

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

Tuesday 20 July 2021

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Rory Vaughan (Chair), Daryl Brown, Ann Rosenberg, Helen Rowbottom and Adronie Alford

Other Councillors: Councillors Andrew Jones and Guy Vincent

Officers: Karen Galey – (Assistant Director for the Economy), Nicki Burgess – (Business and Enterprise Manager, the Economy), Sam Ridley – (Economic Development Officer High Streets and Markets), Ed Shaylor – (Private Sector Housing Manager), Debbie Ricketts – (Private Housing Enforcement Manager), Valerie Simpson- (Strategic Lead for Environmental Health), Matthew Hooper (Chief Officer Safer Neighbourhoods & Regulatory Services) and Charles Francis (Committee Services)

Representatives from several local business networks

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lisa Homan.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 April 2021 were noted. As this was an informal meeting, minutes will be formally agreed at the next meeting.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No public questions were received.

5. UPDATE ON THE CURRENT AND FUTURE PROVISION OF SUPPORT FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES DURING AND BEYOND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Karen Galey – (Assistant Director for the Economy) introduced the report, which provided an update on the range of activity that the council's Business and Enterprise Team had undertaken to assist local businesses through further Covid-19 restrictions since the last update to the Committee in November 2020. It also outlined the scope of planned business support initiatives until the end of March 2022.

The Chair thanked Karen Galey for the overview and invited Councillor Andrew Jones (Cabinet Member for the Economy) to address committee.

Councillor Andrew Jones began by thanking Karen, her team and Councillor Guy Vincent for all their hard work during what had been one of the most challenging periods for many people in their careers and working lives. Councillor Andrew Jones explained that the Council had been very effective in distributing money and acquiring further funding from the government. The current phase of work now focused on building back better out of the recovery through the Industrial Strategy which had evolved to reflect the post-pandemic landscape.

Commenting further, Councillor Andrew Jones highlighted that there had been a very uneven impact (from the pandemic) on different businesses and industries. As well as a huge impact on the Arts, Cultural Industries and Hospitality Sector which the Council were acutely aware of. He explained that one of the Council's aims was to rebuild and re-energise the Arts and Cultural offer which was key to Hammersmith and Fulham's place making. Further goals included developing the Industrial Strategy, the White City Innovation District and reimagining town centres. While it was acknowledged the pandemic was not over, the action to date demonstrated that the Council had effectively risen to the challenge, and had a coherent plan for supporting different businesses so they could emerge from the pandemic in a strong position. It was noted that part of this centred on the money the Council had received so it could support businesses in the digital shift highlighted in the report.

Closing his initial remarks, Councillor Andrew Jones highlighted there were opportunities for the borough. Given it had one of the highest proportions of residents who had shifted towards hybrid (home) working, and this local focus, which was good news for high streets and local businesses as it emerged from the pandemic.

The Chair invited Guy Vincent, (Local Business Champion) to address the committee. Beginning on downbeat note, Councillor Guy Vincent explained that the Council had received several push backs in relation to grants, as

these were not always issued in a coherent way. The implications of this meant that funding could not always be allocated to all the businesses the Council wished to provide it to. And in some exceptional cases, there were still some businesses which had not benefitted from any grant money. Councillor Guy Vincent highlighted that the Business Grants Team, under Jamie Mullins, had been working extremely hard to release all the grant funding despite these challenges.

Councillor Guy Vincent explained that the pandemic was far from over from an economic perspective. It was noted that a considerable number of smaller businesses had been burdened with debt, either through rents, VAT, corporation tax and the deferment of debts or loans. Therefore, one of the key activities was providing advice and guidance to businesses either directly or through business advice agencies.

On a positive note, Councillor Guy Vincent provided a summary of some of the improvements which were in the pipeline, such as the Hammersmith BID for the King Street renewal, Ikea, as well as the new Town Hall and their cumulative regenerative effects. It was noted North End Road would benefit from the Fulham BID, and a number of smaller high streets across the borough which were well represented at the Business Networks. Wandsworth Bridge Road was cited as an example of innovation and development which had won seed money from the Mayor of London and the potential changes were highlighted.

Councillor Guy Vincent explained that the Business Network was in the process of being relaunched with a more strategic approach and he confirmed that businesses were being proactive in advising the Council what their specific needs were.

The Chair invited Paul Kelly, Chief Helper from I Can Help Your Business, to share his experiences with Committee. He explained that having worked with many Boroughs over a number of years; the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham was one of the more supportive boroughs of small businesses within Greater London and had been proactive in assisting smaller businesses and start-ups. It was noted that the past 18 months had been difficult for smaller businesses, especially those which had missed out on funding streams which were primarily non-rate paying businesses who had not be able to access the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEIS) . In which case, Paul Kelly confirmed the Council had been able to assist some of these businesses with the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) instead.

Paul Kelly confirmed one of the services he provided to the Council was that he operated the business and support helpline which provided general business support within the borough. He explained that at the outset of the pandemic every borough had an issue with reaching out to its community, and not enough businesses knew what support was available to them. However, since then, a significant amount of work had been conducted by the Council's Economic Development Team to improve outreach. He confirmed that looking through the list of all the various projects the Council was

supporting, or had planned, the Authority was one of the leading Councils in London for putting forward a wide range of support options for businesses.

The Chair welcomed the positive feedback, as well as confirmation of how the Economic Development Team had reacted throughout the period. The Chair invited Patricia Bench, Hammersmith BID, to address committee.

Patricia Bench explained that repeated lock downs had affected Hammersmith town centre and particularly the office sectors. She confirmed that Hammersmith BID intended to contact serviced offices in the next few days to see whether the lifting of restrictions on 19 July 2021 had improved the situation or not. In her view, there had been an uplift in the number of office workers, but one of BID's greatest challenges was improving office and retail footfall in Hammersmith. To achieve this, the BID had embarked on a public realm vision (in partnership with Rogers Stirk Harbour) which sought to develop and energise the high street.

The Committee noted that the summer cultural programme was progressing and the screen outside 245 King Street had been used to great effect, showing matches throughout the Wimbledon tournament. A film night was scheduled for 21 July 2021 which was already over-subscribed, along with future coverage of the Olympics and Para-Olympics. This demonstrated there was an appetite for residents to attend outside events which were managed and where they felt safe.

The Shop Local, Shop Safe campaign was ongoing and a Pub Watch had been conducted before restrictions eased on 19 July 2021. Patricia Bench confirmed BID was providing monthly Dr Bike sessions and further work was being conducted on the 15-Minute High Street initiative. Tempering this, Patricia Bench referenced how the recent flooding had impacted on businesses, including Kings Mall, and several hospitality venues which had lost food stocks. Concluding her remarks, Patricia Bench confirmed that the BID had been working successfully with the Business Development Team and Councillor Guy Vincent to support the various Business Networks.

Councillor Adronie Alford asked officers to provide further details on the proposed e-commerce platform, including how it would work, its security and administration. In response, Nicki Burgess (Business and Enterprise Manager), explained the virtual high street would be procured from an established e-supplier which would enable residents to source goods from local shops. It was noted the supplier would be responsible for ensuring transactions were safe and secure (to prevent scamming) and the Business Development Team would be conducting a comprehensive marketing campaign with businesses and residents. The intention was for each business to have its own personal shop page and for there to be as many businesses as possible to ensure it was successful.

Councillor Guy Vincent confirmed the Business Networks supported the virtual high street concept but had already underlined it was essential there was a strong marketing plan to underpin its success. Councillor Adronie Alford expressed concern at how recently established businesses, such a

start ups, could demonstrate their authenticity when they might struggle to provide the requisite information (history) to join the e-commerce platform. In response, Nicki Burgess confirmed a comprehensive vetting process would be undertaken by all participants in the platform and it was anticipated that most of these would also be bricks and mortar businesses.

Councillor Helen Rowbottom asked if there was scope to expand the Business Advice Clinics offer and whether the Council had a good impression of what office space utilisation looked like across the borough. In response, Karen Galey confirmed that one of the objectives of the Industrial Strategy was to source as much affordable work- space as possible (such as the Scale Space at White City). However, due to the high proportion of home working across the borough, it was difficult to gauge current office- space requirements but this was being closely monitored. Making a supplementary point, Councillor Helen Rowbottom remarked it would be interesting to see if anticipated building developments (office space) went ahead given the current climate and what the wider ramifications (rent generation and business bounce-back) for the borough might be. Karen Galey confirmed Hammersmith and Fulham was well placed to benefit from the migration of central London businesses westwards.

Councillor Andrew Jones provided an overview of land development within the borough and confirmed there was demand for more affordable office space than could currently be met. Looking at the soft data and pipeline of planning applications, he noted that developers were looking at the nature of office buildings and propensity for hybrid working but the overall landscape had changed since 2019. Paul Kelly highlighted the use of Meanwhile Space and how containerisation remained an attractive option to smaller businesses. In turn, it was noted that box city environments could be used as a springboard to migrate some businesses towards fixed term, more permanent office spaces and that the demand for temporary office space would remain high in the short to medium term.

In relation to Business Advice Clinics, Nicki Burgess confirmed they had been extremely popular and forthcoming Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) funds would enable the Council to expand the offer.

Councillor Ann Rosenberg noted the overall rise in online shopping but highlighted there was still a need to shop locally occasionally (such as DIY retailers) and asked how these shops would be marketed to residents without internet access. In response, Nicki Burgess confirmed that as part of the e-commerce platform developmental work, a significant amount of outreach and engagement work would be conducted by the Business Development Team with every single retailer on the high street. Karen Galey confirmed teams from across the Council (such as the Licensing Service) would be used to ensure the Council engaged with harder to reach businesses in a cohesive and effective way. Councillor Ann Rosenberg suggested it would be useful if a directory of local businesses was developed as part of the e-commerce project.

The Chair thanked officers for a concise and informative report and all the contributors for their work which had been highlighted during the discussions. The Chair confirmed the broadband improvement initiative had supported hybrid working and commended the work on the cultural recovery. The Chair asked officers to provide further details on the project to support over 50's who had been made redundant over the pandemic period. In response, Karen Galey confirmed the Council had run several sessions (which had been over-subscribed) and a further session was planned in September. The Chair requested an update on how this was progressing later in the municipal year.

Action: That a future update be provided on Support for Over 50's employment

The Chair asked officers to comment further on the high street and town centre development (mentioned in paragraph 3.3 in the report) and its importance in the post-COVID recovery of the borough. In response, Karen Galey confirmed this work had not yet started, but the intention was to examine all the high streets and town centres in the borough through a combination of GLA and Mastercard transactional data to better understand what the current high street looked like. Officers would also speak to all the businesses and stakeholders and conduct a mapping exercise to build up a picture of what was currently happening. The Chair acknowledged it was a significant piece of work that the Committee would look forward to an update when this had progressed further.

Action: That a future update be provided on High Street Development.

Councillor Guy Vincent confirmed there were twenty-six high streets in the borough and while there was an over-arching Industrial Strategy, the local aspects of the strategy had to be driven by local businesses. Councillor Andrew Jones remarked that

it was important small business were given the necessary support to enable them to respond to the new world, business was emerging into, and to enable them to continue to thrive.

Closing the discussion, the Chair thanked everyone who had contributed to the work that had been done. The Committee were impressed with what had been achieved so far, especially the exciting work which was being done to enable small businesses to get on to digital platforms.

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted and commented on the report.

6. IMPROVING PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING THROUGH DISCRETIONARY PROPERTY LICENSING

Ed Shaylor – (Private Sector Housing Manager) introduced the item which set out the steps taken to improve Private Sector Housing through discretionary property licensing.

Ed Shaylor provided a short presentation and the following points were noted:

- The private rented sector in H&F is the sixth highest in London and eighth highest in the country and accounts for 30% of all households (2011 census)
- In 2017, the council introduced two discretionary property licensing schemes which expire in June 2022.
- These schemes require landlords of privately rented houses/flats to be licensed, as follows:
- Additional Licensing: Houses and Flats in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) for HMOs which are NOT Mandatory HMOs. To improve standards of property management and living conditions; and
- Selective Licensing: All rented dwellings in 128 specified streets to reduce antisocial behaviour (ASB) where the levels of ASB, rubbish and noise problems from private renters was above average

Key points:

- Public consultation to gather opinions about re-designating both schemes from June 2022 for a further 5 years.
- Can only include 20% of the borough's private rented addresses in the licensing scheme, without secretary of state approval.
- HMO licensing Borough wide will ensure all areas of the Borough are properly supported by the private sector housing team.

Reasons for Proposal of new licensing Scheme:

1. Survey of private renting tenants in the borough from December to February 2021: Showed significant minorities of tenants who were dissatisfied with their landlords and / or stated deficiencies in safety or amenity standards in their rented property.
2. Preliminary finding from the current consultation: Privately renting tenants have a high level of support for licensing schemes (around 80%).
3. Interventions: Issues relating to antisocial behaviour, noise nuisance, poor waste management and public health nuisance, are easier to address if specific streets are designated. Dedicated resource can be focussed on targeted enforcement interventions in those areas.
4. Housing standards: Inspections have uncovered significant problems which can be improved through licensing conditions, e.g. Lack of fire doors or fire detection systems; undersized kitchen for the number of occupiers; Overcrowding; bedroom too small.
Leasehold ownership: Flats formerly owned by the Council altered internally are sometimes unsuitable for multiple occupancy in terms of space, amenities and pressure on services and utilities

Proposals for June 2022 to June 2027 scheme

- a) Continue discretionary licensing schemes but substantially reduce the number of streets in the Selective Licensing scheme from 128 to 23.
- b) Focus on busy roads, flats above shops, and roads with a significant private rented sector: 4 streets in W6; 4 streets in W14; 9 streets in W12; 5 streets in SW6; and 1 street in NW10.
- c) New scheme will have the same number of addresses as the old scheme, just fewer roads as the roads are larger.
- d) Proposal to prohibit multiple occupation use of leasehold flats where the council is the freeholder - pressure on block infrastructure and nuisance to neighbours

Councillor Helen Rowbottom thanked Ed Shaylor for the presentation and commented that the discretionary property licensing scheme was a welcome initiative. She asked if more details could be provided on how the scheme impacted on tenants, especially those tenants whose current living conditions breached the bare minimum threshold set by the scheme. In response, Ed Shaylor acknowledged the scheme was a balancing act to try and keep accommodation as affordable as possible without eroding standards to such a degree, that people were renting sub-standard accommodation. He confirmed the scheme did allow circumstances where all the rooms in a house or flat could be used as bedrooms, however the minimum standard of a 10m squared room was introduced.

Ed Shaylor confirmed if ancillary accommodation was available for use, such as a communal living room or kitchen, this standard was adjusted to 6.5m squared which was the government minimum standard. Ed Shaylor acknowledged that if landlords had undertaken internal modifications to their properties in good faith, it would then be very difficult to ask them to undo this work.

Asking a follow-up question, Councillor Helen Rowbottom asked about the vision of the scheme in terms of who could live where and under what conditions. In response, Ed Shaylor commented it was an aspiration for rents to decrease and to maintain standards. Ed Shaylor explained that Licensing had other advantages besides increasing the quality of the conditions of the accommodation. These included making it easier to identify rogue landlords, so by publicising the Council's amenity standards and conditions, landlords knew what these were when they applied for a license and so by a process of elimination, the Council could deduce which properties did not have a valid licence.

Councillor Helen Rowbottom enquired if there was a mechanism for tenants to contact the Council, if for example, they did not have a valid gas safety certificate. Ed Shaylor explained any resident could email phs@lbhf.gov.uk or use the Council's Private Sector Housing pages to access further contact details. Ed Shaylor confirmed that in those circumstances where remedial action was required, the Council would provide landlords with a notice period to make good the repairs / issues which required attention.

Councillor Adronie Alford asked for further clarification about how the selective licensing scheme worked. In response, Ed Shaylor explained that the Council had two separate schemes. Selective licensing which was proposed to be on 23 main roads in the borough which was for any flat or house which was rented to a tenant. And houses or flats in multiple occupation (3 unrelated people sharing a property) which the Council proposed to licence across the whole borough. Ed Shaylor confirmed that estimates from 2017 had suggested there were about 4100 of each type of property in the borough (selective and HMO). Currently, the Private Rented Sector Team has licensed 3,000 of each type so are working on finding the remaining 2200 or so properties.

According to the ten-year old census, the rented sector within Hammersmith and Fulham numbered about 27,000 properties and this estimate would be revised by the new census data when it arrived. Ed Shaylor reported that over the next 5 years from June 2022, the Private Rented Sector Team aimed to process 5,000 properties in the new Selective Licensing scheme and 4,000 in the Additional HMO licensing scheme.

Councillor Adronie Alford asked whether it was Council policy to not allow any form of sub-letting in council leasehold flats. Ed Shaylor confirmed that this only applied to sub-letters to sharers of 3 or more and this sought to reduce the pressure on the infrastructure of some of the more aged properties within the borough. Details were provided on the different types of properties and the iterations this had on the licence. Ed Shaylor confirmed the exact details of those tenants which might qualify for a waiver was still under discussion, and the full details would be discussed at Cabinet in December 2021.

Councillor Adronie Alford asked for further clarification about what constituted an under sized kitchen. In response, Ed Shaylor confirmed that this was 4m squared (for up to 4 people) with a further square metre added for each additional person after that. Asking a further question, Councillor Alford explained the paperwork to licence an individual property was complicated and, citing anecdotal evidence, mentioned that the assistance provided by the Council could have been better. Ed Shaylor confirmed that improvements had been made and now licensing officers took telephone and email addresses from people in difficulty and would follow up these accordingly.

Councillor Adronie Alford asked for further details to be provided about the enforcement activities which had been undertaken against rogue landlords. In response, Ed Shaylor explained that each individual case was different, but it was in the public interest to concentrate resources on those landlords with multiple properties with significant degrees of non-compliance, so a clear deterrent was sent.

The Chair endorsed the selective licensing scheme and asked for further clarification on the reduction of the number of streets where this would be applied and what this would mean in practice. Ed Shaylor confirmed the reduction was significant from 128 streets to 23. The Council would be

focusing on areas which had been problematic in the past so resources could be concentrated and used most effectively.

The Chair asked how frequently the Council undertook surveys of tenants (in relation to waste collection and complaints arising from non-collection) and how the Department addressed these types of thematic issues. Ed Shaylor confirmed that consultation feedback was not particularly strong, and it was often complaints data or member casework that was used to inform issues with landlords. He explained private dwellings were one of the most highly regulated areas, in terms of public health and housing regulations, so there were a significant number of powers the Council could use. Where the Licensing scheme was helpful, was that it enabled the Private Rented Sector Housing Team to join up resources with law enforcement, planning enforcement and street cleansing to target and tackle problem areas as specific projects. It also allowed the Private Rented Sector Team to, through a process of elimination, uncover those landlords which had not applied for licences.

Summing up the discussions, the Chair thanked Ed Shaylor and his team for all the work which had been done and confirmed the Committee looked forward to reviewing the final proposals when they were finalised in December 2021.

Action: That the Committee review and comment on the Cabinet report

RESOLVED

That the Committee reviewed and commented on the report.

7. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 9th November 2021.

Meeting started: 6.30 pm
Meeting ended: 8.18 pm

Chairman

Contact officer: Charles Francis
Committee Co-ordinator
Governance and Scrutiny
☎: 07776 672945
E-mail: charles.francis@lbhf.gov.uk