

The Economy, Housing and the Arts Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes

Tuesday 26 March 2019

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Rory Vaughan (Chair), Zarar Qayyum, Rowan Ree, Ann Rosenberg, Adronie Alford

Other Councillors: Councillors Lisa Homan and Andrew Jones

Officers: Joanne Woodward (Chief Planning and Economic Development Officer), Valerie Simpson (Interim Strategic Lead for Environmental Health and Regulatory Services), Dawood Haddadi (LBHF Team Manager, Private Sector Housing), Daniel Miller (Resident Involvement and Service Improvement Manager), Fiona Darby (Assistant Director for Place), Kim Shearer (Community Facilities Officer), Mark Meehan (Chief Housing Officer).

Others: Hanna Whiteman (Studio Hanche), Rosie Whitney-Fish - Dance West, Petrea Owens – Chair of the HF Arts Fest, Flora Herberich – HF Arts Fest Producer, Lauren Clancy, Executive Director and Sylvain Malburet, Bush Theatre and Matt Steinberg, Artistic Director /CEO, Outside Edge Theatre Company.

32. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

34. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2019 were agreed as an accurate record. The chair highlighted that there were two outstanding action

points, namely: i) details of how many S106 officers worked at the Council and ii) further information on the Right to Buy scheme and HRA. The clerk confirmed that this information had been chased and would be circulated as soon as it had been received.

35. ARTS COMMISSION 2019

Councillor Andrew Jones introduced the item and explained the rationale for the Council's development of an Arts Strategy and its relationship with the Industrial Strategy. He stated that the Council had a track record of using commissions as an effective means of engaging with communities and ensuring residents' views were considered as new policies were developed.

Acknowledging the December 2018 PAC meeting and the questions that had arisen, he confirmed the Council had taken stock of the issues which had been raised and a new timetable for the Arts Commission had been drawn up. The Committee were informed that the Arts Commission's programme had not started, the evidence gathering sessions had not been finalised and further thought had gone into its nature and independence.

Councillor Andrew Jones confirmed the purpose of the meeting was to rewind the approach which had been suggested in December 2018 and to explore the types of questions the Arts Commission might explore during the evidence gathering phase. Possible themes included: the parameters of the Arts Commission, arts organisations and their role in land development, as well as performance and rehearsal space. Further topics included the relationship between the Arts and the Industrial Strategy, the historic underfunding of the arts and engagement and inclusion.

Joanne Woodward, Chief Planning and Economic Development Officer, reiterated the points made by Councillor Andrew Jones and confirmed that several new themes had been distilled into a series of questions which were set out in Appendix 1.

Councillor Rowan Ree confirmed he was pleased the ten questions outlined in Appendix 1 of the report referred to engagement with young people and asked how the Commission would be working with local schools. Councillor Andrew Jones confirmed that officers had already spoken to both Primary and Secondary School Heads about the Arts Commission / Industrial Strategy and the Council was thinking about how breakfast clubs might be used as a means of delivering talks on technology and the arts. Councillor Andrew Jones explained that one of the Arts Commission's sessions would focus on what could be done to promote the arts to school children and incorporate topics such as islands of excellence, universal offers, best practice, as well as young people and arts outside the school environment.

Councillor Adronie Alford commented that the Committee had still not received a satisfactory response to questions it had asked in December 2018 related to the Arts Commission's membership and the backgrounds of the

proposed panel members. She reiterated that the Committee knew nothing about them and was concerned that the panel members would be drawn from too a narrow band of expertise. In response, Councillor Andrew Jones confirmed that the Council was seeking to engage with experts from across the arts and it was essential the Commission panel members had experience of grass root issues, venues and inclusion.

Councillor Adronie Alford asked when the Committee would be provided with more information about the Commissioners and noted that the timescales mentioned in the report were very different from what had been proposed in December 2018. Addressing this point, Councillor Andrew Jones confirmed the timescale was linked to resources and it was highly likely the Arts Commission would begin its evidence gathering in May 2019 and conclude this about six months later. The Committee noted that the Arts Commission would be supported by a consultant throughout its work. The Chair confirmed it was important for the Committee to have a better understanding of the Commissioners in the fullness of time and who the expert witnesses would be.

A number of representatives from Arts groups attended the meeting and the Chair invited them to ask questions and participate in the meeting.

Flora Herberich – HF Arts Fest Producer, noted the timescales of the Commission and asked if, following the Commissions' report, whether a new Arts Strategy would be written. Asking a supplementary question, she asked if this was the case, what would happen to support for the arts in this interim period? In response, Councillor Andrew Jones confirmed that arts organisations would continue to be supported throughout the Commission's work and in terms of outcomes, the plan was to refresh the Arts Strategy and align this to a new plan.

Petrea Owens – Chair of the HF Arts Fest, expressed concerns about the notice period for the PAC meeting and the timescales associated with the Commission. Joanne Woodward confirmed that moving forwards, as soon as officers had a clear timetable, this would be disseminated to arts groups.

Action: that officers compile a list of arts organisations within the borough and provide them with a timetable for the Art Commission's work.

Lauren Clancy, Bush Theatre, asked a series of broader questions regarding culture and who defined it, as well as the issue of developing young people into artists. Matt Steinberg, Artistic Director /CEO, Outside Edge Theatre Company commented on the links between the arts, well being and public health, and whether other Committees or forums would have an input into the Arts Commission's work. In response, Councillor Andrew Jones explained there were a number of overlapping areas which included the industrial strategy, education and public health which would need to inform the Commission's work.

Councillor Zarar Qayyum noted the questions contained in Appendix 1 and asked if there was scope to broaden these and include training and

apprenticeships. Councillor Andrew Jones confirmed these areas could be considered. Councillor Ann Rosenberg asked if there was going to be a mechanism to allow residents who wanted to start an arts group, to look at how this might be done and be provided with the appropriate contact details. Joanne Woodard highlighted the Council's website and confirmed that it would include a page on the Arts Commission and how residents could become involved in the future.

Councillor Zarar Qayyum asked what the Council aimed to do with the outputs arising from the Commission. In response, Councillor Andrew Jones explained that these would need to be presented in a report to Cabinet before ultimately a decision was taken on which recommendations to adopt.

The Chair thanked all the attendees for providing their insights. Summarising the Committee's views, he confirmed there was scope to improve future communications about the work of the Arts Commission and for details to be readily available about its scope timeframe and how residents could contribute to the commission. He noted that the Commission was due to start in May 2019 and information needed to be provided on the Commissioners themselves, as well as their breadth of experience. Concluding his remarks, the Chair confirmed the Committee were broadly supportive of the approach set out in the report, the questions detailed in Appendix 1 and an update was requested later in the year.

RESOLVED

That the Committee reviewed and commented on the report.

That officers compile a list of arts organisations within the borough and provide them with a timetable for the Arts Commissions' work

That officers provide a further update later in the year.

36. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING - PROPERTY LICENSING

Valerie Simpson (Interim Strategic Lead for Environmental Health and Regulatory Services) introduced the report which provided an update on the Borough's property licensing schemes and how they were being used to improve housing standards in the private rented sector.

Providing context, Councillor Lisa Homan explained the Private Rented Sector had expanded rapidly in the last 10 years and now accounted for approximately a third of the borough's housing. The Committee noted that to improve standards, a selective licensing scheme had been introduced in 2017 which applied to approximately 20% of the streets in the borough.

Dawood Haddadi (LBHF Team Manager, Private Sector Housing) provided a presentation which covered a number of aspects including:

- Property Licensing
- Risks and Challenges
- Types of Licensing

- Case Studies
- Online applications management system

Councillor Zarar Qayyum asked about mandatory and discretionary licences and what the differences were. In response, Dawood Haddadi explained that the Housing Act 2004 placed a duty on local authorities to licence certain types of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), to improve standards in the private rented sector. This duty of mandatory licensing only applied to HMOs which were occupied by five or more persons forming two or more separate households. In 2016, officers carried out a detailed survey of housing conditions in the private rented sector and found that a significant proportion of properties were substandard and did not meet the criteria for licensing. Following extensive consultation with landlords, residents and other major stakeholders, the Council introduced two discretionary licensing schemes to raise standards in the private rented sector which could operate for up to five years. These were:

- The **additional licensing scheme**, regulated housing standards in HMOs that do not fall under the mandatory licensing criteria. The whole borough was designated as licensing area under this scheme.
- The **selective licensing scheme** was introduced in one hundred streets where the Council demonstrated 'significant' and 'persistent' anti-social behaviour i.e. fly tipping and rubbish accumulation. The scheme requires all private rented properties to hold a selective licence. This included family homes that are rented.

Councillor Zarar Qayyum noted that 250 properties had been inspected so far and asked how long this had taken. In response, Dawood Haddadi explained that inspections had started in 2017. Given the high volume of inspections required, it was noted that officers prioritised their inspections based on the information provided by the applicant and local intelligence that officers received relating to the property.

Councillor Lisa Homan confirmed the Council was taking a proactive approach to property licensing and there were a number of officers working in cross functional teams to support the private rented sector. It was noted that the illegal internal conversion of ex-Council properties was a growth area and raising overall standards was a slow and gradual process.

Councillor Rowan Ree asked which landlords needed a licence. In response, Dawood Haddadi provided details the mandatory element of the licensing scheme and explained the changes which had been made when the additional licensing scheme was introduced. Councillor Rowan Ree asked whether a landlord would be aware they needed to hold an HMO licence to operate. In response, officers confirmed that this was a widely known requirement and potential landlords would be made aware of the requirement at the time of purchase.

The Committee discussed the growing trend of portfolio landlords operating in high value areas and whether there were lots of properties which required a licence which still needed to be found. In response officers provided details of

the validation process which needed to be completed and confirmed that there were local guidelines for housing standards in HMOs and non-HMOs. It was noted that by applying the Council's licensing schemes, officers could ensure that accommodation was maintained above minimal national standards that did not adequately reflect the built form, size, layout and type of HMO that was typically found in the borough.

The Chair asked what happened in those cases where the landlord held a single property rather than a portfolio. In response, officers explained that the licensing process was particularly bureaucratic in the way in which it had been set up and all landlords would need to seek guidance from the PSH team and be guided through the process. The Chair asked whether there was guidance on HMOs on the Council's website. Officers confirmed guidance was available but the website could be reviewed.

Action: That officers review the Council's website information on HMOs and refresh the content as appropriate.

Councillor Ann Rosenberg asked in those cases where a resident was steered towards the PSH and was subsequently made homeless, whether the Council had an obligation to rehouse them. Mark Meehan (Chief Housing Officer) confirmed that in these cases the resident would be steered back in to the housing system.

In relation to the whole licensing scheme, the Chair asked whether there was a known number of properties that officers were working towards processing and if they had identified those landlords which needed to apply for a licence. Dawood Haddadi confirmed that landlords still need to self-identify and there was a six-month transitional phase when mandatory licensing was first introduced in April 2006. Some of the achievements of the selective licensing scheme so far includes:

- First Council to have an intelligent form
- Meet with portfolio landlords
- Portfolio landlord accounts set up
- Licensed 1400 properties
- Worked with landlords to update conditions
- Agreed with RPT to have 100% EICR (Electrical Installation Condition Report)
- Artificial intelligence data gathering on properties and landlords
- Oversees landlords policy
- Able to inspect properties based on risk
- FOIs responded to much faster and easier as a result of Rocktime

Summarising the discussions, the Chair confirmed that it would be useful to learn more about the 100 streets which had been selected for the additional licensing scheme, as well as what guidance was available for smaller landlords. The Chair commented that the effectiveness of the property licensing scheme would become apparent in the next year or so, due to the amount of enforcement activity. Concluding his remarks, the Chair confirmed

that, moving forwards, it was essential that the quality of private rented sector accommodation was improved.

Action: The officers provide a further update on private sector housing – property licensing during the 19/20 Municipal year.

RESOLVED

That the Committee reviewed and commented on the report.

37. DIGITAL INCLUSION ON HOUSING ESTATES UPDATE

Daniel Miller (Resident Involvement and Service Improvement Manager) introduced the report which summarised the work which had been done so far to establish five weekly digital hubs across the borough on council housing estates. The report highlighted the key achievements and set out what the proposed next steps were.

Daniel Miller explained that the original aim of the project aim was to set up five hubs by May 2019. It was noted that this target had been met by January 2019 and weekly digital hubs were taking place at Queen Caroline, Clem Attlee, Charecroft, Wood Lane, and Philpot Estate halls.

The Committee noted that the digital inclusion project linked to the Resident Involvement Strategy 2016-2018 with the objectives of:

- Placing greater control and influence at the hands of our residents, making us more accountable for the housing services they receive.
- More involvement, better involvement
- Promote social inclusion and support thriving and vibrant communities

Daniel Miller confirmed that the cost of the project was £79,048 which had been paid for from section 106 contributions. The Committee noted that funding had been secured until 9 May 2019 and options were being considered to extend this funding for another 12 months.

In terms of the outcomes to date, it was noted that 91 separate sessions had been held across the five locations and 564 council housing residents had been assisted.

Kim Shearer, Community Facilities Officer in the Resident Involvement Team, cited some case studies to illustrate how the scheme had assisted residents, to track medication (by using Excel), become more conversant with using new technology such as Ipads and new telephones, as well as stay in touch with grandchildren in other countries (through What's App). Concluding his initial remarks, Daniel Miller confirmed that moving forwards, the aspiration was to support the development and delivery of the existing five digital hubs and, if possible, compliment these with the addition of three further hubs across the borough.

Councillor Lisa Homan underlined how important the internet had become in shaping everyone's daily lives and why digital literacy was essential.

Councillor Adronie Alford asked if officers had considered holding a session at sheltered housing accommodation. Councillor Lisa Homan confirmed that officers would be providing sessions in these locations in the future. Councillor Rowan Ree agreed that digital inclusion on housing estates was a fantastic initiative and commented that the rise of online universal credit had made digital awareness mandatory. Councillor Rowan Ree asked officers why they thought estates were less well connected than other areas in the borough. In response, officers confirmed that they were currently working on a digital heat map of the borough to identify areas of deprivation, so resources could be targeted more effectively.

Referring to the pie charts which had been included with the report, Councillor Rowan Ree asked officers why there had been more female respondents to surveys. In response, officers confirmed that men were less likely to admit they were not conversant with the latest technology and required further training.

Councillor Rowan Ree asked how the scheme was advertised. In response, officers confirmed that leaflets in libraries and doctors' surgeries had been used, along with door knocking and referrals from Housing officers. Councillor Rowan Ree suggested that a general newsletter to all Council properties could also be used.

Councillor Rowan Ree noted that the scheme was about to enter another round of funding and asked if it was linked to the Industrial Strategy. In response, officers explained that Imperial College was currently conducting a variety of initiatives with older people and there were links here. However, officers acknowledged there was scope to improve the links between digital hubs and the Industrial Strategy in the future. Given the improvements the scheme had already brought, Councillor Rowan Ree commented that it was cost effective and a great way of empowering communities.

Councillor Zarar Qayyum echoed these sentiments and asked how often the hubs met. The Committee noted that each hub met once a week. Officers confirmed that residents often returned for multiple sessions and one to one support was available. Councillor Zarar Qayyum asked how outreach was being conducted and what steps were being taken to ensure those from ethnic minorities (where English was not their first language) or disadvantaged backgrounds were assisted. Officers confirmed that these groups were already over represented in Council Housing but officers were endeavouring to reach all groups.

Councillor Zarar Qayyum asked whether officers had explored different funding streams other than s106 monies and if there was scope to out-source training to external organisations. Daniel Miller explained that officers were investigating a variety of possible funding initiatives including Lottery Funding and outsourcing might be an option in the future.

Councillor Lisa Homan explained that there was a larger digital inclusion picture and apart from Housing, organisations such as Bishops Creighton and the Citizens Advice Bureau had been actively promoting digital awareness.

Councillor Rowan Ree asked if the Council had approached BT or other internet service providers about the scheme. Daniel Miller confirmed that this was something officers were planning to explore in the future.

Summarising the discussions, the Chair confirmed that the Committee were extremely supportive of the scheme and realised the value of each of the hubs. The Committee noted the location of the hubs and why these had been chosen, as well as the advertising which had been done to raise awareness across the borough. The Committee agreed that good outcomes had been achieved and the scheme should receive further funding going forwards.

Action: The Committee agreed good outcomes had been achieved and the scheme should receive further funding in the future.

RESOLVED

That the Committee reviewed and commented on the report.

WORK PROGRAMMING 2018/19

The Chair introduced the item and took the opportunity to thank Committee Members for their hard work during the year. Looking ahead to the 19/20 municipal year, the Chair confirmed that the Committee would like to examine the progress which had been made on the Fire Safety Plus Programme.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.25 pm

Chairman

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