

PRESENT

Members of the Committee

Councillor Quentin Marshall (Chairman)
Councillor Carol Caruana
Councillor Emma Dent Coad, MA
Councillor Sam Mackover
Councillor Robert Mingay
Councillor Matthew Palmer
Councillor Jonathon Read
Councillor Marie-Therese Rossi

Others in Attendance

Councillor Timothy Coleridge (Cabinet Member for Housing and Property)
Carl Ainley (Head of Investment, Conferencing and Events)
Nick Austin (Bi-Borough Director of Environmental Health)
Clair Bantin (Scrutiny Manager)
Steve Bell (Head of Asset Management and Capital Projects)
Ray Brown (Head of Business Management and Customer Access)
Michael Clark (Director of Corporate Property)
Tony Heavey (Senior Housing Policy Officer)
Laura Johnson (Director of Housing)
Jon Medlin (Senior Policy Planning Officer)
Steve Mellor (Group Finance Manager)
Gillian Tobin (Senior Housing Policy Officer)
Jane Tretheway (Housing Strategy and Regeneration Officer)
Jonathan Wade (Policy Team Leader) PBD
Jerome Treherne (Governance Services)

A1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been submitted from Councillors Tony Holt and Will Pascall.

A2 Members' Declaration of Interest

No declarations were made.

A3 Minutes of the meeting on 15 March 2012

The Minutes of the Meeting on 15 March 2012 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

A4. Report by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Property

The Cabinet Member reported on the incoming contractor for the TMO repairs service and commented that despite the TMO Board's decision to take on an interim contractor, Morrison had delivered a reasonable service

at reasonable cost. The incoming contractor might have to provide the service at a higher cost and the service would be closely monitored.

In regard to fire doors in TMO properties, the Committee noted that assuming the successful outcome of a test case (as yet to be identified with LFB/EHO), it was anticipated that the most dangerous fire doors could be replaced however there was no timescale on that at present. The Committee asked to be kept up to date on how this issue progressed.

The Committee welcomed the capital receipts from Elm Park Gardens and the proposed investment in Grenfell Tower. Councillor Caruana was reassured that Grenfell Towers lifts were accessible for the disabled.

The Committee noted the increased number of approaches over the last three months made by homeless clients due to benefit changes and Ms Johnson reported the position was likely to worsen and challenge the Housing Department over the next two years. In response four more staff had been taken on to cope with the increased demand. Ms Johnson confirmed appointments could be made for people calling the housing service. Of those in temporary accommodation, 60% had children or were pregnant and therefore deemed vulnerable.

In response to questions on the locations searched to accommodate homeless households, Ms Johnson said that historically the Housing Department had looked to the Greater London area where there had been large enough housing markets to meet demand. She commented that ties of family and friends as well as proximity to the underground train network, led many to resist suggested accommodation outside London even if the new location had fast rail links to the Capital. From 2014-15, Ms Johnson expected the pressure to find new accommodation for homeless borough residents would level off as those on benefit would no longer be able to privately rent properties in the borough so would therefore not approach the authority for renewal. She confirmed that nightly lets referred to emergency accommodation in hotels for one night only.

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

A5. Housing Plan Policy Review

Mr Medlin highlighted that the Planning and Borough Development Department was seeking early input from the Committee to the review of the Core Strategy including chapter 35 which covered the Diversity of Housing.

The Chairman asked for short papers on housing related aspects to be submitted in a co-ordinated way to the Committee. The papers should clarify what aspects of the policy would be open to change by the Council. Councillor Mingay suggested that if the review included a study into the number of second homes in the borough that would prove useful.

Action: Mr Medlin

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

A6. Draft Housing Strategy

The Chairman noted that the report had been discussed at the March Committee and encouraged Members to comment on the draft paper.

The report was received and noted.

A7. Draft Tenancy Strategy

The Chairman noted that the report had been discussed at the March Committee and encouraged Members to comment on the draft paper. Councillor Dent Coad advised that the Labour Group would be submitting its own comments on the draft.

The report was received and noted.

A8. Reinvigorating the Right to Buy

Mr Heavey advised that there had been an increased number of enquiries for Right to Buy since the announcement of an increase in tenant's discount up to £75k, however he did not think it would lead to a significant increase in sales due to the high house prices in this borough. The Committee noted under the revised scheme it was not a requirement that replacement housing be built in borough so the outcome could be that replacement social housing would be provided elsewhere with the funds received from the sales.

The paper was received and noted.

A9. Target Rents

The Chairman said the paper further clarified how target rents were arrived at. Mr Mellor confirmed the timetable for weekly rents to meet target rents could be shortened however, if the average rent exceeded the Limit Rent then the Housing Benefit Subsidy, recovered by the Council, would be limited resulting in the shortfall being charged to the HRA. The Chairman suggested officers consider intergenerational issues in their analysis and present choices over the speed at which payments could be phased in. Councillor Dent Coad reminded the Committee of the rent increase last year that had led to increased arrears and urged officers to continue to give a high priority to affordability considerations for tenants before setting rent levels.

The report was received and noted.

A10. 49 Bassett Road Brief – a part B paper

Officers confirmed the proposed new use fell under planning category D1 and Mr Clark reported the Cabinet Member and Planning Committee would have further opportunities to comment on this disposal during the final stages of this decision. The Cabinet Member commented that maintenance costs for the property if it had been retained by the Council, had been considered too high and the sale value secured a significant sum for use by the Council. Officers hoped the agreement could be signed off in the next two weeks.

Councillor Dent Coad questioned whether the proposed use of the capital receipt was strictly in accord with the technical planning term 'social and community use' or with the Core Strategy and expressed strong disappointment with the proposal. The Committee expressed its strong support for this proposal. Councillors Dent Coad, Mingay and Caruana wished to record their disagreement with the majority view of the Committee.

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

A11. Miscellaneous Matters

The Committee noted that information on Section 106 funds had been circulated recently and Members had an opportunity to make suggestions for use of these funds.

Visit Rota

The Chairman encouraged all outstanding visits to be in hand before the end of the municipal year. Councillor Dent Coad reported that she had been liaising with Councillor Mackover for their report on a visit to Trellick Tower made some weeks ago.

Forward Plan

Councillor Palmer drew attention to the Holland Park ICT contract decision which, although it has been reported to the Committee, had not been entered onto the Forward Plan as a Cabinet Key Decision. Ms Bantin acknowledged there had been an administrative error and steps had been taken to ensure against a repeat occurrence.

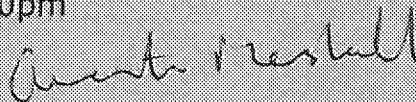
The paragraph was received and noted.

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

A12. Any Other Oral or Written Items which the Chairman Considers Urgent

The Chairman encouraged all Members to complete the scrutiny survey questionnaire copies of which had been made available for the meeting.

The meeting finished at 7.40pm



Chairman