

# Report from Renewal and Recreation PDS Committee

**Chairman: Cllr. Michael Rutherford**

**Vice-Chairman: Cllr. Suraj Sharma**

The Committee met five times this municipal year. Each meeting has scrutinised the reports for decision by the Renewal, Recreation and Housing Portfolio Holder and considered policy development for key areas across the portfolio. Alongside the elected Members on the PDS Committee, we were also pleased to welcome a co-opted member from the Bromley Youth Council, Mr. Sheldon Thomas. Through this past year, the RR&H PDS Committee has scrutinised a range of proposals and performance metrics and added further scrutiny to the planning service.

The Committee have monitored performance against the Renewal, Recreation and Housing strategic outcomes for the municipal year. In its June 2018 meeting considered the housing part of the portfolio plan to be insufficiently detailed, and targets insufficiently ambitious and sent it back for revision. It was therefore pleased to support an updated plan and key performance indicators at the September 2018 meeting.

Topics the PDS Committee have focused on include:

## **Town Centres**

**Bromley:** The RR&H PDS Committee remained supportive of improvements to the public realm in Bromley to encourage footfall and the vibrancy of our town centre. However it scrutinised proposals to ensure value for money. As part of this, it rejected a recommendation to build canopies at the current cost, which it was pleased the portfolio holder upheld. It also recommended that excess profit from new commercial units was used to support the maintenance and enhanced cleaning of the pedestrianised High Street, a recommendation that was also upheld.

**Beckenham:** The Committee was grateful for the successful completion of the work of its sub-committee, the Beckenham Town Centre Working Group. Throughout the duration of the Beckenham High Street improvements, it has successfully engaged businesses and residents in the process. The works have been completed successfully.

**Orpington:** Scrutiny was given to an opportunity paper on how various sites in Orpington could increase housing stock and improve the town centre. The committee supported the proposals but expressed concern about the lack of pace. It also asked that a working party was set up for the Framework Plan, including representatives of Orpington 1st BID, Orpington College and traders. The recommendation was approved.

**Penge:** The committee remained supportive of the council's improvements to Penge town centre, including to the High Street and shopfronts.

## **Housing**

Affordable housing: The Committee scrutinised a number of schemes to increase the supply of affordable housing in the borough including More Homes Bromley and the use of Section 106 funds through housing associations. It successfully requested that the Portfolio Holder take responsibility for achieving more affordable housing by being a member of the Housing Transformation Board.

Temporary housing: The Committee also analysed performance and proposals for temporary accommodation and was concerned about the decrease in available housing with demand increasing. It requested further involvement in scrutinising such schemes and ensuring performance levels of all schemes were high.

## **Leisure and Culture**

Leisure: The Committee is supportive of the council's work to reduce the costs of services without impacting quality. It was therefore pleased with the value for money provided by the new leisure contract which saves council taxpayers' money without affecting service quality.

Libraries: The Committee is also supportive of improving services at the borough's libraries. It was therefore pleased that the new Penge library was delivered under budget and is providing a popular service. It has also supported the proposed West Wickham Leisure Centre and Library, which will also deliver new homes.

## **Planning**

The performance of the planning service was assessed, with a particular focus on the performance of planning enforcement. The committee also scrutinised planning appeals, considering those appeals received and decided and the costs incurred by the council. As a result of ongoing concerns about planning enforcement, it called additional scrutiny at the committee and was pleased that surgeries had been set up to highlight problematic cases.

Scrutiny was applied to the Building Control service and options for its future. It was supportive of plans to undertake a full review of the service in order to achieve an improved service. However it considered it too soon to agree a shared service approach and that commissioning should be considered as part of that review.

The Committee has been tenacious in ensuring that the council takes a proactive approach to private sector buildings with flammable cladding. It has successfully lobbied for officers to speak to ministers to clarify the legal position and take appropriate steps to make the surrounding area of one building more safe.

## **Scrutiny of the Portfolio Holder**

The Committee scrutinised the portfolio budget, requesting that officers and the portfolio holder explained areas where spending was increasing. Particular attention was given to ensure that where third parties run council services, the quality remains unchanged or better and that cost reduces throughout the contract.

The Committee also analysed the contract register twice throughout the year, challenging on specific contracts to ensure that contracts avoid being managed effectively and there is suitable foresight of where new contracts are required.

### **Presentations**

The Committee is grateful to Crystal Palace Community Trust and Countryside for visiting and presenting to it.

### **Proposals for the forthcoming year**

The Committee considers the Transformation Programme to be a great opportunity to cut the costs of homelessness and temporary accommodation while providing our residents with better and more certain housing. It encourages the council to take more steps to increase the affordable housing stock. In particular it encourages further use of Section 106 payments to build affordable homes with housing associations, as outlined at its November 2018 meeting.

### **Thanks**

I would like to thank all the members of the committee for their diligence and hard work throughout the year. A lot of work has been carried out, which has covered a very broad range of subjects. I would also like to thank the officers in the RR&H department and Mrs. Lisa Thornley for their tireless work at the committee meetings and the ongoing day to day running of the department.

**Councillor Michael Rutherford**  
**Chairman, Renewal, Recreation and Housing PDS Committee**