

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE REGENERATION & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON TUESDAY, 30TH JANUARY, 2024

MEMBERS: Councillors Mahmut Aksanoglu, Hivran Dalkaya, Mohammad Islam, Joanne Laban, Edward Smith, Nelly Gyosheva, Ahmet Hasan and Hannah Dyson

Officers: Brett Leahy (Director of Planning & Growth), Nick Denny (Director of Property), Penny Halliday (Director of Meridian Water), May Hope (Plan Making Manager), Karen Page (Head of Planning & Building Control), Doug Ashworth (Head of Development), Jennifer Offord (Head of Meridian Water Regeneration) and Stacey Gilmour (Governance & Scrutiny Officer)

Also Attending:

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr David Skelton who was substituted by Cllr Hannah Dyson.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest registered in respect of any items on the agenda.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the previous meetings held on 12 October and 1 November 2023 were **AGREED**.

4. PLANNING PERFORMANCE

Karen Page, Head of Planning & Building Control introduced and highlighted the key aspects of the report; including but not limited to: the backlog of planning applications and enforcement cases, the quality of service to customers and the wellness of officers.

In response to Members' questions and comments relating to the transformation process, officers advised that the process had been streamlined in several ways which included; focused leadership and defining roles and responsibilities, use of a forecasting tool, establishing clear expectations for agents and applicants as well as implementing training for consistent approaches. Additional temporary agency support had been

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secured and a Fast Track team, utilising Tech Support had also been established with a focus on quick win applications. At the start of the process, the Development Management team had over 2200 applications on hand, most of which were legacy (over target) cases. This has reduced not to 629 cases with the majority of live cases being determined within statutory timeframes and without reliance on an Extension of Time. Officer caseloads have also reduced significantly.

Members sought further clarity in relation to the role of the Tech Support team and officers advise that the team triage all new reports (100% in 3 working days). A new online reporting form has been produced which includes mandatory fields to improve and control the quality and number of enquiries. There has been a focus on leadership to clear historic cases as well as a focus on serving notices without delay. Early peer review of new cases take place to determine appropriate course of action.

In response to further questions from Members regarding Planning Enforcement, officers advised that the team was carrying a case load of 1446 reports of suspected planning breaches and formal action was only being progressed in response to a limited number of cases. The backlog of enforcement cases has now reduced to 91 cases with officer caseloads at manageable levels. Over 200 formal notices were served in 2023 representing a significant uplift from the 8 notices serviced in 2022.

In response to Members' enquiries regarding challenges faced along the way, officers responded that the restructuring had been disruptive and demotivating for staff and there had been some initial rebellion around unfamiliar processes, behavioural change, and the requirement to step up at all levels. There had also been challenges around Member confidence and support for new ways of working. The process has been up and down in terms of progress which requires constant oversight, leadership, and process adaptation. Quick wins had now been exhausted resulting in tricky legacy cases left to work with.

In responses to further comments from Members regarding wellness and improvement officers advised that self-fulfilling results were now being seen which included faster customer service and application processing, reduced delays, and costs for developers, attracting investment to the area and positioning the Council as a development enabler. Wider community benefits were also discussed, and officers explained that capacity increase enhances customer and community experiences along with tangible improvements to the local environment.

Following questions from Members in relation to how staff have adapted to the changes, officers replied that the benefits for team members included clear career progression, a stable and fully staffed team, and manageable caseloads.

In response to Members' comments and questions regarding Section 106 obligations, officers explained the process and explained that all Section 106

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documents are in the public domain and published to the Council's website alongside planning application documents. It was also advised that an Infrastructure Financial Statement is published annually which allows residents to see where monies are being spent and if they have any concerns that money has been secured but not spent this can be reported to Enfield Council officers to investigate. These processes are continuously reviewed and closely monitored.

In conclusion officers advised that whilst the transformational work undertaken to date has yielded exceptional results, the service will continue to robustly monitor performance and review working practices to ensure workloads remain manageable. A review has commenced as to how the team manage appeals, pre-applications, and Planning Performance Agreements to ensure that it is working efficiently and delivering high quality outcomes for customers and communities whilst continuing to explore ways to commercialise the service to provide resilience and help alleviate the budgetary pressures currently faced.

The Panel agreed:

i. To note the report.

5. **WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24**

NOTED the Regeneration & Economic Development Scrutiny Panel Work Programme for 2023/24.

6. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

NOTED that the next meeting of the Regeneration & Economic Development Scrutiny Panel would be on Tuesday 26 March 2024 at 7:00pm in the Conference Room at the Civic Centre.

7. **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

AGREED in accordance with Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the items of business listed on part 2 of the agenda on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in those paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006). (Members are asked to refer to the part 2 agenda.)

8. **STRATEGIC INDUSTRIAL LAND**

The committee discussed progress of the Strategic Industrial Land sites.

Following the Part 2 discussions the item was **NOTED**.

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The meeting ended at 9.00 pm.