

## Minutes

### ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND REGENERATION SELECT COMMITTEE

8 June 2021

Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre,  
High Street, Uxbridge



	<p><b>Committee Members Present:</b> Councillors Wayne Bridges (Chairman) Alan Chapman (Vice-Chairman) Nicola Brightman Alan Deville Scott Farley (Opposition Lead) Janet Gardner Allan Kauffman</p> <p><b>LBH Officers Present:</b> Dan Kennedy, Director, Planning, Environment, Education and Community Services David Haygarth, Climate Action Manager Debby Weller, Housing Policy and Strategy Manager Mark Billings, Head of Housing Options, Homelessness &amp; Standards Gary Penticost, Head of Repairs, Engineering, Planned Works &amp; Facilities Management Neil Fraser, Democratic Services Officer</p>
4.	<p><b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b> (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>
5.	<p><b>DECLARATION OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING</b> (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>
6.	<p><b>TO CONFIRM THAT ALL ITEMS MARKED PART 1 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT ANY ITEMS MARKED PART 2 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE</b> (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>It was confirmed that all items would be considered in public.</p>
7.	<p><b>TO AGREE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING</b> (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p><b>RESOLVED:</b> That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2021 be approved as a correct record.</p>
8.	<p><b>STRATEGIC CLIMATE ACTION PLAN CONSULTATION</b> (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>David Haygarth, Climate Action Manager, introduced a report detailing the Council's draft Strategic Climate Action Plan, as part of the consultation process prior to its</p>

formal submission for adoption by Cabinet in July 2021.

The Committee was advised that the Council had made three corporate commitments as part of the Plan:

1. To lead and inspire the Borough's residents, businesses and schools to reduce their own carbon emissions;
2. To become carbon neutral by 2030; and
3. To achieve 100% clean energy across the Council's services by 2030.

It was confirmed that commitment 2 applied to public access buildings and sites where the Council paid for the energy supplies, together with the Council's vehicles and highways assets such as streetlighting and car parks.

To achieve commitment 3, the Council was adopting a carbon neutral approach including a reduction in the use of fossil fuels, the purchase of green energy, and carbon offsetting measures.

Figures demonstrating the Council's efforts to reduce its carbon emissions through the purchasing of green energy and fuel were highlighted, which showed a 42% reduction in emissions since 2009. Regarding green fuel, this was confirmed to be fuel that contained less carbon than previously purchased fuel.

In response to questioning from Members, it was confirmed that the consultation had included distribution to a variety of stakeholders, via the Council's website, social media channels, and by mail. The 100+ responses received had included feedback that would be useful in drafting detailed actions moving forward. It was agreed that officers would provide Members with a summary of the actions taken as part of the consultation process.

Members highlighted that the report had omitted the circa 5,000 trees planted at Field End Recreational Ground. Officers advised that this would be amended for the final report.

Members referred to questions submitted at the now retired Corporate Services, Commerce and Communities Policy Overview Committee, and officers confirmed that answers were still being sought. Once available, the additional information would be passed to Members.

Members requested that detail on energy saving measures identified at the Borough's libraries, together with detail on how the Council was updating its fleet of vehicles (for example, to include electric vehicles), be shared following the meeting.

Regarding flood mitigation to address rising waters due to climate change, it was agreed that the clerk would seek further detail from the Council's Flood Water Management officers before feeding back to the Committee.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the following be submitted as the Committee's comments to Cabinet as part of the consultation process:

*The Committee support the measures outlined within the proposed Action Plan to address climate change through the reduction of the Council's carbon footprint. The Committee notes the actions previously taken that have resulted in significantly reduced emissions, and is eager to see further successes as a result of the Plan's*

*approval and implementation.*

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. That the report be noted;**
- 2. That the additional information requested above be forwarded to the Committee following the meeting, and;**
- 3. That the above comments be included in the forthcoming report to Cabinet.**

9. **HOUSING STRATEGY - DEVELOPMENT & CONSULTATION** (*Agenda Item 6*)

Debby Weller, Housing Policy and Strategy Manager, introduced a report detailing progress made in preparing the draft Housing Strategy 2021/22 to 2025/26, including the timetable for delivery, the current policy environment and key challenges, emerging strategic direction, and priorities and consultation plans.

For context, the housing market had been seen to have declined as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, but had since recovered strongly. House prices had risen by approximately 4%, while flat prices had remained stable. London prices remained markedly more expensive than other areas, though prices outside London were growing as people were moving to rural locations in search of more space.

The Council's policy and legislation had been drafted to address safety, housing conditions, relationships with tenants and leaseholders, climate change and environmental concerns, domestic abuse, and changes to planning such as permitted development and the new London Plan, etc.

Housing strategy priorities included place shaping, increasing access to affordable homes, improving housing standards, support for the Charter for Social Housing Residents, and support for independent living, together with addressing climate change and normalising service delivery following the pandemic.

Place Shaping involved Housing Services contributing to ensuring inclusive, greener and sustainable places via collaboration across health, social care and housing sectors. The Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy was currently under development and would include actions to address issues identified following the pandemic, such as overcrowding.

The Council's need for affordable housing remained, but the profile of the homes needed had changed, with an increased demand for family housing. Housing Standards was being addressed via a business plan that would ensure the Council's compliance with new building safety requirements.

The Social Housing Charter was to be supported through increased digital tools, surveying and benchmarking. Homelessness was expected to rise following the forthcoming end to the ban on evictions, which would increase pressure on the service. Improvements to the service would include improved joint working with social care, Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation, further support for older people, and support for residents with autism or dementia.

The draft strategy would be widely consulted on, likely between July and September, before a further report to this Committee. Thereafter, the Strategy would be submitted for endorsement to Cabinet, before approval at Full Council.

Members sought further information on a number of points, with officers responding as follows:

Regarding the licensing of landlords prior to their renting of a property, Homes of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) landlords required a licence before renting an HMO property to five or more people. Additional licensing was dependent on the Council evidencing the requirement for additional conditions to address issues, such as antisocial behaviour. The Council did not place families into HMOs, instead placing into separate dwellings that adhered to room space standards. All accommodation was checked prior to placing tenants, to ensure it adhered to the required safety and management standards.

On the matter of Council tenants complaining of a lack of timely repairs, such as the fixing of a faulty boiler, it was acknowledged that there had been issues with the Council's new suppliers at the start of the contract, which had resulted in the Council issuing an improvement notice. Since then, a number of changes had been implemented and such issues were declining. For example, stock of parts for obsolete equipment had been increased, reducing delays for addressing faults.

Regarding empty Council properties, this was confirmed to be at circa 1%, which, according to benchmarking against neighbours, was good performance. It was recognised that this number should be kept as low as possible, though there were occasions where properties were kept vacant to allow for assessments and repairs, etc.

The importance of highlighting standards and practices to both landlords and tenants was recognised, and work was underway to ensure the requisite knowledge on how to maintain a property, and how to report issues, was provided. Landlords were required to evidence that they had provided certain documents to their tenants at the commencement of a tenancy, otherwise they would be unable to serve notice on those tenants. With regard to 'problem' landlords and tenants, the Committee was advised that the Greater London Authority (GLA) maintained a database of such individuals, which was then fed into a national database, for use by local authorities when placing tenants and carrying out enforcement action.

Regarding crime and antisocial behaviour, the Council's Community Safety Team were tasked with addressing such issues. Due to such actions being labour intensive, it was important to review all available data to ensure actions were being targeted appropriately.

The Committee thanked officers to the report, and suggested that the Strategy include additional detail regarding how the Council could ensure landlords and tenants were aware of their responsibilities, and how to notify the Council of any issues. In addition, it was requested that future resident surveys be sent to Committee members for dissemination to their constituents.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. That the report be noted;**
- 2. That the Strategy include Committee feedback as set out above, and;**
- 3. That officers provide Committee Members with future resident surveys.**

Further to correspondence issued by Democratic Services on the new scrutiny call-in procedure detailing the Council's decision to transfer this responsibility to Members of the relevant Select Committee, Members received a verbal update on the procedure change. The Committee was informed that the correspondence explained the procedure and provided detailed guidance, along with a guide on how to download or use the new Scrutiny App.

**RESOLVED: That the verbal update on the Scrutiny Call-in Procedure be noted.**

11. **NEW REVIEW TOPIC SELECTION** (*Agenda Item 8*)

Consideration was given to the Committee's potential first review topic. The clerk advised that, following discussions with officers, the following topics had been suggested for the Committee's consideration:

1. Maintenance and improvement of the playground areas of our parks;
2. Practical measures to improve air quality;
  - key players such as public health, planning, transport, use of green infrastructure etc.
3. Improving feedback from residents of social housing and how to improve estates with use of Better Neighbourhood Fund;
  - I.e. 'the voice of tenants and leaseholders'.

Members discussed the proposed topics and suggested additional review topics detailing the experience of residents in crisis within rented homes, and how the Council was regenerating its High Streets. It was agreed that these topics could be considered for a future information report or review, and would be further discussed during the Committee's Work Programme item (agenda item 10).

Members were supportive of the proposed topic number 3, as set out above, and agreed that this should be approved as the Committee's first review. It was suggested that the review could include feedback from social housing tenants, residents associations, street champions, and Ward Councillors. Areas of focus could include the condition of properties prior to a tenant moving in, the addressing of antisocial behaviour and involvement from the Police, accessibility and adaptations for residents with disabilities, and the information provided to landlords and tenants at the beginning of an occupancy.

It was confirmed that the clerk would bring a scoping report on the topic to the next meeting of the Committee.

**RESOLVED: That the topic of 'Improving feedback from residents of social housing and how to improve estates with use of Better Neighbourhood Fund' be approved as the first review of the Select Committee.**

12. **CABINET FORWARD PLAN** (*Agenda Item 9*)

Consideration was given to Cabinet's Forward Plan.

**RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Forward Plan be noted.**

13. **WORK PROGRAMME** (*Agenda Item 10*)

Consideration was given to the Committee's Work Programme for 2021 and beyond.

Members suggested additional topics for information reports, including:

- Hosing tenants in crisis / within rented Council homes;
- How the Council was regenerating its High Streets, particularly following the pandemic;
- Alleygating within the Borough;
- Houses of Multiple Occupancy within the Borough;
- Empty properties within the private sector (and how the Council could work to bring these properties back into use);

It was agreed that the clerk would review the above topics for suitability before bringing an updated work programme to the next meeting of the Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. That the Forward Plan be noted, and;**
- 2. That the clerk review the above topics for suitability before bringing an updated work programme to the next meeting of the Committee.**

The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 8.30 pm.

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Neil Fraser on 01895 250692. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.