

Report from Renewal and Recreation PDS Committee

Chairman: Cllr. Michael Rutherford
Vice-Chairman: Cllr. Suraj Sharma

1 The committee met eight times this municipal year, including three special meetings. 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. Through this past year, the RR&H PDS Committee has scrutinised a range of proposals and performance metrics and focused on facilitating faster delivery of affordable housing.

2 Topics the PDS Committee have focused on include:

Housing

3 Temporary Housing: the PDS has challenged the Executive to meet the shortage of temporary accommodation places. It enabled this in two special meetings, in which it supported proposals for Banbury House and Anerley Town Hall Car Park. It has supported proposals within the Housing Transformation plan to increase temporary housing supply. However it has asked for a forward plan of how additional temporary housing places will be delivered in the longer term to ensure there is a constant supply of good quality and cost effective housing.

4 Housing Strategy: the committee analysed the 2019-29 housing strategy before and after public consultation. It was pleased to see broad support for the plan and looks forward to assessing future department performance against it.

5 Housing Supply: support was given to a range of means for delivering affordable housing. It has analysed Mears contract performance, assessed demand on the housing waiting list and considered the approach to homeless tenancy support. It is supportive the various means the council has taken to deliver housing, avoiding being too dependent on individual schemes.

Town Centres

6 Beckenham: PDS support was given to Beckenham's continued Purple Flag status, awarded for its continued excellence in managing its evening and night time economy. It twice scrutinised proposals to move Beckenham Library to Beckenham Halls in the town centre. The committee gave its tentative support, subject to detailed proposals and business case. The scheme has the potential to improve footfall in the town centre, provide a better library service and give more efficient use to council assets.

7 Bromley: the committee was pleased to support proposals for upgrades to Bromley Central Library, including improved facilities for families, such as a dedicated children's library as well as toilets. It was pleased to validate that the council was holding contractors to account for works to the pedestrianised High Street, with replacement trees provided.

8 Orpington: support was offered for the Future High Street Fund application and was disappointed this was not received. The committee supported Orpington ward members' campaigning for investment to ensure that Orpington town centre does not decline, as well as supporting quality new homes.

9 West Wickham: strong support was given to proposals for building a modern replacement library and leisure centre, along with quality new homes. In the spirit of enabling faster delivery of housing, it held a special meeting to accelerate delivery of this proposal.

Leisure and Culture

10 The committee continues to be supportive of the council's programme of upgrading and modernising the borough's libraries. It has analysed the performance of the library contract, and successfully challenged the contractor to give visibility of complaints received.

11 In November, the committee it assessed three options for the Bromley Valley Gymnastics Centre. It gave its support to developing a new, modern gymnastics centre on Chipperfield Road along with up to 200 new homes.

Planning

12 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.

13 I would like to thank officers and Cllr Yvonne Bear for their work and analysis on planning enforcement, appeals and call-ins, which are enabling greater scrutiny and may enable the council to learn lessons, improve service performance and reduce costs.

Scrutiny of the Portfolio Holder

14 The committee scrutinised the portfolio budget, requesting that officers and the portfolio holder explained areas where spending was increasing. It encouraged officers and the Portfolio Holder to include ambitious future phases of the Transformation programme, to deliver more temporary homes with better living standards and lower costs. It was pleased to see various housing schemes starting to generate significant savings for the council.

15 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.

Thanks

16 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