

RENEWAL, RECREATION & HOUSING PDS COMMITTEE

26 January 2022

(A) QUESTIONS FOR ORAL REPLY

1. From Tony McPartlan to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

At December's full Council I was delighted to hear the Portfolio Holder agree to bring the housing associations in to this Committee for scrutiny. This was despite me being told at the prior meeting that it wasn't possible! Now it is seemingly possible, when can we expect this to happen?

Reply:

Representatives from Housing Associations have previously attended the Committee to provide updates, attendance will now be on a rolling programme at this PDS Committee in the thematic sessions focus on Housing, the next of which is scheduled for March 2022.

Supplementary Question:

Which Housing Associations have been invited for the March meeting?

Reply:

I believe we have invited most of those who have major holdings in our borough.

2. From Tony McPartlan to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

The Leader of the Council stated that new homes built using the Housing Revenue Account, would be managed by a Housing Association or a housing management company*. Does the Council not feel that it would have more control over the quality of housing provided if it managed these properties themselves?

<https://www.newshopper.co.uk/news/18559029.bromley-move-forward-plans-bulk-council-housing-numbers/>

Reply:

The Council has not historically managed housing stock and contracting with a registered provider for housing management and maintenance services enables the Council to access the required range of expertise and resources needed to ensure

properties are well managed and maintained. A Registered Provider will be required to adhere to the Council's suite of strategies and policies in relation to its housing stock, together with a set of robust performance indicators. In this way the Council ensures it continues to have control and oversight of the management and maintenance of properties.

Supplementary Question:

Mr McPartlan suggested that the Council would have more control over its own staff.

Reply:

I do not think it necessarily makes a big difference. If you look at Croydon, they manage their own properties and they have had problems. Using our staff does not guarantee effective service. We do have the ability to change our managers and that is easier than weeding out poor staff, so I think we are in a better situation.

3. From Mr Owen Wittekind to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

The average house price in Bromley rose 68% 2009-2019, and rents are unaffordable for many people on low incomes. This clearly constitutes a housing crisis. Can the Portfolio Holder explain why the draft London Plan housing target of 1424 new homes p.a. in Bromley was challenged by the Council, and subsequently halved to 774?

Reply:

The Council's position on the draft London Plan housing targets can be viewed on the Mayor of London's website, alongside similar responses from other London Boroughs - <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/london-plan/new-london-plan/examination-public-draft-new-london-plan/written-statements/housing-supply-shlaa-and-targets-m19#acc-i-55523>.

While we recognise the need for new housing, this needs to be balanced against other impacts of development; the draft targets did not adequately take into account these other impacts, particularly in relation to the proposed small sites element of the draft target.

The draft London Plan targets were assessed in detail by the panel of inspectors, who agreed with Bromley and other boroughs that the proposed housing targets were not justified - see paragraphs 137 to 178 of the Report of the Examination in Public of the London Plan 2019, available here:

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/inspectors_report_and_recommendations_2019_final.pdf.

Supplementary Question:

Mr Wittekind asked what the Council was doing to control housing demand.

Reply:

I do not think we can have any control over the demand-side – if people want to buy

houses in Bromley we cannot control that. We are doing everything that we can to ensure that there is a supply of homes for people, but it is not easy and we are short of land.

4. From Mr Owen Wittekind to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

The Housing Strategy also states that in the interests of profit, developers will argue that their schemes for more than 11 units, should not be required to meet the target of 35% of units being affordable. How many of these schemes have not met this target, or been granted exemptions by the council?

Reply:

We don't keep a specific record of these cases where developers submit viability assessments which can allow them to propose a lower level of affordable housing, however information on permitted applications can be viewed using the planning search function on the Council's website - <https://searchapplications.bromley.gov.uk/online-applications/search.do?action=advanced>.

(B) QUESTIONS FOR WRITTEN REPLY

1. From Chloe-Jane Ross to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

When do you envisage the new operator for the Beckenham Public Halls will be contracted?

Reply:

The Council are still in early discussions with the proposed leaseholder. Once the detailed terms for the agreement for lease have been agreed, the proposed leaseholder will need to submit a planning application and apply for Listed Building consent for their comprehensive refurbishment plans for the Halls. On grant of relevant permissions, and completion of the works, the proposed leaseholder will take a lease on the property and commence their proposed operations.

Both parties are aiming for the agreement for lease agreed and formally entered into within the next few months, which will enable the proposed leaseholder to submit their planning application thereafter.

2. From Chloe-Jane Ross to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

Once the new operator commences is Beckenham Public Halls expected to be closed for any length of time, and if so how long?

Reply:

The proposed leaseholder intends to undertake the refurbishment works in two stages, to enable them to open the buildings as soon as possible. Phase 1 construction works are estimated to be completed within 5 months of contractors being procured, with a further 3 months estimated for tenant fit out works. Phase 2 construction works will be able to be undertaken with minimum disruption to the operation of the buildings.

3. From Dermot Mckibbin to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

Is the Housing Building programme as described in report (7c) adequate to deal with the cost of temporary accommodation, what is the gap between the cost of such accommodation and the building programme for the next 4 years? Does the Council now regret selling its housing stock?

Reply:

The House Building report sets out the current position on the acquisition and development programme. This remains under constant review to assess the numbers of units required against the supply of accommodation and level of housing need and opportunities for additional schemes. The work undertaken to date has already started to assist in reducing the numbers in nightly paid temporary accommodation currently averaging a reduction of 7 households per month.

4. From Dermot Mckibbin to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

Why does the report (6e) not consider the recommendation in the Borough's Housing Strategy to license all houses in multiple occupation? Why is the Council not interested in improving standards for all tenants who live in hmo's?

(Question referred to the Public Protection and Enforcement Portfolio Holder)