

RENEWAL, RECREATION AND HOUSING POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 7.00 pm on 21 March 2023

Present:

Councillor Tony Owen (Chairman)
Councillor Keith Onslow (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Will Connolly, Christine Harris,
Tony McPartlan, Chris Price, Will Rowlands, Shaun Slator,
Alison Stammers and Pauline Tunnicliffe

Also Present:

Councillor Yvonne Bear, Portfolio Holder for Renewal,
Recreation and Housing

55 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Ermond Berisha, Youth Representative.

56 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no additional declarations of interest.

57 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ATTENDING THE MEETING

There were no questions.

58 MINUTES OF THE RENEWAL, RECREATION AND HOUSING PDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 23 JANUARY 2023

In considering Minute 48a: Future of Community Resource Centres, Councillor Will Rowlands requested that his speech be appended to the minutes and Councillor Chris Price requested that the motion he proposed be amended as set out below and this was agreed by the Committee

2.1 Continue to review options for the Cotmandene Community Resource Centre and St Paul's Cray library for a six-month period and undertake further consultation with staff in both organisations and within the community again.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2023 be agreed and signed as a correct record, subject to the above amendments.

**59 MATTERS OUTSTANDING AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME
Report CSD23046**

The report set out progress against outstanding actions from previous meetings and the Committee's Forward Work Programme.

In considering Minute 46a: HPR Portfolio Plan Update 2022/23, a Member requested further details of the review of the Small Parades Improvements Scheme, and this would be provided following the meeting.

A Member requested that an item on the Bromley rental market be included in the Committee's Forward Work Programme, including a review of the Bromley Landlords Scheme and advice to residents on Local Housing Allowance with reference to the growing gap with private rental market increases. The Assistant Director: Housing confirmed that it was planned to undertake a Deep Dive on lettings at the next meeting of the Committee on 15 June 2023. This would explore both the ongoing pressures in this area and the work underway to support Bromley residents to secure and sustain housing placements.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

**60 HOLDING THE RENEWAL, RECREATION AND HOUSING
PORTFOLIO HOLDER TO ACCOUNT**

The Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing provided an update to the Committee on her activities.

Development continued to be a key focus within the Portfolio with a number of active workstreams including the redevelopment of St Paul's Cray Library and the Bromley North Housing Scheme which was progressing towards the planning application stage. The Economic Development Team was currently implementing a project to roll-out full fibre broadband across more of the Borough and Crystal Palace Park Trust would shortly take over custodianship of this much-loved park. In terms of upcoming events, 172 street parties would be held across the Borough to celebrate the Coronation. Bromley was also participating in the London-wide High Streets for All Challenge with High Street Fest events due to take place on 26 March and 30 April 2023.

In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder advised that the Local Authority continued to work with the Greater London Authority to secure an improved funding offer for the proposed Beckenham Triangle Housing Scheme with a view to making it viable. Another Member queried whether there had been any progress in addressing an issue around the maintenance needs of the Churchill Theatre which had been identified by the Operational Property Review. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Local Authority was working with the Trafalgar Theatre Group to resolve this.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

61 PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF RENEWAL, RECREATION AND HOUSING PORTFOLIO REPORTS

The Committee considered the following report where the Renewal, Recreation and Housing Portfolio Holder was recommended to take a decision:

A BUDGET MONITORING 2022/23 Report FSD23026

The report provided the second revenue budget monitoring position for 2022/23 for the Renewal, Recreation and Housing Portfolio based on expenditure and activity levels for Quarter 2 of the 2022/23 financial year.

In response to a question from a Member, the Assistant Director: Housing advised that there had not been an increase in the number of Section-21 no-fault evictions in Bromley in recent months. The Chairman asked about maintenance issues impacting Bromley's traveller sites and the Assistant Director: Housing explained that the Local Authority worked closely with a specialist Traveller Liaison organisation to ensure that the needs of these communities continued to be met. This included addressing identified maintenance issues and securing appropriate management arrangements going forward, which could include use of an external management service.

RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holder be recommended to note the projected net overspend of £805k on controllable expenditure based on information as at December 2022.

62 PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF EXECUTIVE REPORTS

The Committee considered the following reports on the Part 1 (Public) agenda for the meeting of the Council's Executive on 29 March 2023:

A HOUSING IT SYSTEMS REPORT Report CSD23048

The report presented an update on Housing IT Systems and requested that contract extensions be agreed with respect of MRI Software (formerly known as Orchard Housing) and Home Connections, which were due to expire on 9 and 16 April 2024 respectively, and that work be undertaken to review future commissioning and procurement options.

In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Housing Compliance and Strategy advised that whilst it was intended to complete the review of the market and options prior to the end of the 2023 calendar year, the procurement and implementation of any new system would take additional time to deliver which was why a two-year contract extension was considered necessary in this case. Housing IT Systems performed a number of critical

roles including compiling the necessary data for the allocation of Government resources to fund homelessness prevention services and the market testing process would identify whether there were more effective options available to meet the Local Authority's needs in this area.

RESOLVED: That the Council's Executive be recommended to:

- **Extend the existing contracts with MRI Software and Home Connections for two years respectively to allow a full options appraisal to test the market fully;**
- **Authorise the application of the two-year extension for Home Connections, provided for within the contract terms, from 16 April 2024 to 15 April 2026 at an estimated contract value of £14k per annum;**
- **Approve extension beyond terms under Regulation 72a with a 1+1 options to MRI Software (formerly known as Orchard Housing). This is anticipated to commence from 16 April 2024 at an estimated annual value of £134k per annum;**
- **Agree the Compliance and Strategy Division utilises the extension period to review the market in order to present commissioning and procurement options for decision by the Council's Executive prior to the extension period expiring; and,**
- **Agree the drawdown of up to £40k from the Technology Fund earmarked reserve for a SME/Business Analyst to review the market.**

B AFFORDABLE HOUSING - POLICY AND STRATEGY DOCUMENTS
Report HPR2023/018

The report presented four policy and strategy documents required to be produced in respect of the Local Authority's role as a provider of social housing. The documents comprised the Residential Asset Management Strategy and Rent Setting Policy which the Council's Executive was asked to approve, and the draft Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Management Policy which the Council's Executive was asked to agree be released for public consultation.

In considering the report, a Member noted that it was proposed that the initial rent of new builds subject to social rents be calculated on a formula rent plus 5% rent flexibility. The Head of Housing Schemes advised that rent flexibilities provided a means by which the Local Authority could take local market context and affordability into account, but that Bromley social rent levels remained affordable and would further benefit from the Government's recently announced 7% rent increase cap for the 2023/24 financial year.

Initial rent would apply to Bromley new builds subject to social rents for a 12-month period with tenants then moving onto a secure tenancy in which rent flexibility would be built into the annual rent review. In response to a further question from the Member, the Head of Housing Schemes explained that the Repairs Charter would provide a clear repairs process for tenants and that the Local Authority would monitor performance in this area closely to ensure that tenants received a high-quality service. Another Member emphasised the need for social housing to be as high a priority for the Local Authority as affordable housing. The Portfolio Holder underlined the Local Authority's commitment to delivering both social and affordable housing and confirmed that work was undertaken to identify if Council-owned land was suitable for housing development prior to any disposal.

RESOLVED: That the Council's Executive be recommended to:

- **Approve the Residential Asset Management Strategy and the Rent Setting Policy for adoption;**
- **Approve the draft Tenancy Strategy and the Tenancy Management Policy for eight weeks public consultation; and,**
- **Note that the results of the consultation together with any suggested amendments arising from this consultation would be reported back to the Council's Executive for final approval and adoption of the draft Tenancy Strategy and the Tenancy Management Policy.**

63 POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER ITEMS

A NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK UPDATE Report HPR2023/014

The report provided an update on the Government's proposals to amend the National Planning Policy Framework.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Head of Planning Policy and Strategy advised that whilst housing targets would remain, the Local Authority would benefit from stronger protections from developments that were considered significantly out of character for the area or that would require the release of green belt land. It might also be possible to achieve a better balance of affordable housing in private developments. The Local Authority was subject to an additional tier of planning policy at a regional level and there would be a need to bottom out how amendments to the National Planning Policy Framework would work with the London Plan.

The Portfolio Holder observed that there would be an increased focus on the granting of planning permission moving forward and asked that this be included in future performance reporting.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

**B BUILDING CONTROL BUDGETARY POSITION
Report HPR2023/015**

The report outlined the budgetary position for the Building Control service, including trend data over five years.

In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Building Control advised that the Local Authority had an approximate 45% market share in Bromley which was in line with other local authorities. The Building Control service was currently working at full capacity; however, in the medium-term, there may be a business case for further investment to increase service capacity. The Chairman highlighted the potential to build the service using referrals from the Planning service and noted that the Building Control Service also had an advantage against its competitors in undertaking work on major projects within the London Plan.

The Vice-Chairman queried whether any consideration had been given to outsourcing the Building Control Service and the Portfolio Holder confirmed that this had previously been tried but that the Local Authority had decided that the service worked most effectively as an in-house provision.

RESOLVED: That:

- **Current pressures on the Building Control Service and the steps taken to improve the budgetary position be noted; and,**
- **The identified next steps be noted.**

C THEMATIC SESSION - HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

The Committee welcomed Angela George, Chair of the Bromley Federation of Housing Associations and representing Chislehurst and Sidcup Housing Association, Leon Graham, representing A2 Dominion Housing Association, and Tony Morgan, representing Hyde Housing Association.

The Bromley Federation of Housing Associations worked in partnership with the Local Authority to ensure that the 49 housing associations with housing stock in the Borough provided good quality homes and tenancy support to Bromley residents and that strategic objectives around housing were met. Current challenges for the sector included the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and introduction of the Social Housing Regulation Bill as well as issues arising from cost-of-living pressures, including the management of damp and mould. There was a requirement for all socially rented housing to be carbon neutral by 2050 and work was underway to assess existing housing stocks and identify what was needed to reach compliance, including new heating systems. Government funding would meet some of the costs arising from the move to net zero, but it was likely that housing associations would also need

to draw on revenue reserves, borrow funds and potentially rationalise some of their housing stocks where conversion would not be cost-effective.

A Member asked what issues were particularly affecting the social housing sector in Bromley. The Chair of the Bromley Federation of Housing Associations advised that there was a lack of 3–4-bedroom properties in the Borough and that some larger properties were under-occupied by existing tenants. Whilst current legislation did not require tenants to move to smaller properties, individual tenants could be incentivised to move to a more appropriate property where available. The representative of Hyde Housing Association noted that the vulnerability of tenants was also an issue in Bromley, and housing associations were working to ensure vulnerable tenants received the support they needed to sustain their tenancies.

In response to a question from the Vice-Chairman, the Chair of the Bromley Federation of Housing Associations advised that housing associations were required to undertake an annual tenancy audit which included an inspection to assess the condition of the property and identify if it was being sub-let. An annual gas safety inspection also provided a means by which to detect concerns with a property. Another Member asked about the remedies available to housing associations where tenants were engaged in anti-social or criminal behaviour and the Chair of the Bromley Federation of Housing Associations explained the duty of housing associations to record and respond to all incidents of anti-social behaviour which could involve agreeing an Acceptable Behaviour Contract with the tenant or seeking eviction. Tenants involved in criminal behaviour would also be subject to police action and/or criminal prosecution.

The Portfolio Holder raised a recent case of a Bromley resident who had found it difficult to secure a management transfer despite a serious damp and mould issue in her property and a Member spoke of a case where a Bromley resident was significantly affected by anti-social behaviour in the vicinity of her home. The Chair of the Bromley Federation of Housing underlined the need for Bromley housing associations to work together to secure management transfers where appropriate and in partnership with the Police, mental health services and other partners where issues were identified. Another Member highlighted variations in timescales for housing associations responding to concerns reported by Members. The representative of Hyde Housing Association explained that housing associations were required to meet new consumer standards, including around complaints, and were also regulated by the Social Housing Ombudsman, the Code of which would be circulated to Members following the meeting. The representative of A2 Dominion Housing Association provided further assurance that complaints were closely tracked within his organisation, including weekly updates to the Chief Executive. Members were asked to raise future housing issues/casework matters directly with the Assistant Director: Housing and she would refer them to the relevant housing association contact for resolution.

*Renewal, Recreation and Housing Policy Development and Scrutiny
Committee*

21 March 2023

The Committee thanked Angela George, Leon Graham and Tony Morgan for their excellent presentation.

RESOLVED: That the thematic session be noted.

The Meeting ended at 8.39 pm

Chairman