

Report from Renewal, Recreation and Housing PDS Committee

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

- 1.1 The Committee met seven 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 continued to focus on facilitating faster delivery of affordable housing.
- 1.2 It has been a difficult year for many of the service providers and service users of this portfolio. We would like to thank the staff of the London Borough of Bromley and our contractors and partners for keeping services running (where possible) and for doing their best for all residents of the borough.

1.3 Topics the PDS Committee have focused on include:

Housing

- 1.4 Affordable Housing: The committee continued to help the increased supply of affordable housing within the borough. It supported proposals from Orchard and Shipman and Beehive for acquiring properties for temporary and affordable housing, scrutinising details to ensure that the accommodation would be of sufficient quality and represented value for money. It considered approaches to funding affordable housing to ensure the schemes provided genuinely affordable rents while being cost effective in the long term for the council.
- 1.5 Housing Delivery: Throughout the year, the committee has been actively tracking the progress on the first phase of the Transforming Bromley approach to building homes. It has challenged officers on delivery timelines and met urgently to approve major milestones where required. It has identified potential other sites for new temporary accommodation and raised considerations about others.
- 1.6 Emergency Accommodation: At the outset of the crisis, the committee expressed concern for rough sleepers in the borough, so was pleased to see the success of the "Everyone In" initiative, which brought the vast majority of rough sleepers into homes with some in hotels on a short-term basis. It was impressed with the diligence of officers in keeping in contact with clients in temporary accommodation to check they were ok and whether they had access to support.

Town Centres

- 1.7 Bromley: the committee was pleased to support proposals for improvements to Bromley High Street, including a new bandstand and seating.
- 1.8 Orpington: the committee fed comments to the Executive on the continued work with Areli to regenerate Orpington town centre. Particular focus was given to ensuring that town centre library and leisure centre provision remained.
- 1.9 Chislehurst: support was given to the redevelopment of Chislehurst Library into a new, modern library and GP practice. The new library will be more accessible and allow better use of the site with at least the same number of books as at present.

Recreation and Digital

- 1.10 In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the committee analysed the Digital Infrastructure Work Plan with a view to improving the high quality digital connections across the borough.

- 1.11 The committee was pleased to support proposals to bring the Concert Platform in Crystal Palace Park back into active use. It supported proposals for larger events in Crystal Palace Park but challenged officers on how well other council portfolios (specifically Environment and Public Protection and Enforcement) were involved in planning for large-scale events.
- 1.12 The committee scrutinised the re-opening of leisure and library services after the first lockdown, and the plans for re-opening them after the current lockdown. It raised concerns about Biggin Hill leisure centre and the Pavilion not reopening between lockdowns. It supported the temporary new timetables for libraries across the borough, but asked for a consultation with all service users before any permanent changes were made.

Planning

- 1.13 The performance of the planning service was assessed, with a particular focus on the performance of planning appeals. The committee considered appeals received and decided and the costs incurred by the council.
- 1.14 The Committee supported proposals to protect sensitive parts of the borough through Article 4 directions protecting Areas of Special Residential Character, Petts Wood and Bromley's office clusters. It also proposed an Article 4 direction to protect views within the Ravensbourne Valley, which was adopted by the council.

Scrutiny of the Portfolio Holder

- 1.15 The committee scrutinised the portfolio budget, requesting that officers and the portfolio holder explain the certainty of the budget put forward in light of the ongoing lockdowns.
- 1.16 The committee also analysed the contract register 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. Similarly it considered the Risk Register on a regular basis, highlighting potential other risks and challenging identified impacts.

Thanks

- 1.17 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 for their tireless work at the committee meetings and the ongoing day to day running of the department. I would also like to thank the committee's outgoing clerk Mrs. Lisa Thornley for all of her work over the years I have chaired this committee, her diligence has always been appreciated.

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