



London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Economic Regeneration, Housing and the Arts Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes

Annex E -
Printed minutes
07th-Jul-2015
19.00 Economic
Regeneration
Housing and the
Arts PAC

Tuesday 7 July 2015

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Daryl Brown, Alan De'Ath (Chair) and Lucy Ivimy

Other Councillors: Councillors Lisa Homan and Andrew Jones

Officers: Craig Bowdery (Scrutiny Manager), Mike England (Director for Housing Options Skills & Economic Development) and Toby Graves (Head of Housing Advice & Assessment)

63. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Connell, Fennimore and Phibbs.

64. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Alan De'Ath declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was part of the Home Buy Scheme. He explained that he would remain in the room but not participate in this part of the discussion for agenda item 5.

65. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd June 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

66. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED –

That Cllr Lucy Ivimy be elected as Vice-Chair for the 2015/16 municipal year.

67. **HOUSING STRATEGY SECOND PHASE OF CONSULTATION ON THE COUNCIL'S HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME; TENANCY STRATEGY; AND HOME BUY ALLOCATION SCHEME DRAFT DOCUMENTS**

Cllr Lisa Homan introduced a report from the Lead Director for Housing outlining proposals for new Council housing policies. She explained that at the beginning of the year, the overarching Housing Strategy was open for consultation and many comments were received. The Strategy had now been agreed and many of the comments submitted were now reflected in the subsidiary policies on housing allocation, the tenancy strategy and the Home Buy scheme. Comments on the proposals were therefore invited from councillors and members of the public, with the consultation due to end on 16th September 2015.

Cllr Homan explained the historical context of the proposed new policies, as prior to May 2013 there had been over 11,000 people on the housing register. Following changes made by the previous administration, over 10,000 people were removed. There were currently around 2,000 people on the list, and the new proposed policies were intended to increase this number further. However due to limited availability of housing in the Borough, only around 600 homes were being allocated each year. Given the supply could not keep up with demand, it would therefore be important to strike a fair balance to determine who was eligible for housing.

Officers summarised the report and outlined the key features of each proposed new policy and invited comments:

Housing Allocation Scheme

Noting the preferential weighting for residents making a defined community contribution, a member of the public asked whether this might potentially discriminate against disabled people. Officers explained that there were proposals within the policy to address this and ensure that disabled residents who met the other criteria would still be placed into Band 2. Following a public question, officers also confirmed that there was no grading of community contribution with all work (paid or voluntary) treated the same. The only exception was for members of the armed forces, who had separate provisions under national legislation. If a resident lost their job whilst on the register, then they would move down to Band 3, however if they had been allocated a home this would be a secure tenancy that was not dependent on maintaining the same circumstances. Officers also confirmed that once approved, the banding and priorities would become a statutory requirement for the Council to comply with, and as such there would not be instances of lower priority residents 'jumping the queue'. There might however be instances when an available home is not suitable for someone on the highest Band (for example, if it were too small or large), in which case the home would be allocated to the highest ranked suitable tenant. It was noted that previously housing allocation

schemes had not been the most robust in terms of ensuring priority order was adhered to, with the arrangements under Locata being highlighted.

Members of the public asked whether the priority bands would take into account factors such as poor or criminal behaviour. Officers explained that there would be some ability to disqualify people if there was clear evidence of antisocial or criminal behaviour. However there would not be an automatic expulsion from the housing register with the circumstances of each case judged on its merits. Disqualifying someone from being entitled to council housing was a sensitive matter and was an action that would not be taken without careful consideration in a case conference. The Cabinet Member reported that she had sat in on a case conference previously, and confirmed that all factors were carefully considered.

In response to concern expressed about Looked After Children (LACs) and young people, officers explained that all children coming out of Council care would be covered by a quota and that there were around 30 flats allocated each year for this purpose. For homeless young people under the age of 18, Children's Services provided assistance and those over 18 would be subject to the same requirements and banding as other residents. For vulnerable residents with Special Education Needs or in need of other support, the Borough also had a good range of supported accommodation.

Tenancy Strategy

Officers presented a summary of the proposed new strategy, a key component of which being a return to lifetime tenancies, with some fixed terms tenancies for particular circumstances. For example a Local Lettings Plan had been established for homes at the Edward Woods building specifically for new teachers as these homes were not suitable for families.

The Committee asked about how the Strategy would be defining 'teachers' and whether this would be anyone working in education or not. Officers explained that anyone with the TTS qualification working in one of the borough's schools (therefore not for private schools) would be eligible.

Members highlighted that there was a particular shortage of larger properties within the Council's housing portfolio, and asked therefore whether fixed terms tenancies should be considered when a family's children moved away. Officers acknowledged that this had been considered and would be one way of ensuring there were more family homes available for those on the register. However on balance it had been agreed that providing residents with secure tenancies was more important. Officers also reported that under-occupation of homes was an issue where they thought the Council could do more. The Council currently offered £2,000 per room when residents agreed to downsize their home and it was suggested that the incentives should be developed further. Members of the public present argued that the public health benefits of secure, long-term tenancies outweighed any other issues as they promoted engagement with the community and dissuaded anti-social behaviour.

The Cabinet Member also confirmed that if the new Strategy was agreed, the intention was to write to all existing short-term tenants to give them the option to convert their tenancies to lifetime arrangements.

Home Buy Allocation Scheme

Officers presented the proposed Scheme and Cllr Jones (Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Regeneration) explained that through the planning system there was currently many homes available at discount market rate (around 80% of market value), with hundreds more currently being built. However the Council wanted to provide affordable homes for those with lower household incomes of around £20-40,000. Land values in the Borough were extremely high which meant that even at 80% of market value, these homes were out of reach for many residents. The new Scheme therefore proposed intermediate level homes to provide truly affordable home ownership.

Members of the public asked how the Council could control people buying affordable homes and selling them on quickly to make significant profits and reducing the overall level of affordable housing. Cllr Jones explained that homes purchased at discount market rates would have covenants applied to them so that if they were sold, it would have to be at the same discount market rate as it was purchased.

Noting the priority afforded to certain occupations, members of the public asked why Police officers should be singled-out to be high priority and whether this should be expanded to all public sector workers. Officers explained that this was likely a historic provision, which could be reviewed as part of the consultation. Cllr Homan acknowledged that this should be reviewed and commented that Police officers would likely qualify through other criteria anyway.

The Committee thanked officers for their presentation and noted that the consultation was open until 16th September and that members of the public were invited to respond.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

68. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The dates of future meetings were agreed as follows:

- Tuesday 8th September 2015
- Tuesday 3rd November 2015
- Tuesday 1st December 2015
- Tuesday 19th January 2016
- Tuesday 8th March 2016
- Wednesday 20th April 2016

Meeting started: 7.00 pm

Meeting ended: 8.30 pm

Chairman

Contact officer: Craig Bowdery
Scrutiny Manager
Governance and Scrutiny
☎: 020 8756 2278
E-mail: craig.bowdery@lbhf.gov.uk