

Appendix 3 – Minute extract

ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND REGENERATION SELECT COMMITTEE

14 September 2021



Meeting held at Committee Room 6 - Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge, UB8 1UW

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| | <p>Committee Members Present:</p> <p>Wayne Bridges (Chairman)</p> <p>Alan Chapman (Vice-Chairman)</p> <p>Alan Deville</p> <p>Scott Farley (Opposition Lead)</p> <p>Janet Gardner</p> <p>Carol Melvin (In place of Allan Kauffman)</p> <p>Teji Barnes (In place of Nicola Brightman)</p> |
| 28. | <p>HOUSING STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AND CONSULTATION (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>Debby Weller - Housing Policy and Strategy Manager, introduced a report as part of the consultation process for the draft Housing Strategy 2021/22 to 2025/26. Mark Billings - Head of Housing Options, Homelessness & Standards, and Gary Penticost - Head of Repairs, Engineering, Planned Works & Facilities Management, were also in attendance.</p> <p>The Committee was informed that the wide consultation process had included an online questionnaire which had resulted in, to date, 75 responses. It was felt that, while this figure was accepted as somewhat low, this still constituted a positive level of response that had provided meaningful feedback, as had a number of meetings and workshops with a wide range of service users and other stakeholders. Themes from the responses received included concerns regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• measurable targets;• local strategic approaches;• communication with community groups;• sustainability and infrastructure to accompany development (e.g. provision of schools, GPs, etc);• affordable housing;• time on the housing register before rehousing;• prices of houses versus flats; |

- overcrowding;
- communication with tenants prior to their moving in;
- the Council's role as leader and its responsibility to support landlords and tenants;
- unsustainable debt and concerns regarding Universal Credit;
- support for independent living, with a focus on differently abled or older residents; and
- support for mental health, debt, and drug and alcohol dependency
- work towards DAHA accreditation is seen as positive.

It was confirmed that officers would consider the above when drafting the final report for determination by Cabinet. The Committee was requested to provide further comments for inclusion in that report.

In response to questions from the Committee, officers confirmed that the consultation had included various posts and advertisements on social media, together with an online questionnaire. Online questions had been bolstered by supporting information (e.g. summary detail on affordable housing), and a link to the full strategy had also been provided.

Regarding the strategy's target of ensuring all homes had at least a Band C energy rating, it was acknowledged that ideally all homes would be at Band A. However, many homes were currently substantially lower than Band C, and so the strategy was focussed on addressing the most problematic areas first.

On the matter of tenant/leaseholder workshops and meetings, these had been held in person prior to the pandemic but had since been put on hold. Officers were looking to start these again, with attendees based on a list of residents who had indicated their willingness to participate in such events.

Regarding meeting the Borough's need for more 3 and 4 bed homes, officers advised that they worked closely with planning officers, developers and housing associations to promote housing that would meet such needs as identified by strategic market assessments. Implementation of the strategy would include continuing to explore further innovation in this area.

On the matter of moving tenants into smaller homes, the Committee was advised that the incentive scheme for downsizers had been reviewed, and a new package of financial support had been signed off by the Cabinet Member. This included, but was not limited to, a £2k payment for each bedroom released. It was confirmed that the Council ensured that homes were never statutorily overcrowded.

Homelessness presentations resulting from evictions in the private rented sector had been difficult to accurately forecast, as a result of the pandemic. Following the reopening of the Courts, presentations due to evictions in July had increased, with a slight reduction in August, though numbers remained higher than pre-pandemic. However, some areas of homelessness presentations had declined, e.g. the number of rough sleepers or asylum seeker clients. Other areas had increased, e.g. domestic abuse clients. It was suggested that the Committee could receive a larger report on the topic of homelessness at a future meeting.

Regarding hospital discharges and referrals to the Council, it was confirmed that officers were in regular communication with hospitals to upskill staff to identify patients in need of referral.

It was confirmed that officers were in discussion with the GLA regarding grant funding for addressing Traveller sites, though this was at an exploratory stage.

The Committee thanked officers for their work on the strategy and was pleased to see that the wide consultation had resulted in meaningful responses. The Committee requested that the report to Cabinet include a key focus on bringing empty homes back into use, potentially linked with the Council's Buy Back scheme, building relationships with key stakeholders such as housing associations, and downsizing/upsizing tenancies where required. The Committee also supported the suggestion that a further report on homelessness be considered at a future meeting, and requested that officers provide further detail on how 'affordable housing' was defined.

RESOLVED:

- 1. that the report be noted;**
- 2. that the comments of the Committee be included in the forthcoming report to Cabinet; and**
- 3. that a further report on homelessness be added to the Work Programme for consideration at a future meeting.**