

Annual Scrutiny Report from the Renewal, Recreation and Housing PDS Committee

Chairman: Cllr Yvonne Bear

Vice-Chairman: Cllr Gary Stevens

The Committee met six times this municipal year, including one special meeting. 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.

The municipal year has been a very busy one for the Renewal, Recreation and Housing PDS Committee, with many important policy developments and strategic initiatives coming forward for scrutiny.

Some of the most important proposals we have helped shape have included:

- The building of the council's first social housing in decades. The committee has overseen delivery of over 100 socially rented units built on Council owned land at Burnt Ash Lane Plaistow, the former Annerley Town Hall Car Park, Bushel Way Chislehurst and York Rise Orpington with the first 3 of these now nearing completion. In addition, new contracts with Beehive and Orchard and Shipman have enabled more homes to be acquired to address demand for affordable housing.
- Distribution of millions of pounds of grants to businesses to help them recover from the impact of the Covid pandemic.
- The launch of the Council's first Economic Development Strategy which seeks to understand the dynamics of the local economy and explore how best to support its future growth for the prosperity of the borough and its residents. This strategy also encompasses a digital infrastructure strategy which seeks to rapidly ramp up the rollout of full fibre broadband and 5G mobile connectivity across the borough, critical both for business and individuals who are now increasingly working from home. Big improvements have been seen over the last year as a result of the increased focus.
- Key investment in the Boroughs cultural assets. The biggest projects reviewed include the renovation of Crystal Palace Park, a major initiative which will seek to restore the key assets in the Park back into full use including the dinosaurs and subway, and the provision of a new library in West Wickham which will also come with some further social housing.
- Extensive enhancements in planning policies, including the creation of a conservation area in Shortlands, numerous Article 4 Directions including one which will require all HMO conversions in the Borough to require planning permission and the launch of the Orpington Supplementary Planning Guidelines which outlines a vision for how Orpington can be optimally and sympathetically developed in the future.

In addition, the Committee scrutinised the portfolio budget and raised concerns about the continually rising cost pressures on housing.

The Committee also analysed the contract register throughout the year, challenging on specific contracts to ensure that they are 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 new risks and challenging identified impacts.

Regular thematic sessions have been introduced which enable a deep dive into specific aspects of the Portfolio. Extremely informative presentations have been made to members on the state of the local economy, homelessness and the performance of the housing team in addressing demand for accommodation, challenges within the planning department, and key culture, leisure and town centre regeneration projects. These presentations have been enhanced by external attendees from MyTime, GLL and the major local Housing Associations.

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 officers for their efforts in bringing forward clear and informative reports and presentations which have enabled members to make properly informed recommendations about the important work carried out in this portfolio.

Councillor Yvonne Bear
Chairman, Renewal, Recreation and Housing PDS Committee