

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 14 NOVEMBER

REFERENCE FROM CABINET – 11 OCTOBER 2012

Response to Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report 'Private Rented Sector Housing in Harrow'

Cabinet received a report of the Corporate Director of Community, Health and Wellbeing, in response to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Review of 'Private Rented Sector Housing in Harrow'.

The Leader of the Council invited Councillor Marilyn Ashton, Chair of the Scrutiny Review Group, to address the meeting. Councillor Ashton referred to the report of the Scrutiny Review Group, which had been non-partisan and she hoped that the recommendations would be useful to any future administrations. She was pleased to learn that all the recommendation of the review Group had been accepted and she thanked Members of the Review group for their sterling work in this area. She thanked Heather Smith, Scrutiny Officer, for her work and support provided to the Review Group

The Chairman of the Review Group added that the report summarised the function and achievements of the Review Group, including how the Council should move forward. She was pleased with the manner in which a Residents' Panel had engaged with the Council and she thanked them for their participation. Councillor Ashton added that there were no easy answers that would ensure that excellent standards were maintained in the private sector rented housing but it was important to ensure that decent standards were maintained. She was of the view that one way to maintain high standards was through the developers and by applying the Local development Framework and national policies.

The Leader of the Council welcomed the response report to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review Group. He added that the Review Group's report had been clear, practical and the approach taken had been 'bottom up'. He commended the Chair of the Review Group in her presentation of the report.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing thanked Members and residents of the Review Group for their original recommendations. He added that the report of the Scrutiny Review Group was timely, as the Directorate was finalising its housing strategies. He added that all the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review Group would be taken on board.

The Portfolio Holder added that the Council recognised the importance of the private rented sector in meeting the housing needs in the borough and it was therefore important that standards were improved and poor quality of housing was tackled. He added that due to limited resources, enforcement action had to be directed at tackling the worst conditions, and the Council looked forward to establishing a good relationship with landlords, developers and private tenants. The Portfolio Holder referred to the number of innovative and effective schemes that were already in place and assured Members that the Council would continue to build on these. A priority would also be given to bringing back empty homes back into use or finding housing uses for existing Council assets.

In concluding, the Portfolio Holder thanked the Scrutiny Review Group and officers in the Housing Department for their contributions on this important issue.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and that the Corporate Director of Community, Health and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, be authorised to ensure that the responses outlined in Appendix 1 are included within the draft Housing Strategy and draft Private Sector Housing Strategy to be reported to Cabinet in December 2012.

Reason for Decision: To enable the response to be formalised in the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy and accompanying action plan.

Alternative Options considered and rejected: None.

Conflict of Interest relating to the matter declared by Cabinet Member / Dispensation granted: None.

FOR INFORMATION

Background Documents:

Report submitted to Cabinet – 11 October 2012

Draft minutes of the Cabinet – 11 October 2012

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(Signed) COUNCILLOR BILL STEPHENSON
Chairman