

PRESENT

Members of the Committee

Councillor Quentin Marshall (Chairman)
Councillor Tony Holt (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Carol Caruana
Councillor Deborah Collinson
Councillor Emma Dent Coad, MA
Councillor Robert Mingay
Councillor Matthew Palmer
Councillor Jonathon Read
Councillor Marie-Therese Rossi
Councillor Charles Williams

Others in Attendance

Councillor Judith Blakeman
Councillor Timothy Coleridge (Cabinet Member for Housing and Property)
Michael Clark (Director for Property)
Jean Daintith (Executive Director for Housing, Health and Adult Social Care)
Gillian Davies (Senior Housing Policy Officer)
Laura Johnson (Head of Housing)
Paul McCarthy (Senior Asset Management Surveyor, Property Services)
Steve Mellor (Group Finance Manager, Housing, Health and Adult Social Care)
Paul Morse (Director of Environmental Health)
Anthony Parkes (Director of Financial Services, TMO)
Kevin Thompson (Interim Head of Service, Residential Operations)
Rachel Wigley (Head of Personalisation)
Janice Wray (TMO Health and Safety Advisor)
Gareth Ebenezer (Governance Services)

A1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for delayed arrival was received from Councillor Palmer.

A2 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made. Also there were no declarations under S.106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

A3 MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING ON 8 NOVEMBER AND THE ORDINARY MEETING ON 10 NOVEMBER 2010

Both the Minutes of the Special Meeting on 8 November and the Ordinary Meeting on 10 November 2010 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

A4 REPORT BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND PROPERTY

On paragraph 3 (Stable Way Travellers' Site) the Cabinet Member explained that the Council was engaged in a long term strategy to work with travellers to improve conditions on this site, particularly with regards to the education of children and health and safety.

In response to a question from Councillor Dent Coad on paragraph 5 (Landlord Rationalisation) the Head of Housing confirmed that the rationale here was for Registered Providers to provide better management and services to their tenants; there was no intention to encourage selling off of the housing stock. Councillor Williams agreed that it was the correct policy to encourage a reduced number of Registered Providers.

Subject to the above, the report was received and noted.

A5 PROPERTY ASSETS OF THE COUNCIL - OVERVIEW REPORT

Prefacing the consideration of this report, the Chairman stated he thought it valuable that the Committee had a introductory session on property. Mr Clark (Director for Property) gave the Committee a commentary on his report on the Council's Operational and Investment Portfolio.

At the start of the subsequent discussion, the Cabinet Member made the point that Mr Clark and his officers were breaking new ground; the time had come for RBKC to manage its property centrally rather than in Business Groups. RBKC was not a property business but needed to better manage its property and significantly increase property income. There were a number of properties that were well loved but not much used. In the future people would need to co-operate on how to use buildings better.

In the subsequent debate a number of actions for the Director for Property were agreed, as detailed:-

(i) Following points made by Councillor Dent Coad, it was agreed that a report would be submitted to the Committee's next meeting on properties that were empty/currently not in use. The point was made by the Cabinet Member that properties empty were empty for a reason (e.g. squatters, legal difficulties);

(ii) To give Members of the Committee (a) a colour copy of the pie chart 'Total income split by rental value and percentage' and (b) an electronic copy of Appendix 2 - Operational Property List January 2011;

(iii) The Director for Property was requested by the Chairman to submit (in due course) a report on non-operational properties; the report to include some content regarding for what reason(s) (other than financial) these properties were being held.

Action by: Director for Property

A6 TACKLING AFFORDABLE WARMTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING

Mr Kevin Thompson (Interim Head of Service, Residential Operations) introduced this report. Cold homes were a significant cause of ill health and, as detailed in the report, there was considerable scope for delivering improvements locally.

In discussion with Members the following main points emerged:-

(i) There was some initial thought being given to a solar heating project at Stable Way Travellers' Site however, this was at a very early stage of consideration. Mr Morse (Director of Environmental Health) assured Councillor Read that were these plans to be developed further there would be extensive scrutiny, including by this Committee.

(ii) Mr Thompson confirmed to Councillor Mingay that enforcement action was taken against private landlords when necessary.

(iii) The Chairman was pleased to hear from Mr Thompson that considerable evidence could be provided on the beneficial effect of improving energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty in leading to reductions in health budgets and the cost of long term care.

Subject to the above, the report was received and noted.

A7 BUDGET PROPOSALS 2011/12

It was noted that this report was going to all Scrutiny Committees in the current committee cycle and set the overall context for budget reports appearing later in the agenda.

Subject to the above, the report was received and noted.

A8 REVENUE BUDGET 2011/12

Mr Mellor, the Group Finance Manager, introduced this report and stated that the main risk factor was the cost of temporary accommodation. Appendix 1 of the report (Projected Costs of Temporary Accommodation) covered this in detail.

Subject to the above, the report was received and noted.

A9 CAPITAL BUDGET 2011/12 - 2013/14

Mr Mellor confirmed that, with the loss of supported borrowing, the HRA Capital Programme had reduced to £7.6 in 2011/12. This lower level of resources meant the programme was now limited to works necessary for health and safety reasons or for decent homes compliance.

There was a sum in the Capital Programme (of £268,000 in total) for environmental improvements at the Stable Way Travellers' Site. The Cabinet Member, Councillor Coleridge was conscious of the fact that this was a substantial sum of money. He added that there were approximately 100 people who lived on this long-established travellers' site and approximately 60 of these were children who could be considered as falling into the vulnerable person's category. Travellers lived a very different lifestyle to most people in the community and the Cabinet Member believed this expenditure (along with other improvement measures) would help to promote peaceful co-existence.

Councillor Palmer stated that travellers had chosen not to participate in wider society; he was aware that some persons from Stable Way had caused problems in the local community. From the economic standpoint, Councillor Read questioned the value of this expenditure both in terms of not securing any capital improvement for the community as a whole and in terms of a lack of any payback from revenue.

Councillor Mingay believed that, historically, statutory authorities such as this Council had not done a lot to improve conditions on travellers' sites and he welcomed the proposed expenditure.

Closing the debate, the Executive Director of Housing, Health and Adult Social Care reminded the Committee that the Stable Way Advisory Group (whose membership included the Cabinet Member for Housing and Property) provided overall strategic vision for statutory bodies to improve the housing, educational, safety, health and social care and other needs of persons living and/or working on the site.

Subject to the above, the report was received and noted.

A10 BUSINESS GROUP CAPITAL REPORTS 2011/12 - 2013/14

This report collated capital reports from other business groups, this Committee being interested in the property dimension.

With regards to the Family and Children's Services (FCS) Capital Budget, Councillor Mingay noted that the Central Library refurbishment had been removed from the Pipeline Schemes. Councillor Coleridge thought that this had been due to a lack of available resources at present. The Clerk undertook to refer the point to officers in FCS requesting they email Councillor Mingay to clarify the future plans for the Central Library.

Action by: Governance Services

Subject to the above, the report was received and noted.

A11 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - RENT REPORT 2011/12

The Cabinet Member, Councillor Coleridge, introduced this report; he faced a major decision he stated. The average increase in rents proposed had been adjusted to (now) 8.7% (Central Government had assumed an increase of 6.6% in determining HRA subsidy). The average rent increase had been pitched at this 8.7% level in order to bring in additional resources of £600,000 per annum to look after HRA properties. The Group Finance Manager confirmed that with this suggested 8.7% increase, only 24 persons who were on housing benefit would have a rent increase of more than £20 per week.

In discussion between the Cabinet Member and Members of the Committee the following main points emerged:-

(i) Councillor Dent Coad was concerned about the possible hardship to some of the Borough's poorer residents of needing to meet rent increases of the order of £5 or £10 a week. The Cabinet Member stated that he had agonised over an average increase of 8.7% but to keep the increase to only 6.6% would he believe make it impossible to manage the stock properly. Councillor Read pointed out that with inflation running at the current level of 4.5%, the rent increase in real terms was much more modest. Councillor Caruana concurred in Councillor Dent Coad's concern regarding likely hardship. Councillor Holt was concerned about a possible increase of 8.7% but felt there was little alternative.

Additionally, Councillor Dent Coad stated that at the TMO Board she had requested an Equalities Impact Assessment. The Head of Housing confirmed this was currently being drafted and would be with the Councillor shortly.

Action by: Head of Housing

(ii) Mr Parkes (Director of Financial Services, TMO) confirmed to Councillor Mingay that there would be a later Key Decision Report on Heating and Hot Water Charges.

(iii) Mr Parkes responded to a question from the Chairman that the TMO was seeking to extend the use of its garages. For what Mr Parkes thought were historical reasons, TMO tenants were charged less for these garages.

It was noted that at the World's End Estate there was a large number of unused garage spaces and Councillor Dent Coad believed that there was a wasted asset here and at other estates such as Holmefield House and Trellick Tower etc. She believed there was a need to be much bolder to make more use of these assets. Councillor Coleridge cautioned that there were planning restrictions that applied.

More generally, Councillor Dent Coad disputed the premise that the HRA would fall into deficit in 2020/21. She believed that there were significantly more TMO assets that could be more fully utilised to bring in additional revenue.

Subject to the above, the report was received and noted.

A12 FIRE RISK ASSESSMENTS IN RBKC RESIDENTIAL BLOCKS - PROGRESS REPORT

Ms Janice Wray (TMO Health and Safety Advisor) was present to introduce this report, which was an update to her previous report in March 2010. The TMO was still working closely with RBKC and the London Fire Brigade and making ongoing progress.

In response to a question from Councillor Williams about flat entrance doors in enclosed blocks of flats, Ms Wray explained that all such doors must meet the same acceptable fire safety standard. Where necessary negotiation would take place with leaseholders in the first instance to give them the opportunity to demonstrate that their door meets the required standard. RBKC and the TMO had requested that the London Fire Brigade provide some publicity to further advise leaseholders of the importance of complying with the necessary standards.

At the suggestion of the Chairman, in view of the importance of this matter, it was requested that a follow up report be provided, probably to the Committee's meeting in November 2011.

Action by: TMO Chief Executive/ Head of Housing

Councillor Mingay asked about Registered Providers in the Borough and the Head of Housing confirmed that they had been surveyed over a year ago. The Head of Housing undertook to update the information from Registered Providers and come back to the Committee in due course.

Action by: Head of Housing

Subject to the above, the report was received and noted.

A13 LOCAL DECISION: A FAIRER FUTURE FOR SOCIAL HOUSING CONSULTATION

Appendix 2 to this report, the Council's response to the Department of Communities and Local Government, had been sent to comply with the Department's consultation deadline of 17 January and to Members of this Committee subsequent to the main agenda.

Councillor Coleridge referred to the importance of the proposed changes. There would be a follow up report to the Committee's next meeting.

Action by: Head of Housing

Subject to the above, the report was received and noted.

A14 DECANT POLICY

Ms Gillian Davies (Senior Housing Policy Officer) introduced this report and explained the principles of the proposed Decant Policy. Consultation would continue until 4 March. To assist her to respond to the consultation Councillor Dent-Coad requested an electronic Word version of the policy which the Head of Housing would supply.

Following comments made by Members of the Committee (principally Councillor Palmer), Ms Davies undertook to consider the following amendments to the policy:-

- (i) Section 2.6 - to add to the grounds listed a reference to forms of mental illness such as vertigo;
- (ii) Sections 5.13–5.15 – need to clarify to a size of property that fits and that these options are additional to those in the Allocations Policy, and added in with the intention to ease moving;
- (iii) Section 5.16 – presentation of the point – change last sentence to read more clearly;
- (iv) Section 5.43 (and all references to payments) – payment will be received once moved, unless it is needed and there is written agreement from the Council;
- (v) Section 7.4 – if appropriate (in terms of time scales) to pursue necessary squatter proceedings to ensure there is no hold up to the regeneration works as a result; and
- (vi) Definition of Right to Return to be included and some notes to state this is not always going to be within the Council's gift and therefore the need is to negotiate. This should be stated early on in the document.

Action by: Head of Housing

Subject to the above, the report was received and noted.

A15 MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS

Paragraph 1 - Tour of TMO Estates

The paragraph was received and noted.

Paragraph 2 - Rota Visits

It was noted that Councillor Rossi had visited the TMO Hub. Her visit report would come to the Committee's next meeting.

Subject to the above, the report was received and noted.

Paragraph 3 - In-Depth Reviews

The Chairman's suggestion that this Committee have its first attempt at deep level scrutiny was accepted. With the agreement of the Head of Housing the subject area would be Section 106 funding. There would be a preliminary/background report to the Committee's next meeting on 17 March with the first deep level scrutiny (an hour or so session) on Section 106 at the meeting on 18 May.

Action by: *Head of Housing*

The Chairman confirmed that, although a draft had been produced, the final report of the Sub-Group on Temporary Accommodation had been delayed. A number of matters the Sub-Group had discussed had been overtaken by events.

Subject to the above, the paragraph was received and noted.

Paragraph 4 - Matters Arising from Last Meeting on 10 November

The paragraph was received and noted.

Paragraph 5 - Questions Arising from Performance Monitoring Reports Circulated

The paragraph was received and noted.

Paragraph 6 - Vital Improvements - Progress Report

On Vital Improvement number 5 (Housing Stock Financing and Redevelopment), the Executive Director for Housing, Health and Adult Social Care stated that there would be a report to the Cabinet Working Party in March. Councillor Dent Coad was keen to see this report when available and it was agreed that the report would be copied to all Members of this Committee via the Clerk.

Action by: *Executive Director for Housing, Health and Adult Social Care/*

Governance Services

In respect of Vital Improvement number 14, Councillor Dent Coad requested an update on the Wornington Green redevelopment. The Clerk undertook to refer this request to the Executive Director of Planning and Borough Development.

Action by: *Governance Services*

Subject to the above, the paragraph was received and noted.

Paragraph 7 - Scrutiny Report and Key Agenda Item Tracker

The paragraph was received and noted.

Paragraph 8 - The Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The paragraph was received and noted.

ANY OTHER URGENT MATTERS

None.

The meeting ended at 08.45pm

Chairman