

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON MONDAY, 21ST OCTOBER, 2024

MEMBERS: Councillors Mahmut Aksanoglu, Lee Chamberlain, Margaret Greer, Tom O'Halloran, Edward Smith and Doug Taylor

Officers:

Joanne Drew (Strategic Director of Housing & Regeneration), Brett Leahy (Strategic Director of Planning, Growth & Infrastructure), May Hope (Head of Strategic Planning & Design), Karen Page (Head of Planning & Building Control), Kayt Wilson (Head of Private Housing Solutions), Jane Creer (Committee Secretary)

Also Attending:

Cllr Ergin Erbil (Leader of the Council)

Cllr Susan Erbil (Cabinet Member for Planning & Regulatory Services)

Cllr Ayten Guzel (Cabinet Member for Housing)

1 public and 1 press representative

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

Cllr Mahmut Aksanoglu (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Kate Anolue.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received regarding any item on the agenda.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Cllr O'Halloran requested the minuted member attendance at the 26 March meeting to be checked for accuracy.

Action: Governance Team (*Attendance including substitutions confirmed.*)

Cllr Smith advised that he had not received the information expected further to the Housing Fraud / Illegal Subletting item at the 22 April meeting.

Action: Joanne Drew / Neil Wightman (*Information to be circulated by Neil Wightman*)

AGREED the minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Panel held on 22 April 2024, and the minutes of the Regeneration & Economic Development Scrutiny Panel held on 26 March 2024.

4. UPDATE ON THE ENFIELD LOCAL PLAN

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Cllr Ergin Erbil, Leader of the Council, provided an introduction with a reminder of the importance of having the Local Plan adopted, and its significance particularly in respect of supporting sustainable development, protection of green spaces, and provision of new homes.

May Hope, Head of Strategic Planning & Design, and Brett Leahy, Strategic Director of Planning, Growth & Infrastructure, introduced and highlighted key aspects of the report. The Local Plan was a critical document for shaping the development of the borough to 2041. It was submitted to the Secretary of State in August and the examination process was well underway. The receipt of the Inspector's preliminary questions was part of the process, and detailed responses were being prepared. It was anticipated that public hearings would take place in early 2025. Modifications would be then made. The final adoption of the Local Plan was expected by the end of 2025.

An email from the 'Action for Enfield's Future' group had been sent to Panel members. Questions raised in the email would be examined through the process, but a brief high-level response was provided to each of the questions for the Panel's information. This included information on management of the issue of missing consultation survey responses; Greater London Authority (GLA) and Transport for London (TfL) objections; validation of evidence submitted; references to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF); brownfield first principle; and alignment with Council plans and strategies.

Questions were invited from the Panel.

In response to Members' queries in respect of brownfield sites identified, it was advised this would be a key test for the Inspector, and would be debated and discussed in detail. Sites had to be put forward by landowners and be deliverable and viable, and meeting the needs of the borough, particularly for affordable and family homes. Housing targets could not be delivered without an element of Green Belt release: it was stressed that this referred not to parks or ancient woodland but to garden centres, car parks etc and to fields that were currently inaccessible to residents on Green Belt land. At Chase Park, a large proportion (c.68%) was proposed to be 3 to 4 bed homes. A master planning stage would provide detail and inform planning applications.

In response to Members' queries regarding future water supply and waste water treatment, the reference to upgrade needs at Deephams site was noted, and it was advised that the Local Plan was a way to manage development and assist water and other strategic infrastructure companies to then be able to manage investment decisions.

Members asked further questions about the responses to the Inspector's questions, and potential impacts if the information was not provided. It was advised that the period between submission and examination was a normal part of the Local Plan process. The Council had until 1 November 2024 to respond to questions and was confident it would meet the deadline, but there was a risk of delays in receipt of information from third parties. The Inspector

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was being kept appraised, and a time extension may be permitted for some less significant questions.

In respect of the timeframes further to the preliminary questions, public hearings were anticipated in January, February or March 2025. The Inspector may then require an element of modifications to the Plan.

In response to Members' queries regarding Brimsdown Industrial Estate, it was advised that the site had crucial employment uses, and the borough had to meet industrial needs as well as housing needs.

In respect of housing need across London, it was confirmed that the emerging Local Plan did take the London Plan into account but noted this plan was shortly due to expire. Enfield had identified its own new homes figures and these would be tested by the Inspector.

In response to Members' queries regarding the Traveller Local Plan, the Council had made the decision to split the Local Plan, and the Inspector would consider the justification and scrutinise appropriately. Other councils had similarly split the Local Plans.

Members asked for more detail on missing responses to the consultation. It was advised that groups had been contacted in respect of missing responses, and work had been undertaken with IT colleagues to investigate the reasons for it. The Inspector had been made aware and kept updated. The issue had been contained and no-one would be disadvantaged.

In response to Members' queries relating to concerns raised about car dependency, it was advised that the Council sought a balance with appropriate car parking provision within housing developments and did not share an ambition of zero car parking or greater densification.

Panel Members requested to receive a copy of the response to the Action for Enfield's Future email, and to receive a copy of the response to the Inspector's preliminary questions.

Action: Brett Leahy

5. PLANNING AND BUILDING CONTROL SERVICES PERFORMANCE

Cllr Susan Erbil, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regulatory Services, provided an introduction, noting that this item followed an update provided to Scrutiny Members at the beginning of the year and involving changes she had requested on becoming the relevant Cabinet Member. She expressed thanks to Brett Leahy and Karen Page for taking a lead and performing a service restructure.

Karen Page, Head of Planning & Building Control, introduced and highlighted key aspects of the report. The transformation of the Planning Service had begun in 2022 and had addressed the backlog of planning applications and enforcement cases and consequent customer dissatisfaction. The

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improvements in numbers of outstanding cases were illustrated. The majority of live cases were being determined within statutory timeframes. Officer caseloads had reduced significantly, also improving the wellness of officers. Appeals performance had also improved, and the target of successfully defending 80% of cases was now being met. A number of measures, including a Continuous Improvement Board, had been instrumental in the service improvement. Additionally, clear expectations had been set with agents and applicants. Officers were praised for embracing new working practices and for their hard work and commitment.

Planning Enforcement had also been transformed and was committed to dealing with planning breaches and closing cases quickly. An online reporting form helped standardize the process. The team now had more capacity to support other departments, such as HMOs without a proper licence or planning permission. Another workstream involved Community Infrastructure Levy (CiL) charges where developers had not made the payments that were due.

With faster service and more certainty on outcomes, more developers were wanting to invest in Enfield. The enforcement actions were also having noticeable impacts in local communities. The service was also getting outside recognition, including a recent Royal Town Planning award.

Aspirations for the future included for a 5-week case performance, which was anticipated being met before September 2025, and standardization of the s106 process. The service aimed to become financially self sufficient, and to obtain a replacement software system in time.

Questions were invited from the Panel.

The Chair and Panel thanked Cllr Susan Erbil and the officers and passed on congratulations for achieving the service improvements described.

In response to Members' queries that there were sufficient staff to achieve the targets, it was confirmed that the right complement of staff was now in place and the service had been successful in filling permanent vacancies with good planners. There was constant review of performance against targets, and mitigation measures could be implemented straight away if needed.

Members raised the importance of keeping customers apprised of the progress on planning enforcement issues they reported. It was acknowledged that there had been issues around communication, and timescales could be difficult to predict, but the need to keep customers updated was being picked up particularly as officer capacity increased.

In response to Members' queries on drops in performance when staff were sick or on leave, it was confirmed that the performance quickly caught up again and that average cases per officer were now a manageable 30 - 40 rather than 90 – 120 cases two years ago. Wellness of officers had been a key part of the project.

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Members were advised that there was no longer a Head of Planning Enforcement, but leadership now comprised two area managers on the technical side to support team members on the case work, and a new line manager to operationally oversee the service.

In response to Members' queries regarding CiL and s106 charges, it was confirmed that the service was reviewing all legacy / historic cases and proactively chasing down developers for payments owed to the Council.

Panel Members requested to receive more detail of the workstream in respect of CiL payments via email.

Action: Karen Page

6. HOUSING GATEWAY LTD - UPDATE

Joanne Drew, Strategic Director of Housing & Regeneration, and Kayt Wilson, Head of Private Housing Solutions, introduced and highlighted key aspects of the report. At a challenging time for Housing, the service was pleased to have Housing Gateway Ltd (HGL) proving solutions that the Council could not otherwise provide. HGL not only purchased properties for the company but was also the purchasing arm for the Council: within the borough via the Council and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and outside the borough via HGL. The portfolio of homes led to savings on temporary accommodation costs. It was confirmed that HGL was in a good financial position and was predicting a profit at end of year. Changes in the business model in relation to temporary accommodation had impacted on HGL's income, but the leadership was addressing these issues and put in place a recovery plan for reducing arrears.

Questions were invited from the Panel.

In response to Members' queries regarding bad debt, the moving of tenants from Housing Benefit to Universal Credit leading to arrears was clarified. The fall in income collection had been greater than anticipated, but it was expected going forward to get back to excellent rent collection rates. There was a robust rent collection process. Collection was pursued as it was in everyone's best interest.

Members were provided with detail around market rent setting and the nominations fee. It was confirmed that tenants placed in properties were subject to suitability assessment, including an affordability assessment based on their income.

In response to Members' queries in respect of purchase of more properties, it was confirmed that HGL was ready to buy properties which came onto the market and met the parameters set for HGL's needs.

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In response to a query on the potential impact of the Renters Reform Bill, officers suggested that a full report could be prepared for the Panel in due course.

Members expressed congratulations on the success of HGL for the Council and the high customer satisfaction levels, and officers were thanked for their hard work.

7. WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25

The Panel noted the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel Work Programme for the remainder of 2024/25.

8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Noted the next meeting of the Panel would be held on Tuesday 10 December 2024, 7:00pm in the Conference Room at the Civic Centre.

The meeting ended at 8.58 pm.