve access rates.

Members noted that the new contract began this month, and 467 properties were booked for checks in August. It was hoped that the remaining checks would be completed by the end of this financial year.

In terms of fire safety inspections for shelters and hostel schemes, the Service achieved 100% compliance. In response to new legislation introduced following the Greenfield inquiry, specifically the Fire Safety Regulations 2022, it was stated that the service implemented visual monitoring regimes. These included quarterly inspections of communal doors and manual checks of flat entrance doors.

The service also adopted a new tool that enabled us to create 3D models of each high-rise building, allowing us to identify and document service isolation points and other critical information effectively. The tool was shared with the building safety regulator as part of the building safety case files. Additionally, the Service regularly shared information concerning any mandatory occurrences as part of our engagement strategy, which extended access across relevant sectors and to residents. The tool functioned similarly to Google Maps, allowing users to navigate around the building in a 3D environment, which was beneficial.

The report detailed that the Service was ahead in terms of gas compliance and safety. All gas compliance must undergo annual inspections, resulting in the issuance of a landlord gas safety certificate. As of July, the service had conducted 8,573 gas safety checks. Only one of the 8,574 properties remained unchecked due to the resident being hospitalised. The remaining inspection was carried out on the 6th of August, bringing the total compliance in gas safety to 100%.

Gas carburising, which involves properties without individual boilers, also achieved 100% compliance. This included tests on parts of the work within the property and a visual check on appliances such as cookers and other gas supplies. In terms of communal gas servicing, compliance was also at 100%, which was positive.

On electrical components and safety, social rented properties require an Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) every 10 years, the Service adopted the practice of every 5 years for its social rented properties to align with best practices. It was stated that 9,309 were completed out of 9,321 EICR inspections, which equates to 99.87% compliance. The 12 remaining inspections were due to access issues, with one excess injunction being granted by the courts.

The service completed 835 inspections, including 135 emergency lighting tests. These tests also achieved 100% compliance, with 800 of the 835 inspections completed this month.

The report indicated that with regards Protection planning and portable appliance testing (PAT), 100% compliance was maintained.

Members were informed on the Lift compliance and safety, monthly inspections that were conducted along with planned maintenance regimes. New certificates were provided by the council's Insurers to ensure compliance with Lift maintenance. It was stated monthly maintenance inspections, annual servicing, and annual insurance certification inspections all achieved 100% compliance.

Legionella compliance, achieved 100% compliance in both monthly and bi-annual monitoring with all required risk assessments and monitoring carried out.

The report indicated that the Service dedicated a section in the compliance report for properties rented from private landlords and occupied by Havering residents. Officers explained that the service maintained a duty of care to residents and adopted a more rigorous approach to monitoring and addressing instances where landlords failed to provide requested information.

The Assistant Director stated that significant progress had been made in aligning systems to efficiently collect and monitor data. The figures presented in the report allowed the service to track ongoing improvements whilst also reflecting compliance.

The Sub-Committee was informed that the service was in the process of reviewing relevant key documents to ensure that all compliance areas were supported by contracts that delivered high performance and accommodated emerging technological advancements.

The Sub-Committee was informed that following recently completed the renewal of the painting maintenance contract, the focus would now shift to renewing the electrical services contract, along with other compliance-related contracts such as asbestos surveying, removal, fire risk assessments, fire safety works, all types of general services, and lift maintenance.

In response to a Member question, on the split between MEARS and K&T regarding the ease of access and the conjunction with gas safety measures. The query was raised about why K&T was not assigned to handle all inspections, especially

considering the significant split and the mixed tenure of developments involving some Leasehold and some general needs. It was suggested that the decision might relate to capacity and the desire to reflect different tenure mixes. There was also mention of a trial with painting to try and improve the figures, and the need to compare two different rooms to see how each contractor was performing, which would be evaluated in the future.

In terms of door checks within communal areas, questions were raised about the compliance rate of doors following inspections and the timescales to bring those not in compliance up to standard. It was stated that if a door, particularly a leasehold door, was found non-compliant, the cost of replacement was being covered by the council rather than charging the leaseholder, to ensure safety. This approach was explained as part of maintaining a secure environment.

In response to a question on timescale for bringing non-compliant doors, such as a front door in a block, into compliance. Officers responded that whether noted during a fire assessment check, reported by Housing or Estate staff, or brought to attention by a resident, the aim was to address all such issues by the end of the financial year.

In addition, it was stated that Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) inspections were being conducted, with around four thousand of these inspections planned. These inspections were designed to pick up any issues like non-compliant doors, which would then be referred to the maintenance team and prioritized accordingly.

A question was raised regarding the response times for priority one repairs, particularly concerning the replacement of doors. It was stated that the target was to replace such doors within a week, although this was dependent on gaining access to the premises.

Further discussion revolved around the completion of compliance rates following inspections. It was suggested that it would be useful to know how many of these repairs met the target of one-week post-inspection. This information was deemed essential for future planning and adjustments.

Concerning the testing of emergency lighting, it was explained that the main test involved ensuring the lighting was operational and that the backup batteries functioned correctly during power outages.

In response to a question about wayfinding signage and its compliance, especially in relation to fire risk assessments. It was noted that signs, particularly those indicating fire exits, were sometimes vandalized or removed. The importance of maintaining compliance with wayfinding signage was emphasised, and it was confirmed that this was part of the Building Safety case file, with a program in place to address any deficiencies.

Members discussed the issue how residents were informed about building safety, including evacuation strategies and how to make complaints. Officers mentioned that a specific software, Twin Edit, was trialled which allowed residents to access information about their specific building. Additionally, booklets had been distributed to residents in high-risk buildings, providing key information and directing them to further resources online and from the London Fire Brigade. Roadshows had also been

conducted to engage directly with residents, allowing them to ask questions and express concerns about fire safety.

Further deliberation on Lift compliance. It was clarified that not all lifts go into what is known as firefighting mode when the fire alarm is activated. This mode involves the lifts descending to the ground floor and then being operable by the Fire Service. A lift replacement programme was underway, partly to ensure that more lifts could support this functionality, including ensuring a separate electrical supply for such lifts. It was noted that the testing regime for lifts with firefighting capabilities differed from others, and further technical details could be provided separately if needed.

Members discussed fire risk assessments, particularly regarding fire paths and removable bollards used for access in some developments. The frequency of the testing and compliance rates, such as whether they could be unlocked or securely placed into the ground, were questioned. It was acknowledged that specific statistics and compliance rates needed to be clarified and would be addressed in the future.

In reply to a question regarding the 15 high-risk buildings that had completed all necessary case filings, which was positive news. Inquiries were made about whether these buildings would meet current standards if they underwent 3DWS certification and what remediation work was still required. It was explained that while the buildings were generally safe according to the building safety case files, some areas needed improvement through a planned action programme. Officers stated the programme was designed to bring the buildings up to current standards, considering that building regulations might have been different at the time of their construction. Temporary evacuation measures were also in place as part of these safety efforts.

The Sub-Committee noted the update report with assurances that efforts were ongoing to actively engage with residents, especially those in high-risk buildings, to enhance their safety and compliance awareness.

## **WATERLOO AND QUEEN STREET, PHASE , BLOCK 1 AND 2 UPDATE**

The Director Housing & Property and the Senior Regeneration Manager provided the Sub-committee an update on the evolving changes to the Part B (Fire Safety) of the Building Regulations and the implications for the Waterloo and Queens Street regeneration sites.

It was noted that the Bridge Close development scheme had recently been amended to include a dual-staircase design, which required substantial redesign. The planning approval process would likely need to restart which would cause further delays.

The complexity of the Bridge Close site, including the potential need for a Planning Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) was highlighted as a contributing factor to the delays.

The Sub-committee was informed that despite losing some units in the redesign, the scheme remained viable from a regeneration perspective, aligning with anticipated regulatory changes.



The evolving building regulations and lack of detailed guidance under BS 9991 were discussed as challenges. The Service had proactively redesigned schemes like Bridge Close to include dual staircases in anticipation of these changes.

The Senior Regeneration Manager explained that while Bridge Close was in a good position due to early adjustments, other schemes with existing single-staircase designs might face more significant delays and redesign requirements.

The Sub-Committee agreed to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting due to the nature of the business and the potential disclosure of exempt information under Paragraph 3 of part 1 of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

## **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE COUNCIL AND HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS**

It was reported that the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 introduced new consumer standards, enabling the council to inspect Housing Associations and require Performance Improvement Plans.

It was stated that Housing Associations account for a third of social housing in the borough. For low cost rentals, the general needs stock consisted of 8153 LARP units and 4243 PRP units. The average weekly net rent for LARP units in Havering was £112.78. For PRP units, it was £133.39.

It was reported that the council has nomination arrangements with all Housing Associations in the borough. There was a large degree of cooperation between the council and Housing Associations. Some of the larger Housing Associations load their properties onto LBH's LC system, to be advertised online. Other Housing Associations send property details to LBH, to be advertised online. There have been meetings between Housing Association nomination staff and LBH staff to make sure the system operates effectively.

It was reported that there is significant cooperation regarding housing development, especially concerning section 106 agreements. When a private developer or Housing Association is developing housing, they have to provide a certain proportion as affordable housing. A recent problem is the inability of developers to find a suitable housing association to purchase the social housing on new developments. It was stated that the council has some regeneration arrangements with Housing Associations, for example with Notting Hill Genesis in Rainham and Beam Park, which was an effective joint venture.

It was reported that there is significant cooperation regarding housing management, and particularly cooperation in the maintenance of properties. The council's Housing Strategy and Partnership Service leads the development of this working relationship. Regular meetings and forms have been held to discuss nominations and letting arrangements. Nonetheless, Havering's relationship with Housing Associations is less developed than those of other boroughs (which have joint repair services, for example).

It was stated that every Housing Association has their own structure for resident engagement, which helps them to manage their stock well. Some have tenants on their board.

It was reported that there are a lot of arrangements between the council and Housing Associations regarding anti-social behaviour. The council can issue Community Behaviour Orders and Noise Abatement Notices. The larger Housing Associations in the borough have attended forums with the council, to discuss common approaches to anti-social behaviour and tenancy management.

Attention was drawn to appendix 1, which contains detailed figures on the numbers of Housing Association Stock. Anchor Hanover Group operated in 245 other local authorities, London and Quadrant Housing trust operated in 139 other local authorities, and The Guinness Partnership Limited operated in 133 other local authorities. The number of other local authorities Housing Associations operate in has changed their relationship with each local authority in the last 15 years. In Havering, there was now no local Housing Association based here.

In response to a question about how and why Havering's relationship with Housing Associations is different to other boroughs, it was stated that local authorities used to have Housing Association Liaison Officers to manage the relationship through HALO meetings. In boroughs where that was effective, there was usually a core of Housing Associations active in the borough (that core could be as few as 20 Housing Associations). As associations have amalgamated, the connections they have with local authorities has diminished, their head office has become more distant, and their ability to send someone to a meeting with the local authority has changed. Whereas Housing Associations used to have a statutory duty to cooperate with local authorities to help homeless households, that incentive for cooperation no longer exists. Local authorities have also become less involved in the regulation of housing associations.

A question was asked regarding the 4000 Housing Association properties that the council uses, and how many of them are occupied by Havering residents or residents from out of the borough. The response was that all of these are let through the council's allocation scheme, and 95 to 100% of tenants in these properties were local.

In response to a question about the council's nomination rights on new lets and re-lets, and the possibility of residents from outside the borough moving in, it was stated that in practice, most housing associations don't have a list. If you're a Housing Association tenant and want to move, you have nowhere to put your name on a list, so you put your name on the council's list. It was suggested that this is cheaper for Housing Associations, because maintaining a list is expensive. Some boroughs subsequently charge Housing Associations for nominations.

In response to a question about Swan Housing Association Limited's 290 general needs bed spaces (compared to zero for all other housing associations in Havering), it was suspected that this is simply a data issue, and only Swan submitted data for this column of the table.

A question was asked about potential other arrangements to manage housing, given the difficulty of finding suitable Housing Associations to purchase social housing. It

was responded that Housing Associations have shifted their focus from new builds to maintenance of their stock. This has meant Housing Associations are more cautious about where they invest in new stock, focussing on building themselves rather than purchasing from private developers. Some associations have been stuck with stock bought from private developers that turned out to be lower quality than they expected. So they are being more cautious in the market, and in which developers they work with. There has also been a size issue: in Havering, there are lots of medium size developments which produce 5-10 affordable units. These are not attractive to associations, due to issues of management and price. This presents challenges for the council. The council has tried to bring Housing Associations and private developers together so that affordable housing comes through. One challenge of the management model is that section 106 agreements require developers to deliver affordable housing in perpetuity, and it can be difficult to show housing will continue to be affordable if it's on a fixed-term management agreement.

A question was asked regarding the possibility of Housing Associations being reluctant to take up large numbers of social homes built by developers, and the possibility that the council will end up receiving small section 106 payments instead. It was responded that commuted sums are often asked for by developers. Big developers want to reduce affordable housing, and local authorities want to increase it, so there are complex negotiations. It was observed that section 106 needs reviewing.

In response to a question about what the council needs to get Housing Associations to develop social housing, instead of the council receiving commuted sums, it was responded that the council can influence the type of social housing built when the council has had some control and influence over the design (eg. at Quarles, where the quality of stock turned out well).

A question was asked regarding the council's degree of quality control over the property advertisements on its website, given that internal photos and room sizes are often omitted, and potential residents are sometimes denied the opportunity to view the property in person. The response was that the council does lots of work with Housing Associations on their adverts, but our current allocations policy doesn't help Housing Associations to sell their properties: people aren't shown enough information about the property online, and there are insufficient opportunities to view the property in person. It was reported that the council is moving to a system where people can bid for as many properties as they like, and go to see them. It was hoped that this will expose the hard-to-lets, and landlords will have to work harder to let properties (by including better information on adverts, and showing off their flats when people see them).

A question was asked regarding how communication and collaboration can be measured. The response was that this isn't measured scientifically, and is more of a feeling. The council didn't have a single officer responsible for managing the relationship with Housing Associations. Lots of officers do their bit.

In response to a question about the council's ability to acquire an association's properties if that association got into financial difficulty, it was stated that the council can, in theory, acquire properties from a variety of sources, but only if it is affordable

within the HRA business plan. There are reasons to be cautious about buying stock that another landlord is selling.

In response to a question about the legislative levers the council has to make Housing Associations help to improve the quality of life of residents in Housing Association stock, it was stated that the council has very few levers to pull. Section 106 agreements relate to who can live in a property, so the council has some influence here. There were some other arrangements for stock transfer agreements. The council has some control on the planning side, to influence what Housing Associations can do with properties and the sale of properties. Some Housing Associations ask the council to lift restrictions so they can sell properties. It was reported that the council has some influence with the Housing Ombudsman, but this is very limited. The council has no influence on the regulator.

A question was asked about whether the council needs the resources to appoint an officer to be responsible for managing the relationship with Housing Associations. It was responded that this may be useful, but the proposal could be financially difficult because it would be a general fund position. In particular, the council doesn't have the capacity in the Strategic Performance Service to negotiate effectively on section 106 agreements. It was stated that the council would benefit from negotiating effectively and early enough.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration was asked whether the council is bringing larger Housing Associations into conversations around the local plan refresh, including in Beam Park. The Cabinet Member responded that most of the new developments will be owned and controlled by the council. He added that the local plan is not yet advanced enough to discuss Housing Associations. He would prefer for the council to have greater control because, for example, Housing Associations don't put enough money into managing anti-social behaviour.

It was stated that councillors should be respectful of Housing Association colleagues, given some shortcomings in the council's Housing department in the past.

A question was asked about why the council might prefer to receive commuted sums. In response, it was stated that the council would always prefer to get the property, and a commuted sum would be a reluctant compromise. The council only has a small number of commuted sums.

**It was agreed that the Planning Team will find out how many commuted sums were received in the last few years, and the reasons for them.**

Regarding the possible need for a specific resource to manage relationships with Housing Associations, it was responded that the level of development in the borough is low. This business is not currently sufficient to justify a resource for managing the relationship with Housing Associations.

## **UPDATE ON CURRENT POSITION IN RELATION TO EMERGENCY TEMPORARY ACCOMODATION IN HAVERING AND THE LACK OF SUPPLY**

It was stated that Havering Council's use of hotel and nightly charged

accommodation has created enormous pressure on the Council's housing general fund budget. The average cost of emergency temporary accommodation had risen since 2021/22, from £73 per night to £81 per night. The increase in the average cost is not because of the use of hotels, but because of the use of a nightly charged property. This is an ordinary home in Havering or another part of London.

It was shown that the council has 230 households in hotel and nightly charged accommodation. The council successfully navigated exiting families out of chain hotels where a maximum stay is 2 weeks. The council has reduced the numbers of families with children in bed and breakfast hotels over 6 weeks (a statutory obligation) from 76 households to 15.

Attention was drawn to table 1, showing the number of households directly placed into temporary accommodation over the last four years (between 2020/21 and 2023/24). The number of households in hotels has risen from 123 to 485. The number in private sector leases has fallen from 23 to 2. The number in short-life accommodation has fallen from 23 to 1. The number in hostels has fallen from 147 to 15.

It was stated that London boroughs now spend more than £90 million per month on TA, up nearly 40% from a year earlier. It was said that increases in TA costs are being driven by four broad factors: increased demand, reduced supply, increased costs and insufficient funding.

It was shown that the number of properties on private sector lease contracts over the last four years has fallen from 840 in 2019/20 to 484 in 2024/25. This is partly due to landlords asking for their properties back. It was reported that the council is currently working through 71 outstanding handbacks.

It was stated that the three main reasons for homelessness are family and friends eviction, private rented eviction, and domestic abuse. Attention was drawn to the figures in table 6, showing the numbers of homeless approaches. Domestic abuse was increasing as a reason for homelessness, up to a total of 319 domestic abuse approaches in 2023/24.

It was shown that the performance of the Find Your Own (rent deposit) Scheme has been decreasing since 2020/21.

It was reported that the cost of temporary accommodation is being affected by the lack of supply.

Without creating a pipeline to exit residents out of the current 230 hotel and nightly charged accommodation places, it was predicted that the number of emergency forms of accommodation required will rise from 293 in 2024/25 to 940 in 2026/27. With a pipeline, it would rise from 251 in 2024/24 to 253 in 2026/27.

It was reported that the council is currently in the process of securing a supply of 562 units and it is anticipated that the council will need another 700 properties to avoid facing the high profile risks identified in the report. These plans may include the following initiatives: private equity finance, office to residential conversions, pension

fund property investments and new development opportunities for temporary accommodation.

Attention was drawn to table 13, showing the temporary accommodation pipelines planned, including the property Purchasing Scheme at Chalkhill (150 units), the Mother and Baby Unit, an open and fully occupied Royal Jubilee Court, a Family Welcome Centre, Notting Hill Genesis Joint Venture, and modular units.

A question was asked regarding the levers available to cooperate with other boroughs to make sure their placing of residents in Havering's temporary accommodation doesn't drive up the council's costs. It was replied that IBAA arrangements regulate the rates boroughs should be paying when placing residents in another borough's temporary accommodation. The IBAA framework has some flaws (eg. landlords playing boroughs off against each other). Collaborative conversations with other boroughs has led to the agreement of rates. Section 208 allows boroughs to communicate regarding the placement of residents. Havering has also participated in conversations at London Council meetings, at a pan-London level.

A question was asked regarding the impact of illegal migration, and whether the council or central government foots the bill for accommodating illegal immigrants. It was replied that the Home Office has a substantial estate across London. The issue doesn't impact Havering directly, but it does indirectly, for example when support is provided to immigrants for health and education.

In response to a question about requirements for hotels to apply for a HMO licence if they have provided a certain amount of emergency temporary accommodation, it was stated that boroughs including Havering have tried and failed to make a hotel into a HMO. The law is complex on this issue. Chain hotels don't want HMO status and don't provide emergency temporary accommodation for more than two weeks. It was stated that Havering is a member of Setting the Standard, a London-wide inspection regime which inspects hotels to make sure they meet standards, and where they don't, the council has the ability to coordinate activity to jointly not place in those hotels.

It was observed that as well as increasing and diversifying temporary accommodation, the council also needs to increase housing stock.

In response to a question about the support in place for residents in unsuitable accommodation, it was observed that Havering offers a trauma-informed service and has received funding to create psychologically-informed environments.

A question was asked regarding the number of households who are under-occupying their property, and what is being done about it. It was stated that about 110 households are registered as under-occupying their properties. One challenge is moving them into new properties further from their support networks. That 110 includes only those who've expressed an interest in moving, which is very small percentage of under-occupiers. The true number is probably over 1000, but the council doesn't hold exact numbers on this. It was stated that every year, the council phone tenants over 70 and ask if they've considered downsizing. The council provide incentives and support to enable downsizing. The new allocation policy provides them with additional priority.

Residents' aversion to change can be an obstacle. It was observed that the council needs more 2/4/6 bed properties.

A question was asked regarding the development of accommodation for over-55s. It was replied that one such project has recently been finished, but there isn't currently another in the pipeline. The council's main demand is for family units (3 or 4 beds).

In response to a question about properties given back to owners where living standards have fallen short of letting standards, it was replied that the council does carry out work on such properties unless it is prohibited by cost.

A question was asked regarding the difficulty some residents have in finding a guarantor when seeking a property in the private sector, and whether the council can assist with this. It was replied that guarantors are generally with more established agents, who have their own vetting processes. But many agents and landlords accept residents without a guarantor. It was stated that the council also offers other incentives to landlords.

A question was asked about the reasons for seeking temporary accommodation, other than the main three included in the report. It was replied that other reasons include release from prison, hospitals, relationship breakdown, or undisclosed reasons.

**The Director of Living Well agreed that these figures will be supplied to Councillor Stanton at a later date.**

**It was agreed that the sub-committee would arrange another opportunity for Darren Alexander to respond to any further questions.**

**The sub-committee made no recommendations on this first report under agenda item 6.**

The second report under agenda item 6 concerns Temporary Modular Homes on Waterloo and Queen Street, and was delivered by Mark Butler.

It was stated that the modular housing proposal presents an opportunity to provide up to 18 families with stable homes, reducing the need for temporary hotel accommodation. This report set out the outline of the scheme, projected costs and delivery programme.

It was reported that the Council is proposing to introduce a scheme of 18 modular homes on part of the cleared site at Waterloo and Queen Street, on land scheduled for permanent development in approximately 5 to 7 years.

It was stated that the proposed development will consist of 14 two-bedroom homes and 4 three-bedroom homes, all fully equipped to accommodate families. The scheme will include some landscaping that enhances the development and improves the visual appeal of the area. There will also be five standard car-parking spaces.

It was reported that these modular homes are designed with a lifespan of up to 60 years and can be relocated up to five times if necessary, whilst retaining the supplier warranty.

It was stated that each unit is supplied at a cost of £200,000. Additional expenditure is required to provide the necessary site infrastructure, in addition to which it is proposed to apply cladding. It was said that faster construction reduces interim housing costs, and off-site manufacturing lowers per-unit expenses.

It was reported that the modular homes will provide modern, well-equipped spaces that are energy efficient and well insulated. Each unit can be relocated to smaller sites as required, and stacked up to three storeys, although it was only proposed to stack up to two storeys, and only on part of the site.

It was reported that positive feedback was received following meetings with planning officers during pre-application discussions. A specialist company, Better Delivery, was appointed by the Joint Venture to conduct extensive market testing.

It was reported that modular homes offer sustainability in the construction phase, by minimising waste and reducing carbon emissions. It was also said that they offer sustainability in use, including green technologies such as air source heat pumps and photovoltaic panels. It was reported that there will also be built-in sprinkler systems.

It was envisaged that the modular units will be available for occupation in Autumn 2025.

A question was asked as to why this is being proposed when the cost of each home, including the additional costs, is similar to those on the open market. It was replied that some of that expenditure will be recovered through the avoidance of spending money on hotels, and some will be recovered in the remaining life of the unit.

In response to a question about whether an assessment exists to justify spending this money on modular homes because those on the open market are unaffordable, it was replied that these modular homes will be supplementary to, not instead of homes on the open market. It was described as an opportunity to use an under-utilised site.

## **TEMPORARY MODULAR HOMES - WATERLOO ROAD AND QUEEN STREET**

At its meeting on 28 November 2024, the Sub-Committee received a presentation from officers setting out the key details of the Temporary Modular Homes proposal due to be considered by Cabinet at its January meeting.

It was stated that the modular housing proposal presents an opportunity to provide up to 18 families with stable homes, reducing the need for temporary hotel accommodation. The report set out the outline of the scheme, projected costs and delivery programme.

It was reported that the Council is proposing to introduce a scheme of 18 modular homes on part of the cleared site at Waterloo and Queen Street, on land scheduled for permanent development in approximately 5 to 7 years.



It was stated that the proposed development will consist of 14 two-bedroom homes and 4 three-bedroom homes, all fully equipped to accommodate families. The scheme will include some landscaping that enhances the development and improves the visual appeal of the area. There will also be five standard car-parking spaces.

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A question was asked as to why this is being proposed when the cost of each home, including the additional costs, is similar to those on the open market. It was replied that some of that expenditure will be recovered through the avoidance of spending money on hotels, and some will be recovered in the remaining life of the unit.

In response to a question about whether an assessment exists to justify spending this money on modular homes because those on the open market are unaffordable, it was replied that these modular homes will be supplementary to, not instead of homes on the open market. It was described as an opportunity to use an under-utilised site.

It was agreed that the meeting should now go into exempt session.

Members sought information on how officers arrived at the price, provider, and design.

Members received a cost benefit analysis, including reason why the purchase of temporary homes offers value against the option to purchase further homes on the open market.

Following resumption of the open session, the Sub-Committee stated that based on the information presented to the Members, they were satisfied and supportive of the proposal that is going before Cabinet and therefore recommend that Cabinet adopt the decision to deliver 18 Modular homes.

### **LIBRARY CONSULTATION**

At the request of the Sub-Committee, a pre decision scrutiny was undertaken to review the Council's budget setting exercise for 2023-24 that included proposals to reduce the revenue budget of the Council's library service by £300,000 over two years.

This prompted the production of a Library Strategy that would set out how the library service would function in the next few years. The Council's current statutory library provision consists of ten library sites, together with the Home Library service, the local studies library and a digital and online library.

It was noted in the report that amongst other things, the Library Strategy provided for the potential closure of 4 out of 5 branch libraries.

The report considered the outcome of the consultation on the draft Library Strategy that sought views of stakeholders on the Strategy and on the option for the Council to close up to four branch libraries.

It was explained that following careful analysis of all the responses received during the consultation including the public survey, stakeholder feedback, petitions and correspondence received, the condition of the libraries, the Council's ability to invest capital, and the Council funding gap it was considered that Council funding for three branch libraries should cease. It was noted that the result in the consequential loss of service of three branch libraries that were recommended to close on 31 March 2025 and achieve an annual saving of £288k.

It was stated that against a backdrop of continuing significant financial pressures for the Council, which included the need to request exceptional financial support from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in order to set a balanced budget for the financial year 2024/25, the budget included proposals to reduce the revenue budget of the Council's library service by £300,000 over two years. The library service accordingly developed a draft library strategy which included a set of proposals to close a number of libraries in order to deliver that saving.

The evidence of need to apply for a capitalisation direction from the Government includes a thorough scrutiny of budget making decisions. The Council must demonstrate to the Government it is doing everything in its control to reduce costs and to deliver savings. Without making these difficult decisions, a request for a capitalisation direction may not be successful which could put further services at risk.

The draft strategy comprised:

- Proposals to reduce the revenue budget of the service by means to closing up to four of the five "branch" libraries (Collier Row, Elm Park, Gidea Park, Harold Wood, South Hornchurch);

- Proposals to reduce the service's book stock budget by 61% (£161,000) in 2024/25 and £30,000 (from the 2023/24 base) in both 2025/26 and 2026/27;
- A detailed needs and usage assessment which was used to develop the proposals;
- A refreshed vision and strategic priorities to underpin the statutory service in coming years;
- Proposals to develop an investment business case seeking capital funding to improve the quality of the library estate;
- Proposals seeking views on whether a purpose-designed children's library – either at a fixed site or as a mobile provision – could better meet library need in the future.

It was noted that an extensive twelve-week consultation on the draft library strategy began on 10 May 2024 and ended on 2 August 2024.

The Sub-Committee noted that whilst the proposal to determine which branches to close, the report detailed the rationale with the likely impacts of the decision to close the three branch libraries recommended. A full needs assessment that considered all the libraries in Havering was included within the draft Havering Library Strategy 2024-2029. The decision making criteria adopted by the Council seeks an objective basis by reference to the available data, as informed by the needs assessment.

The report recommended the following three branches to close:

- Gidea Park
- Harold Wood
- South Hornchurch

The executives of Unison attended the meeting and gave a representation on behalf of libraries staff.

In response to Members questions, the Sub-Committee was informed that the decision on which branches to put forward was based on multiple factors, including cost savings and the distance to alternative branches. It was stated that all relevant factors were considered and weighted appropriately in the decision-making process. It was emphasized that the difficulty of the decision, fell into a category of decisions that no one wants to make. It was explained that budget pressures were the driving force behind the proposal, although it was acknowledged that the current year's budget is not directly affected. A key point of context was the £300,000 saving that was agreed upon in Cabinet and Full Council meetings around February of the previous year.

Questions were raised on the potential lease and the status of preparations of the Friends Group who were considering formation with the intention takeover the library from the Council, it was stated that the Group was undertaking a cost-benefit analysis though the full details are currently unclear. The Sub-Committee's attention was drawn to the upcoming Cabinet meeting, where a legal decision relating to this matter would need to be made.

The Sub-Committee and Members in attendance received satisfactory responses to all questions raised.

The Sub-Committee submitted the following comments and recommendation to Cabinet and requested that Cabinet responds to these at its meeting on 5 February 2025.

The Sub-Committee sought assurance that the report EQHIA was correct. This followed a Member query about discrepancies between the EQHIA and Action plan.

Members agreed the following recommendations:

1. That Cabinet delay the decision until a second consultation has been carried out, presenting the proposal to close three libraries to the public, as has taken place in other parts of the country. And that the Officer benchmark what is best practice.
2. That, following the formation of the Friends Group of Harold Wood Library, who are seeking funding, the Cabinet delay the decision to close Harold Wood Library in order that the group might have time to secure funding
3. That the Cabinet seek the opinion of the 151 Officer on whether savings made elsewhere could be used to offset the overspend generated by keeping the libraries open, and whether that would satisfy the CIPFA report and MHCLG with regards to the Capitalisation Directive
4. That the Cabinet explore and outline what work needs to be undertaken to ensure that the remaining libraries do not fall into disrepair and be threatened with closure
5. Cost Breakdown – that Cabinet defer decision until further information is provided on both revenue and capital costs.

## **FCC WASTE CONTRACT REVIEW**

At the request of Members, the sub-committee received a performance update on the FCC Waste Contract. The report provided an overview of the procurement, award and first year of the contract's operation.

The integrated waste, recycling and street cleansing contract was awarded in January 2022, and commenced in October 2023.

The award of the integrated contract for Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing was agreed by Cabinet in January 2022, with the successful bidder being Urbaser Ltd (now absorbed into FCC Environment).

The Sub-Committee reviewed the following contract monitoring process that is carried out in a number of different ways:

- Monthly report from FCC: The raw data is accessible by Council officers to enable it to be verified.
- Street Cleansing Monitoring: The contract monitoring officer aims for 50 inspections per month at present, to check that roads are being cleansed to standard. Where they fall below standard, a rectification notice is raised via the management system. The grading system utilised is nationally recognised, with examples shown in the Members' Handbook. Spot checks are also carried out on service requests such as fly-tipping reports to check that clearance has taken place.
- Supervisor monitoring: This includes checking on work reported as completed by crews, as well as checking that roads are within the standards set out, and directing crews accordingly if roads fall below standard.
- Joint monitoring: Havering's Monitoring Officer and FCC's supervisors regular carry out joint inspections together to look at cleansing standards, as well as crew behaviours and safe working practices. This helps to ensure that both parties are working and monitoring to the same standards.
- Complaints monitoring: Carried out by Havering officers to identify and address any recurring issues.

The contract team also deals with the general running of the contract, and administration of items such as container distribution. For example, the team manages the siting and replacement of street litter bins, but works with the contractor, the council's Enforcement team and ward councillors, as well as using littering data to understand hotspot areas before deciding on the locations. Bins are removed if abused, for example where they have previously been set on fire.

It was stated that there are three key groups that meet to review the contract:

- Contract Partnership Board: To meet quarterly, or less frequently if agreed, and act as a strategic forum for contract improvement and development. Comprises of senior management from Havering and FCC.
- Contract Management Group: Meets monthly, and comprises Havering's Waste and External Contracts Manager or Head of Service, Assistant Director, FCC's Regional Manager and Senior Contract Manager. Discusses monthly performance management report, service improvements, and any escalated issues.
- Contract Operations Group: This consists of Havering's contract monitoring team and FCC's operational managers. It focuses on the day-to-day running of the contract, and any key matters arising.

In response to the Social Value of the contract. It was stated that FCC has various values as part of their commitment to Havering, both in terms of the day-to-day running of the contract, and specific commitments around provision of support and funding. This includes an annual £10,000 Environment Fund to support tree planting and other initiatives, and a £30,000 Community Engagement Fund. Havering officers are working with FCC to allocate these funds accordingly.

An example of one of the social value commitments was to provide 100 litter pick packs per year to the council to help with keeping the borough clean. These are utilised

in various volunteering initiatives. Members welcomed this initiative and asked that this be operated across the borough.

FCC have also engaged with a lot of volunteer and community groups as part of the commitment to volunteer hours and assist in the local borough. Apprenticeships are also currently in progress for HGV drivers and an administrator. The company are recruiting more people from the local area and utilising local businesses such as electricians, plumbers and builders which helps to support the local economy.

The Sub-Committee was informed of anticipated service changes and future contract developments. The main anticipated change within the current contract is the introduction of separate weekly household food waste collections; a requirement of the Environment Act 2021.

Members noted that FCC have modelled for their expected service delivery, based on the number and spread of households, as well as expected volumes of waste to be collected. The service is currently in its planning stages, with the rollout to commence from October 2025.

There are further opportunities for continued service developments throughout the life of the contract, with an optional 8-year extension from 2031. An annual contract review will help to identify opportunities for shared efficiency savings as well as technological innovation and improved performance.

The Sub-Committee received satisfactory responses to its questions. Members noted that the current cost of the integrated waste, recycling and street cleansing contract with FCC was detailed in the report. Officers are working with FCC to establish the expected uplift for the coming year, taking into account inflation, national average earnings, and the increase in properties. It was stated that this process will be reviewed annually via an agreed metric, and checked by officers.

## **ROMFORD MASTERPLAN SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING PRE DECISION SCRUTINY**

As part of the Sub-Committee's oversight, Members received a briefing on the development of the Romford Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document, for the final stage of seeking approval to adopt the Romford Town Centre Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) as planning policy by Cabinet at its next meeting. It was stated that the Masterplan has been drafted and consulted on in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

The Havering Local Plan sets out the detailed policy for Romford and commits to the delivery of a Supplementary Planning Document for the area, recognising the significant opportunities that Romford offers. The Masterplan develops and supplements the Havering Local Plan and sets out a framework to shape and guide development in Romford over the next 15-20 years.

It was stated that the purpose of the Masterplan will be instrumental in guiding Romford's ongoing evolution over the next 15-20 years. Its aim is to draw on Romford's unique character and to continue to evolve it into a place which respects and reveals its history whilst looking forward to deliver growth and opportunities that will benefit the entire community.

The report highlighted that Romford offers exciting regeneration and development opportunities and is expected to accommodate significant levels of housing and economic growth in the coming years. It is identified as an Opportunity Area in the London Plan and designated as a Strategic Development Area (SDA) in the Havering Local Plan. The Masterplan is needed to guide these opportunities in a way that respects Romford's qualities and history, strengthens pride in the town, and makes it a distinct and attractive place to live, work, and visit.

The Masterplan proposes a series of key spatial moves that establish the physical structure and interventions to achieve the long-term vision for Romford town centre:

- Opening up the River Rom - The River Rom will be deculverted and partially renaturalised through the town centre to create an ecological linear park.
- Recharacterising the ring road – creating an active travel corridor with at-grade crossings, planting and an urban boulevard character, better integrating the town centre with the surrounding neighbourhoods.
- Celebrating Romford Market - Reinforcing the importance of the market place as a key civic space by upgrading the public realm improving frontages and introducing spaces that can support a variety of events and gatherings.
- Reinstating the historic urban grain - Introducing new streets and spaces that reflect the finer historic urban grain of the town centre with smaller, more walkable blocks with varied and engaging building frontages.
- Wider green links - Introducing new green links that can act as walking and cycling corridors both through the town centre and connecting to wider key public green spaces and parks.
- New and improved station entrances - Creating a new station entrance that acts as a gateway to the town centre and improving the existing station entrance with public realm enhancements, seating and wayfinding.

The Sub-Committee noted the following key themes and objectives to guide the delivery of the Masterplan.

- Space and landscape - The Masterplan promotes a wide range of safe, public spaces including high quality streets, pocket parks, squares and roof gardens. Blue and green networks through the town centre will be strengthened. The River Rom will be the centre piece of these networks as a new linear riverside park.
- Movement and Connectivity - The Masterplan improves access, connectivity and permeability across Romford. Public transport and active travel choices, such as walking and cycling, are promoted to encourage healthy lifestyles and

considered equitably with other modes of travel. Reconfigured streets and public realm will create a more attractive, safe and inclusive Romford.

- Sustainability - ensuring growth is built on a platform of sustainable infrastructure with environmental and wellbeing benefits. Environmental, social and economic sustainability is a golden thread that runs through the Masterplan.

- Inclusivity, Health and Wellbeing - all developments, public realm, transport and projects will have inclusive design at their heart. The Masterplan provides guidance to promote social cohesion and to create opportunities to diversify and to also improve health and wellbeing through better accessibility, infrastructure and resources.

- Character and Townscape - The Masterplan draws on the existing qualities and unique assets of Romford. The setting of Romford's historic places and buildings will be enhanced. New developments will contribute by positively supporting existing or evolving character areas through new and enhanced buildings, streets and spaces.

- Uses and Mix - The Masterplan promotes a diverse Romford that is active throughout all times of the day. In the central area smaller shops and a more varied food and drink offer will support the vibrancy of the centre and an enhanced early evening economy. Employment and business space will be enhanced. Key locations and public spaces will be anchored by cultural and leisure uses to drive footfall. New residential within the town centre will support existing and new businesses but will also require corresponding social infrastructure including schools, public spaces, health facilities and transport.

- The Economy - The Masterplan capitalises on Romford's unique position at the interface between Essex and London to promote Romford as a destination, to support existing businesses and attract new occupiers. The Masterplan seeks to broaden the early evening and night-time economies, revitalise Market Place and enhancing retail, business and residential offers. This diversification will create new jobs and support the vitality and long-term viability of Romford.

Members received satisfactory responses to all questions raised. The Sub-Committee welcomed the Master Plan and commended the report to Cabinet for its approval.

The Sub-Committees asked that Cabinet consider and respond to the following recommendations:

Members provided the following comments & suggestions to support the delivery of the Master Plan Supplementary Report:



- The Sub-Committee (S/C) support the need for an Inward Investment in Romford Strategy, related launch events and would like to see further details when available.
- The Sub-Committee asked for all the referred to associated documents such as the IDP & Local Plan to be updated accordingly and advised when that has happened and to have sight of them.
- The S/C are interested in the growth of small retail businesses in Romford and are keen to encourage this.
- The S/C are interested in what the plan will encourage and deliver in regards to economic growth, and how the requisite skills and employment will be achieved.
- The S/C hope that the new jobs will increase residents' employability and household incomes.
- The S/C are interested in how the Master Plan will be funded and also the provision of more schools/school places in support of the Plan.
- The S/C are interested in Romford developing as a place of learning taking the Queens Hospital University as a key driver for this.
- The S/C are interested in the future demand on health facilities, in particular the adequacy of the development of additional medical hubs to support the Queens Hospital.
- The S/C asked if the plan or related plans could consider attracting wider further education facilities, e.g. a university, college or skills academy.

## 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

Minutes of meetings of Places Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee