

CABINET – 19 JULY 2007

EXTRACT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE HELD ON 13 JUNE 2007

Draft Housing Strategy:

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Adults and Housing, which set out a draft of the Council's new Housing Strategy. An officer explained that the Council's previous Housing Strategy when submitted to the Government Office for London (GOL) in 2002, was deemed 'not fit for purpose' in line with their criteria. The new Strategy was intended to meet the GOL's fit for purpose criteria. Members were asked to comment on the new draft Strategy before it went to Cabinet in July 2007.

Officers explained that there were effectively two documents to consider - a draft Housing Strategy and a draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan. An officer gave a presentation in order to give Members a better understanding of the new Housing Strategy and HRA Business Plan. The presentation covered the following topics:

- Housing Strategy
- Government Office for London (GOL) and fit for purpose criteria
- Harrow Housing Conference: 16 May 2007
- Further consultation
- Housing Core Objectives
- Meeting the needs and aspirations of vulnerable people
- Continue to tackle homelessness and high demand whilst reducing temporary accommodation (TA)
- Improving neighbourhoods and quality of life
- Increasing housing supply
- Make better use of resources to deliver quality services
- HRA Business Plan
- Addressing the housing issues in Harrow.

Members questioned officers on the presentation and on the draft Housing Strategy in general. In response to their questions, the officers stated that:-

- GOL had set 'fit for purpose' criteria;
- with regards to how the Strategy responded to demographic change in Harrow, separate work was being undertaken which would look at the provision of housing for the elderly. A preliminary report on this work had made direct recommendations about sheltered housing, as it was understood that the provision made for sheltered housing did not meet the diverse needs of the community in Harrow;
- the issue of under-occupancy ought to be addressed as elderly people needed to be encouraged to move out of larger properties. The longest waiting time for social housing was for larger properties and that the Housing Service was working towards providing five, six and seven bedroom properties in Harrow.
- officers had met with GOL representatives to ensure their criteria were being met. Housing Service staff had been working with Tribal Consulting (housing professionals) with a view to ensuring that GOL's criteria were met.
- the Strategy was for the whole borough regardless of whether the housing was privately owned or social;
- the HRA Business Plan was directed solely at the maintenance of Council housing;
- with regards to community involvement, Harrow Council had lost a lot of housing stock when the 'Right to Buy' Scheme was introduced. Tenants had the right to

self-manage and that, as a landlord, Harrow Council needed to explore the possibility of giving people the right to self-manage;

- Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs), which gave management of estates to tenant groups, included leaseholders;
- Members would need to look at existing policies to ensure that they delivered affordable housing.
- the Housing Strategy document was linked to the Council's corporate priorities;
- the final Housing Strategy would include statistical data;
- social landlords were funded to produce new housing, and the Strategy would look to work with social landlords as a 'partner';
- schemes which the Housing Service offered such as the Finders Fee Scheme, needed to make 'business sense' for landlords. The Chairman suggested that more support should be given to landlords to encourage them to house more people;.
- the Housing Service relocated people to other London Boroughs where requested/necessary;
- a licensing scheme had raised the standard of HMOs (Homes in Multiple Occupancy);
- schemes were needed to support people who suffered from anti-social behaviour;
- as much support as possible needed to be given to vulnerable tenants;
- the Local Area Agreement (LAA) did not mention housing;
- the Housing Service in Harrow provided a good service to one of the most diverse communities in London;
- the Housing Service worked with tenants to prevent anti-social behaviour and that it was the responsibility of the Housing Management department to address issues of anti-social behaviour on Council estates;
- the Housing Service needed to improve communications with Housing Associations in order to prevent anti-social behaviour, as it was understood that anti-social behaviour was a priority for Council tenants;
- the Housing Service had introduced a new tenancy agreement for Council tenants, with a view to tackling the problem of anti-social behaviour;
- the relationship between Housing Associations and Harrow Council was complex and an officer had been working with the Portfolio Holder for Housing with a view to improving the relationship between the organisations and regular meetings were held to resolve issues of mutual concern;
- London had unique housing problems when compared with the rest of the country and therefore the 'London context' was an important part of the Strategy;
- the officer noted the Member's concerns that the Strategy did not look for solutions to tackle the problem of anti-social behaviour; rather it just stated what the problems were;
- they were looking to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from Council houses and officers in the energy team were currently working on this initiative;
- homelessness forums dealt with the problem of homelessness in the borough;
- it was accepted that the issue of adaptations needed to be addressed and that a more efficient adaptations service was necessary.

A Member queried whether an attempt had been made to meet with 'hard to reach' tenants who did not have access to a Tenant and Resident Association. In response, an officer explained that the Housing Strategy consultation document would have a feedback form which would be posted to every single Council tenant and leaseholder and would be published on the Council's website. The officer confirmed that during summer, Housing staff

planned to target estates that did not have strong TRAs in order to encourage people to get involved.

In response to a concern raised by the Chairman, an officer stated that they were under enormous pressure to 'turnaround' void properties. The officer agreed to look at the problems of anti-social behaviour on an estate in Harrow Weald.

RESOLVED: That (1) the above be noted;

(2) officers circulate to all Members of the Sub-Committee copies of the updated Housing Strategy for further comment before it was submitted to the July 2007 Cabinet meeting;

(3) the scrutiny officer provide housing officers with detailed findings on this matter to supplement the minutes, including guidance on the preparation of further drafts of the Housing Strategy and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.40 pm, closed at 9.09 pm)