



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

# MINUTES

## Housing, Finance and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Housing, Finance and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 12th September, 2019**, Rooms 18.01 and 18.03, 18th Floor, City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

**Members Present:** Councillors Melvyn Caplan (Chairman), Richard Elcho, Adam Hug, Matt Noble, Mark Shearer, Elizabeth Hitchcock, Guthrie McKie and James Spencer.

**Also Present:** Councillor Rachael Robathan (Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Regeneration), Councillor Andrew Smith (Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services), Barbara Brownlee (Executive Director - Growth, Planning and Housing), Neil Wightman (Director of Housing), Greg Ward (Director of Regeneration and Economic Development), David Hodgkinson (Director of Corporate Finance and Property), Aaron Hardy (Policy and Scrutiny Manager) and Toby Howes (Senior Committee and Governance Officer).

#### 1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 It was noted that Councillor Guthrie McKie was a newly appointed Member on the Committee, replacing Councillor Pancho Lewis.
- 1.2 It was noted that Councillor Elizabeth Hitchcock was replacing Councillor Antonia Cox.

#### 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 Councillor Richard Elcho declared that he has undertaken unpaid pro bono work for the Free Representation Unit, who he would refer to in relation to item 4 in the agenda.

#### 3 MINUTES

##### 3.1 RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2019 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record of proceedings.

#### **4 CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, PROPERTY AND REGENERATION UPDATE**

- 4.1 Councillor Rachael Robathan (Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Regeneration) highlighted the success of the event “Ebury on Sea” at Ebury Bridge that had taken place in August. There had been a positive mood at the event, with the community fully engaged. The Futures Group was also providing considerable input in helping to shape the regeneration of Ebury Bridge.
- 4.2 The Committee sought an update in respect of the Fair Funding Review and the Spending Review. It was asked in what ways the Budget Task Group could assist and what processes would be involved in setting the Budget. Members welcomed the 200 homes allocated for the Infill Programme and asked when the first new homes would be built. An update was sought on how much money had been raised to date in respect of the Community Contribution. With regard to the London Living Wage (LLW), Members asked what steps were being taken to improve contract monitoring to ensure that external organisations were adhering to what they had promised to undertake and could the Council insist that the LLW be mandatory for all new contracts. An update was also sought in respect of the review of W/C provision.
- 4.3 Members enquired how the housing developments impacted upon temporary accommodation in Westminster and was a residents’ ballot being considered in respect of the Ebury Bridge renewal project. Updates were sought in respect of Farm Street, proposals involving the Jubilee Community Sports Centre, Cosway Street, Beechcroft and whether negotiations with regard to Luton Street had resulted in any material changes to the scheme. A Member welcomed the support the Council and Westminster Citizens’ Advice Bureau was providing for residents. He asked whether the Council could do more to build bridges between residents and pro bono organisations like the Free Representation Unit, which provided residents with support for their benefit appeals.
- 4.5 In reply to the issues raised, Councillor Robathan advised that the Fair Funding Review would not be completed this year, whilst there were no major implications for the Council in respect of the Spending Review. The Council was continuing with its three year savings plans, taking a strategic approach. In respect of the Infill Programme, some new homes had already opened and a further set of homes were shortly due to go to the planning permission stage. Good engagement between the Council, ward councillors and residents was also taking place in helping to move this programme forward. The number of families on housing waiting lists in Westminster was a real issue, and every effort was being made to provide as much affordable housing as possible. With regard to Ebury Bridge, Councillor Robathan stated that the ongoing consultation and engagement with residents was more productive and more fruitful than a one-off ballot.
- 4.6 Councillor Robathan advised that around £800,000 had been collected from the Community Contribution to date. Councillor Robathan stated that every effort was being made to promote implementation of the LLW. She advised

that steps would be taken to ensure that contract monitoring was as robust as possible and organisations would be informed that it would be expected that they would implement the LLW for staff for organisations who had contracts with the Council, however legally the Council could not make the LLW mandatory. The need to provide community W/Cs was recognised, however some had closed due to assaults on staff and anti-social uses. The W/C review was being finalised and Members would be updated on this. The Committee heard that the development at Farm Street had been delayed due to issues to be resolved with the contractors, whilst 19 affordable homes would be onsite at the Jubilee Sports Centre by the end of the year. In respect of Luton Street, a 50/50 split agreement had been agreed with the developer, however the allocation would remain unchanged. Councillor Robathan advised that the homes at Beechcroft were being soft marketed and there had been a number of expressions of interest. Further consideration would also take place in respect of working with community organisations supporting residents with benefits issues.

## **5 CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING SERVICES UPDATE**

- 5.1 Members had before them an update from Councillor Andrew Smith (Cabinet Member for Housing Services). The Committee sought further information in respect of progress on fire doors and sprinklers, including fire doors in tower blocks. In respect of the consultation underway for the process of issuing leaseholder bills, Members asked what would happen to those leaseholders who had already received their bills. Members asked what criteria was used in respect of prioritising major works. Details were also sought on the Section 20 process in relation to providing estimated major works charges.
- 5.2 Members welcomed the steps being taken on homelessness prevention and asked if the main causes of homelessness in Westminster had been identified. In addition, Members enquired if there were any preparations in helping homeless people with the onset of winter. In noting the number of people in temporary accommodation, a Member asked why a substantial amount of accommodation being built would be available at market rates. It was also asked why there was no mention of customers in the five key priorities set out for Housing Services. Another Member welcomed progress on implementing traffic management orders and asked how many orders were now in place.
- 5.3 In reply, Councillor Smith advised that consultation with leaseholders regarding fire doors was taking place as part of the major works planning. There was also a specific fire door programme in respect of tower blocks. With regard to prioritising major works, Councillor Smith advised that consideration was given as to what was viewed as most urgent and steps were being taken to ensure that access to sites happened earlier. Councillor Smith commented that there was a focus on early intervention in tackling homelessness and there was on-going consultation in developing the Homelessness Strategy. Councillor Smith added that there was a cold weather protocol in place in respect of homelessness. Members heard that 1,850 new affordable homes were planned for Westminster and residents on

the housing list would also receive support in finding long term accommodation in the private sector.

5.4 Neil Wightman (Director of Housing) advised that there was every intention to ensure that Housing Services was customer focused and this would be made more clear in future communication.

5.5 **ACTIONS:**

1. How much parking enforcement has been rolled out on former CityWest Homes estates under the Traffic Management Orders programme to date and what is the completion date for the programme. (Action: Sam Swales [Project Manager] and Kevin Goad [Director of City Highways].)
2. Briefing note to be sent to Councillor Matt Noble on the Section 20 process. (Action: Neil Wightman [Director of Housing Services].)
3. Provide a timeline for the Council acquiring property and an update on the property acquired to date, to be provided in the next update. (Action: Gemma Stanton [Cabinet Officer].)
4. Reply to be provided on Councillor Richard Elcho's query raised at the previous meeting on the use of drop keys at Orsett Terrace in Bayswater. (Action: Neil Wightman [Director of Housing].)

**6 PROGRESS ON HOUSING AND REGENERATION**

6.1 Barbara Brownlee (Executive Director, Growth, Planning and Housing) introduced the item and emphasised the Council's commitment to building quality housing and to regenerate estates. This included a commitment to build 1,850 affordable homes and she was confident that this target would be met.

6.2 Greg Ward (Director of Regeneration and Economic Development) then gave a presentation on this item and set out the design principles and potential delivery models in achieving the housing and regeneration objectives. During the course of the presentation, he emphasised that consultation and community engagement were vital in helping to shape future housing and regeneration in Westminster.

6.3 During discussions, Members commented on the need to increase intermediate housing and the importance of changing direction in situations where projects were not making headway. Members stressed the need to encourage key workers to take up intermediate housing and asked why the Council had not applied for Greater London Authority (GLA) funding for regeneration schemes. Further consideration needed to be given to ensure that more Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding was provided on site. Members commented of the need to protect independent shopkeepers by not increasing business rates. It was also asked how confident was the Council in achieving the schemes listed in the appendices of the report.

6.4 In reply, Councillor Robathan advised that schemes were monitored closely throughout the process. Problems were more likely to be encountered where schemes were developer led because of market conditions, however an increasing number of schemes were now being self-delivered which gave the Council more control over progressing them. Councillor Robathan acknowledged the need for intermediate properties and to help attract and maintain key workers and families in the area. She also acknowledged that every opportunity obtain funding wherever possible, including CIL funding and other funding streams and also to increase the ratio of affordable housing.

6.5 Barbara Brownlee advised that a number of schemes were already underway and that she was confident that the large schemes would be delivered. Every effort was also being made to attract key workers to Westminster.

6.6 **ACTION:**

- What were the specific reasons why the Council did not apply for GLA funding that was £100,000 per unit for regeneration schemes. (Action for: Neil Wightman [Director of Housing]) and Barbara Brownlee [Executive Director – Growth, Planning and Housing]).

**7 WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER**

7.1 The Committee noted the Work Programme and Action Tracker. The Chairman stated that the Anti-Social Behaviour Task Group was nearing completion of its work and a Major Works Task Group was due to commence by the end of October.

7.2 Aaron Hardy (Policy and Scrutiny Manager) advised that a review of Housing Management Services would be considered at the next meeting in November.

**8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT**

8.1 The Committee considered the call-in of a confidential report Cabinet Member report with officers' response on the disposal of homes where decisions had recently been taken.

8.2 Following discussions of the call-in, the Committee agreed that the decisions of the Cabinet Members be endorsed.

The Meeting ended at 9.07 pm.

**CHAIRMAN:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_