

**London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
The Economy, Housing and the Arts Policy
and Accountability Committee
Minutes**



Tuesday 9 November 2021

PRESENT

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

Other Councillors: Councillor Lisa Homan

Jonathan Pickstone – (Strategic Director The Economy), Daniel Miller – (Head of Community Engagement /Resident Involvement & Service Improvement Manager), Magda Goncalves – (Resident Involvement and Governance Manager), Matt Rumble – (Strategic Head for Regeneration and Development), Labab Lubub – (Development Programme Manager), Richard Buckley – (AD Resident and Building Safety Housing) and Charles Francis – (Committee Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Andrew Jones.

2. ROLL - CALL AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2021 were noted. As this was an informal meeting, minutes will be formally agreed at the next meeting.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions were received.

4i) UPDATE FROM JONATHAN PICKSTONE -

The Chair welcomed Jonathan Pickstone, (the new Strategic Director, The Economy) to his first Economy, Housing and the Arts Policy and Accountability Committee meeting.

Jonathan Pickstone introduced himself and provided an update on recent activities within the Economy Department. Further to the Business Support update at the July meeting, he explained that a range of initiatives had been launched to support small independent businesses across the borough. These included an e-commerce platform to allow businesses to compete against larger online suppliers, assistance to help small businesses successfully bid for Council contracts and support to help them to become digitally enabled.

Additional workstreams included: a set of hardship recovery grants, measures to improve high street footfall and a fund that had been created to bring local businesses and community groups together to work on projects such as lighting / floor displays and well as local events. It was noted that £200k had been won from the European Social Fund to assist residents access training and employment.

In relation to Housing, Jonathan Pickstone explained the Stock Condition Survey (covering every tenanted home in the next two years) had started in October 2021 which would inform the Council's capital investment in Housing for the next 12 years. Officers were also collecting data on ways to reduce carbon emissions, as well as, ensuring the Council met its health and safety obligations.

Updates were provided on the work being done to resettle Afghan refugees, the Disabled Peoples Strategy (including the Disabled Peoples' Housing Group) and the focus of the Capital works Programme - fire doors, digital warden systems and video-controlled access to all sheltered housing.

In relation to Estates Based Services, Jonathan Pickstone explained that procurement for a new grounds maintenance contract had been concluded and an announcement would be made in the near future. It was also noted that Pinnacle Cleaning and Caretaking contract had achieved its highest performance standards in the last 3 years.

Concluding his remarks, Jonathan Pickstone provided brief summaries for the Council's Delivery of Affordable Homes and Fire Safety Housing reports which were considered in due course.

5. RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT UPDATE

Daniel Miller (Head of Community Engagement /Resident Involvement & Service Improvement Manager), gave a brief introduction and asked Magda Goncalves – (Resident Involvement and Governance Manager), to provide a presentation on the environmental improvement projects (EIP) delivered between 2020 and 2021, where over £500k of improvements had been undertaken on council housing estates. The presentation covered what EIP were, the levels of investment and the projects funded by the investment group. Further topics included: the 2020/21 Place Environmental Rejuvenation Programme Bids, updates on Neighbourhood Improvement Project (NIP) Bids in the North and South of the borough and the successful implementation of the H&F Urban Ecology Trail.

In the second part of the presentation, Daniel Miller gave an overview of Housing Involvement work. Information was provided on the Resident Involvement Strategy 2019 to 2022, the changing nature of involvement and engagement since the Covid-19 pandemic and current projects being worked on. Finally, information was provided on future activities and workstreams.

The Chair welcomed the comprehensive updates and acknowledged that a significant amount had been achieved since the last update.

Councillor Adronie Alford asked a series of questions. In relation to the sustainability of EIPs, she enquired if these were going to last and how they were going to be maintained. Turning to anecdotal evidence, she raised drug dealing which had occurred at St Peter's Terrace and enquired whether planters and furniture would be removed to curtail this. In response, Daniel Miller confirmed that a joined-up approach was being taken and most of the projects were delivered by Idverde, who was also the Council's grounds maintenance contractor. This meant it was important sustainable solutions were delivered which dovetailed with existing maintenance plans. With regards to longevity, Daniel Miller confirmed that the wood used for planters, seating and playground equipment was tanned wood which had an estimated shelf-life of 15 years.

Addressing the St Peter's Terrace issues, Daniel Miller confirmed that a Housing Management plan was in place to address these issues and the area of concern did not relate to the NIP project undertaken there.

Action: Daniel Miller to provide Cllr Adronie Alford with an update on the St Peter's Terrace issues.

Councillor Adronie Alford commented that she had recently attended a Sheltered Housing Forum meeting and she was concerned about the reduced number of resident attendees. She asked whether a decline in numbers was representative of other forums. In response, Daniel Miller confirmed that this was not representative of other forums and he cited the Housing Representative Forum which had recently been attended by 20 resident representatives (which was an average number). However, he acknowledged attendance was important and officers were looking at ways to support representatives attend forums in greater numbers in the future, such as through more support to access online meetings and exploring the use of hybrid meetings in the future at a time when it's safe to do so.

Councillor Adronie Alford acknowledged that officers were acting on a variety of involvement fronts and queried whether resources were being spread too thinly as a result. Daniel Miller confirmed he had a fully staffed team, and everyone had their own respective responsibilities. He highlighted the important role played by Block Champions and confirmed Officers reviewed current ways of working and the involvement structure and made changes as and when necessary.

Councillor Adronie Alford asked what support was in place for the gap sites and small blocks which were prone to suffering from anti-social behaviour. In response, Daniel Miller confirmed a Block Champions Forum had been established, so if residents

wished to join these as part of the block champions forum, their input would be welcomed.

Action: Daniel Miller to provide further information on the Block Champions to Cllr Adronie Alford.

Councillor Helen Rowbottom welcomed the progress that had been made. She asked what routes were used to engage those groups which did not have a strong TRA. Daniel Miller confirmed that during consultations, all affected residents were written to and postal and online feedback was also sought. The Resident Involvement Team also undertake door knocking as well as phone calls to verify that the improvements being made had resident buy-in. The Team were also using text messages to get important messages out to residents.

Councillor Helen Rowbottom asked whether it was a competitive bid process or if projects were initiated if there had been enough interest. In response, Daniel Miller explained the criteria the Investment Group had put in place to ensure that no specific site/s dominated funding streams and underlined the importance of achieving community buy-in and sustainability with these projects. Magda Goncalves reiterated the importance of feedback and highlighted that all consultations encouraged new suggestions from residents to keep ideas fresh and innovative.

The Chair, Councillor Rory Vaughan, welcomed the considerable number of projects that had been completed, the diverse range of active forums and the work which had been conducted on estates. He asked if officers reviewed projects to assess their impact in terms of whether the facilities were well used (in the case of playgrounds) and what parameters were used to gauge the success of a project. In response, Daniel Miller confirmed that as many of these projects were very recent, assessing the effectiveness of the projects was the next stage officers would be looking at. A lesson learnt at this stage was to ensure that communities were engaged throughout the project and that by its conclusion, the outcomes reflected the groups original vision. Magda Goncalves confirmed the Authority now had a pro-forma in place which was used to collect data at the end of the project to look at what had gone well and what aspects might be improved in the future.

The Chair asked if successful projects were used a catalyst to engage even more residents. Daniel Miller confirmed that playgrounds were good examples of pocket improvements within blocks which residents reacted to and wanted transposed across whole estates. It was also noted that when ball courts were installed, there was further resident interest and engagement when murals (which sought their design input) were integrated within a project.

Councillor Adronie Alford asked if checks were made on projects, 18 months to two years after their conclusion to ensure they were sustainable. In response, Daniel Miller confirmed the Council were developing a community asset register which would list all local facilities, including their condition. In addition, the Council was working closely with Idverde to ensure projects such as community gardens were revitalised. Magda Conclaves highlighted the community fund which residents could also bid to use from Idverde.

Councillor Homan, Cabinet Member for Housing, commented that she had asked similar questions around the issue of sustainability and would continue to do so, to ensure that projects delivered value for money. She explained that engagement was at the heart of the Administration in terms of doing things with residents and not to them.

Councillor Lisa Homan thanked those residents which had put many hours work into making projects successful through their commitment to the forums and service improvement groups. She welcomed the scrutiny of Council performance by residents and agreed with the Committee that the move to online provision (necessitated by Covid) had been a challenge. However, aspects such as the voting buttons used at Resident's Voice had worked brilliantly. Councillor Lisa Homan formally thanked the Resident Involvement Team for the innovation they had brought to resident engagement during the pandemic period. Closing her remarks, Councillor Lisa Homan referred to gap sites and the block champions and the importance of ensuring these areas were engaged.

Concluding the item, the Chair underlined the value of resident-led projects evolving to co-production, the importance of sustainability and given how recent some of the project work was, that a comprehensive evaluation process would take place at some point in the future.

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted and commented on the report.

6. UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S DELIVERY OF AFFORDABLE HOMES

Matt Rumble – (Strategic Head for Regeneration and Development), introduced the item which provided an update on the Council's delivery of affordable homes. It was noted that until relatively recently, the Council's ability to deliver housing was restricted by the government caps on the way the Council was able to borrow to deliver new homes. In late 2018, central government announced the scrapping of the HRA debt cap, which meant councils had greater freedoms to borrow to invest in existing and new housing stock.

Matt Rumble provided a short presentation. This covered: the Building Homes and Communities Strategy 2019 and its objectives, and the development and approval / financing process. Information was provided on the Defend Council Homes Policy, the Partnership Programme, and: the Education City programme, the White City Central project, the operational net zero carbon construction elements and Spring Vale Development.

Councillor Adronie Alford asked officers to provide further details on the funding / costs of the development programme. In response, Matt Rumble confirmed the total costs were £500 million. He explained that the Council borrowed from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), how these mechanisms worked; and how in the long term, the rent generated from the new homes paid off the remaining debt. It was also noted that the

Council also bid for grant money from the GLA to offset the cost of delivering affordable homes and used Right to Buy money in the same way.

Councillor Adronie Alford asked officers to define what a Youth Zone was and provide details on its size and sustainability. In response, Matt Rumble confirmed this was a designated space for young people to engage in positive activities (incorporating a multi-use games sports area – MUGA - on the roof) with various activity rooms, with the total floor space mirroring the MUGA. In relation to its use / viability, Matt Rumble explained that On Side – the provider – needed to produce a business plan which was then signed off by the Council's Education's Commissioning Team.

Councillor Adronie Alford asked for clarification on the total number of homes for the Hartopp and Lannoy site. In response, Matt Rumble confirmed this was for 134 homes.

Councillor Adronie Alford asked for further details to be provided on the breakdown of house sizes within the projected 134 homes and also the garage site. Matt Rumble explained that officers determined the housing needs of the borough from the Housing Register and sought to create a mix within new developments to meet this need. In relation to the garage site, he explained that officers were about to start a consultation with residents about a small development on that site.

The Chair, Councillor Rory Vaughan, welcomed that there was a significant amount of genuinely affordable housing being delivered by the programmes which had been highlighted. He asked if more detail could be provided on how the climate emergency had been factored into new homes. Matt Rumble confirmed the Council was designing new buildings (net carbon zero) which far exceeded the current specifications laid down by the Mayor of London, which meant that there would be a target of reducing carbon by 45% in all new developments. In relation to the Council's Climate and Ecology Strategy, Matt Rumble confirmed that officers would be looking at 3 example path finder projects and to design these (using new and emerging technologies) to operational net zero carbon which would progress overall carbon reduction to between 80% and 85% on these developments. Matt Rumble confirmed the Hartopp and Lannoy would become the exemplar scheme across London using a net zero carbon approach.

Councillor Ann Rosenberg stated she was impressed by the building projects which had been mentioned but asked what the impact would be on the waiting list for Council accommodation. Matt Rumble explained that over the next 8 to 10 years, the Council aspired to deliver approximately 1800 new homes. Of these, approximately 1100 were designated to be affordable. He confirmed that the current Housing Register, numbered about 2800, but this would fluctuate, and so it was clear that the affordable housing programme would have a significant impact.

Councillor Lisa Homan acknowledged that a significant proportion of this work was met by Councillor Andrew Jones's portfolio, but remarked she was pleased that in the last few years, the Authority had started to focus on delivering more Council homes. Referencing local lettings plans, Councillor Lisa Homan explained this was something the Administration had been keen to introduce, as it meant the people in most need were given the first opportunity to bid. She remarked that the supply of affordable homes which were in the pipeline would go a long way to help ease the register.

Concluding her remarks, Councillor Lisa Homan commented on Hartopp and Lannoy and cited it as good example to turning a very difficult situation a few years ago into a positive one which embraced the themes which had been discussed: affordability, new technology, defend council homes and the importance of resident engagement.

The Chair explained he was encouraged that so much development was in the pipeline to address the need for affordable homes. He was glad that sustainability, the response to the climate emergency and resident engagement and involvement had been incorporated into the project planning. He confirmed the Committee would keep a watching brief on the supply of affordable homes and he looked forward to seeing the delivery of new homes soon.

RESOLVED

That the Committee reviewed and commented on the report.

7. FIRE SAFETY HOUSING

Richard Buckley – (AD Resident and Building Safety Housing) introduced the report which provided an overview of the fire safety arrangements in place, on-going monitoring and reporting arrangements and planned capital fire safety works.

He explained that officers met with London Councils on a bi-monthly basis and these meetings were also attended by the Department for Levelling Up, GLA and Fire Brigade. During these meetings, the London Fire Brigade provided an update on the status of large buildings and their evacuation procedures. It was noted that London had 60% of all the tower blocks nationally (of 6 blocks or above). He explained that one London Borough with 14 tower blocks was incurring costs of £450k per month in waking watch which in many boroughs charged to leaseholders. Whereas in Hammersmith and Fulham, it was noted that the Administration had decided not to charge any leaseholders for these costs (or any associated fire safety costs).

Details were provided on accountabilities and the implications of the Buildings Safety Bill which was passing through Parliament. At this stage, it was still uncertain whether the height of tower blocks would be altered from 18 metres to 11 metres which would significantly increase the number of buildings officers would need to register. The roles and responsibilities of the Buildings Safety Bill regulator were provided and the requirement for all buildings of 18 meters or over to have a safety case file were discussed. It was apparent that the Buildings Safety Bill increased duties of care and held responsible persons / bodies to account.

Richard Buckley confirmed a Fire Safety Management system was in place to ensure buildings were safe for residents. It was noted that over 1,500 fire risk assessments had been conducted for buildings of 6 storeys or above and these were reviewed annually, as were higher risk buildings such as sheltered housing and hostels. The Committee were reassured that when fires took place, processes and procedures were reviewed to see if any new learning had emerged. It was noted that as part of planned works all fire detection systems would be upgraded as part of an overall electrical upgrade over the next 5 years.

Information was provided on the Fire Safety Plus Scheme and fire safety measures which the Administration had committed to under its Capital Programme in 2018. The update also included details of the works which had been conducted in Edward Woods (sprinkler systems) and Drake and Shackleton (sprinkler, fire detection systems and new evacuation plans). Richard Buckley confirmed the Council had its own specific Fire Safety Team for delivering works and Bazaars were currently conducting an independent safety audit of the Council.

Making initial remarks, Councillor Lisa Homan commented it was vital that all Councillors were aware of the work which was being done on fire safety, as all Councillors were responsible for ensuring residents were safe. As Cabinet Member for Housing, she explained she had fortnightly updates which provided rolling updates of how works were progressing. Given the challenging situation, Councillor Lisa Homan was also encouraged by how the Council was proactively adapting to Government guidance and the recommendations arising from the ongoing Grenfell enquiry.

Councillor Helen Rowbottom asked how the fire safety priorities dovetailed with the Council's sustainability and ecological implications of its housing stock. In response, Richard Buckley explained that all capital projects were scoped to PAS 2035 standards before relevant Cabinet Members decided whether to agree the progression of specific projects. Richard Buckley highlighted there were cost implications of adopting a sustainable and ecological approach but works needed to be future proofed and this was something that needed to be allowed for.

Councillor Adronie Alford asked how much the rain screen and cladding removal from Edwards Woods block would cost. Richard Buckley confirmed this work was estimated to cost between £25 and £30 million which had been set out in Cabinet report which was approved in September 2021. He confirmed the Council had applied to the Building Safety Fund to assist with these costs and would be looking to apply for any grants, from a climate change perspective to also help.

Referring to Edward Woods, Councillor Adronie Alford noted that the Council did not have a waking watch, but did use fire wardens, and asked if this was 24 hours per day. In response, Richard Buckley confirmed that fire wardens patrolled 24 / 7 and this work involved checking that the means of escape were not blocked with any combustibles or items such as bikes or scooters which would hamper egress. It was noted that these fire wardens were Council trained and so were fully conversant with their respective blocks and patrol parameters.

Councillor Adronie Alford noted that Appendix 1 described the panel risk as high and asked how this was evaluated. In response, Richard Buckley confirmed the Council was responsible for 27 buildings with panelling and a list of ascending risk had been drawn up. Risk factors included the height of buildings, the amount of cladding and what the cladding was made from. Asking a supplementary question, Councillor Adronie Alford asked when officers anticipated they would start to remove the panels. Richard Buckley confirmed that in many cases, contracts had been awarded for the removal, but contractors (and the use of expert contractors) were now assessing what the most effective method would be to remove the panelling safely.

The Chair, Councillor Rory Vaughan, noted the information that had been provided on the appointment of building safety managers and asked what plans were in place to ensure residents were kept aware of any new fire safety measures and any actions they needed to take. In response, Richard Buckley confirmed the Council had two building safety managers at present, and conversations were still ongoing nationally as to their function and competency. In terms of resident engagement, it was noted that the Fire Residents Action Group (FRAG) still existed (with an extended safety remit) and a key element of the Building Safety Bill was for every building to have its own bespoke strategy. In relation to notifying residents and ensuring they were kept informed, Richard Buckley confirmed this was achieved by using a combination of the Housing Representatives Forum, FRAG (issues such as charging electric scooters in hallways and BBQs) and the Residents Engagement Team. Richard Buckley also highlighted there were plans to roll out fire / building safety awareness training for residents via Zoom, webinars or in some cases, in person

Councillor Lisa Homan commented in relation to the Fire Brigade, that with the numbers of Council properties in the borough, there would inevitably be fires (with most being small and contained). When there were fires of consequence, she confirmed she was notified and advised about the incident. However, despite all best efforts, it was impossible to eliminate all fire risk from every property and the Council needed to mitigate this where it could.

Concluding the item, the Chair, Councillor Rory Vaughan, stated he was pleased the Council was taking a proactive approach and doing its best to get ahead of the curve in relation to recommendations arising from the Grenfell tragedy. He underlined the importance of residents being fully engaged with emerging guidance and confirmed the Committee wished to revisit the topic to monitor progress in the future.

RESOLVED

That the Committee reviewed and commented on the report.

Meeting started: 6.30 pm
Meeting ended: 9.00 pm

Chair

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