

# Housing and Environment Scrutiny Commission

Monday 17 December 2018

7.15 pm

Ground Floor Meeting Room G01A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

## Membership

Councillor Helen Dennis (Chair)  
Councillor Graham Neale (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Paul Fleming  
Councillor Sunny Lambe  
Councillor Hamish McCallum  
Councillor Margy Newens  
Councillor Ian Wingfield  
Cris Claridge  
Ina Negoita

## Reserves

Councillor Adele Morris  
Councillor Radha Burgess  
Councillor Karl Eastham  
Councillor Tom Flynn  
Councillor Jon Hartley

---

## INFORMATION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

---

**Access to information** You have the right to request to inspect copies of minutes and reports on this agenda as well as the background documents used in the preparation of these reports.

**Babysitting/Carers allowances** If you are a resident of the borough and have paid someone to look after your children, an elderly dependant or a dependant with disabilities so that you could attend this meeting, you may claim an allowance from the council. Please collect a claim form at the meeting.

**Access** The council is committed to making its meetings accessible. Further details on building access, translation, provision of signers etc for this meeting are on the council's web site: [www.southwark.gov.uk](http://www.southwark.gov.uk) or please contact the person below.

### Contact

Julie Timbrell on 020 75250514 or email [julie.timbrell@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:julie.timbrell@southwark.gov.uk)

---

Members of the committee are summoned to attend this meeting

**Eleanor Kelly**

Chief Executive

Date: 7 December 2018



# Housing and Environment Scrutiny Commission

Monday 17 December 2018  
7.15 pm  
Ground Floor Meeting Room G01A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

## Order of Business

Item No.	Title	Page No.
	<b>PART A - OPEN BUSINESS</b>	
1.	<b>APOLOGIES</b>	
2.	<b>NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT.</b>	
	In special circumstances, an item of business may be added to an agenda within 5 clear working days of the meeting.	
3.	<b>DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS.</b>	
	Members to declare any interests and dispensations in respect of any item of business to be considered at this meeting.	
4.	<b>MINUTES</b>	1 - 6
	To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the open section of the meeting on 17 October 2018.	
5.	<b>SOUTHWARK'S SUSTAINABILITY PLANS</b>	

<b>6.</b>	<b>COMMUNITY ENERGY: COUNCIL PLAN AND COMMUNITY PILOTS</b>	7 - 8
-----------	--	-------

Martin Kovats, Community Projects Manager, Housing and Modernisation will provide an officer overview on delivering the council plan commitment to: *“support the creation of community led sustainable energy projects on estates to help residents reduce their energy bills”* , with input from colleagues in Asset Management and Finance.

Please find attached an overview of the Community Energy pilots.

<b>7.</b>	<b>COMMUNITY ENERGY PILOTS</b>	
-----------	--------------------------------	--

Overview of community led energy models by Dr Giovanna Speciale, Chief Executive Officer, South East London Community Energy (SELCE) with input from Afsheen Kabir Rashid, Repowering London.

- Haddonhall TMO with support from SELCE
- Juniper House, with a deputation including Rob Kenyon , Secretary, Juniper House TRA.
- Brenchley Gardens TMO

<b>8.</b>	<b>REPOWERING LONDON</b>	
-----------	--------------------------	--

Repowering London will present on Community Energy and Repowering’s work with communities and councils in Lambeth and other London boroughs. With Afsheen Kabir Rashid, Chief Operating Officer, and Felix Wight, Technical Director.

<b>9.</b>	<b>ROUNDTABLE</b>	
-----------	-------------------	--

Members of the Commission, officers, community representatives, and stakeholders will discuss how Community Energy could be best taken forward in Southwark.

<b>10.</b>	<b>WORKPLAN</b>	
------------	-----------------	--

**DISCUSSION OF ANY OTHER OPEN ITEMS AS NOTIFIED AT THE START OF THE MEETING.**

**PART B - CLOSED BUSINESS**

**DISCUSSION OF ANY CLOSED ITEMS AS NOTIFIED AT THE START OF THE MEETING AND ACCEPTED BY THE CHAIR AS URGENT.**

Date: 7 December 2018

**EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The following motion should be moved, seconded and approved if the sub-committee wishes to exclude the press and public to deal with reports revealing exempt information:

“That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1-7, Access to Information Procedure rules of the Constitution.”



## Housing and Environment Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Commission held on Wednesday 17 October 2018 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G01A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

---

**PRESENT:** Councillor Helen Dennis (Chair)  
Councillor Graham Neale  
Councillor Sunny Lambe  
Councillor Margy Newens  
Councillor Hamish McCallum

**OTHER MEMBERS  
PRESENT:**

**OFFICER** Shelley Burke, Head of Overview & Scrutiny  
**SUPPORT:** Julie Timbrell, Scrutiny Project Manager

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr Ian Wingfield, Ina Negotia and Cris Claridge.

The chair invited Elizabeth Errington from Homeowners Council to make comments and ask questions from the audience.

**2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT.**

There were none.

**3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS.**

There were none.

#### 4. COMMISSION WORK-PLAN

##### Community Energy

The chair introduced the planned scope on Community Energy and invited feedback. The following points were agreed:

- Contact SE24 to flag up the roundtable
- Prepare questions for the roundtable
- Invite written contributions in advance of the meeting with a deadline
- Invite SGTO & housing associations and tenants groups.
- Look at Local Authority best practice (Lambeth and Lewisham - maybe Islington)
- Set a date for the roundtable, after consultation with officers on the option paper in development
- Inform committee members of the date with as much advance notice as possible

##### Workplan

Committee members indicated it would be useful for scrutiny to examine progress on new council home delivery and government proposals on borrowing limits. The chair of this committee will discuss this with the OSC chair, to decide the best forum to address this and inform members before the next meeting.

A report looking at comparative performance data on Housing repairs; now the service has been brought in-house (from 1 October) would be useful, once available.

The Resident Involvement review will come to the committee at an appropriate time.

#### 5. EMPTY HOMES

The chair invited the officers to introduce themselves:

- Paul Langford, Director of Resident Services, Housing and Modernisation,
- Cheryl Russell, Area Manager, Housing and Modernisation,
- Keith Kiernan, Specialist Services Contract Manager,
- Michelle Williams, Project Officer.

Officers presented the report circulated with the papers and the chair invited members to comment and ask questions.

The following issues were raised on council empty homes:

Clarification was sought on council empty homes, with reference to paragraph 2 in

the report. Officers updated the committee with the most recent figures:

- 307 due to refurbishment decisions awaiting
- 846 Aylesbury awaiting demolition
- 27 properties awaiting decisions re disposal if they meet that criteria
- 144 active voids being turn around

Cllr Hamish McCallum referred to numbers supplied by an officer from the exchequer department in a letter he had received recently (enclosed with the minutes). He asked for clarification about these figures and how they relate to the report figures and those submitted to CLG, using a national formula. He noted that the letter indicted that Southwark as a Local Authority with one of the highest numbers of empty homes. Members requested clarity on this.

Officers were asked how many residents are on the waiting list, length of waiting time and homes available. The committee was informed that this is approximately 10,500. Waiting time depends on what band; people on band 4 have no hope, whereas higher bands will receive offers. There are approximately 20 homes now (on the day of the meeting) with an estimated 144 available this week.

Members referred to concerns about houses left empty for 6 - 24 months. Officers acknowledged that there have been problems, however now voids are turning around much faster. Sometimes there are tricky issues; maybe damp or the house could be up for disposal. Officers were asked if prospective tenants could do this work as many are willing. Officers explained that the authority has a letting standard and the council do not allow tenants to do major refurbishment because of health and safety. The housing service does, however, encourage tenants to do minor repairs.

Officers said that waits can be to do with other issues; there can be adaptations, resident may wish to wait. Officers said that they had solved many technical issues around contractor performance and access to electrical power, which had delayed turnaround previously.

Members asked about the process for disposal and if there are grey areas. Officers explained that properties that become available are viewed first by surveyors. If significant refurbishment is required a property may be referred to a specialist team, and then go to a review panel to decide if the scale of investment is justified. Previously there was a threshold figure of about 50K which would have led to property disposal, however property decisions are now more contextualised and there have been instances where properties requiring investment of 70-80K to be re-let have been invested in to retain social housing. In other cases disposal is deemed sensible; if this raises significant capital for reinvestment – there was a case fairly recently where a home valued at around 3M was sold.

Members raised concern about Maydew House on the Abbyfield estate which has not been in use for several years. Officers agree that is a difficult issue awaiting a decision. An update on Ledbury was also requested.

Officers were asked to provide data on the numbers of long term voids.

Officers were asked if long term voids are used in the interim. Officers said that they are utilising the properties when they can.

A member asked about turn around time when someone passes away. Officered reports this varies; on some occasions a home can be re-let quickly, and on other occasions more remedial work is needed.

## **RESOLVED**

- Provide clarity on the letter provided to Cllr McCallum, report statistics, and CLG data.
- Invite the exchequer department to a follow up meeting.
- Officers will provide a written answer on Mayhew and Ledbury.
- Provide a more detailed report on long term voids (less than a year , over a year , one or more years )

The committee then moved on to look at the data on private property.

There was a discussion about accuracy of data on empty homes. There is no longer any incentive to register; this was previously provided by council tax discounts, however these have now gone. Officers were asked about use of local intelligence and they confirmed that this is used, including electoral services, rubbish collection and neighbourhood complaints. There are also licensing requirements which provide data. Additional licensing is being rolled out.

Officers were asked if private property data includes leasehold and if they were aware that a significant proportion is let out on Airbnb and similar platforms. Officers said that it does include leaseholder and they were aware of the problems.

Members asked about housing association data on empty homes and officers explained that these are a category under private homes. Cllr McCallum said that there is extra data broken down in letter provided and that Southwark's figures are also high here. Members asked why this was and officers said that available funds to bring private sectors houses back into use are not as generous as other councils.

There was a discussion on the opportunity to expand borrowing to build social housing; with details expected in the upcoming budget .Officers said that they do welcome this, however the national social housing rent reduction regime reduced income by 800 million from the housing business plan . There is also a lack of certainty about rents; which is important for business planning and borrowing.



Members asked about the merging of teams and capacity to manage the caseload of private property empty homes, and requested information on activity levels. Officers said that there are 1000s on the data base contacted by mail merge, around 600 open cases and a smaller cohort that officers are actively working with. Presently they are looking at 5 compulsory purchase orders. Members asked if more staff would help; officers replied that a more limiting factor is the HRA. Officers asked about the length of time enact compulsory purchase. Officers said working with owners is a protracted process; however through this the owners often take steps to bring the properties back into use.

Officers were asked about the 'Buy to leave', whereby homes are purchased as investment vehicles, rather than as homes. There are financial incentives for people to buy to accrue. Officers were asked how long will it take for action to be taken by the council to address this, would this 2, 3 years? Officers responded that there are issues here and that they tend to focus on those empty properties that blight the neighbourhood. Officers suggested more action needs to come from the government using the tax system. Officers also suggested bringing in regeneration to ask about 'Buy to leave.'

Elizabeth Errington from Homeowners Council highlighted concerns about new builds that are still empty. She added that Heygate has many empty homes and this of great concern considering the amount of people on the waiting list and homeless.

A member suggested the commission look at what the council can do to discourage 'Buy to leave' and any conceivable method to tackle this, including increasing council tax after two years. Parliament is presently considering the introduction of a long term discretionary premium up to 300%. Other members voiced agreement to introducing sanctions for places left empty. Officers confirmed that nothing was in place presently and measures cannot be used on furnished properties.

There was a mention of the green paper on social housing and a query on if the commission will be feeding into this.

## **RESOLVED**

- Provide more detailed data on case management of private empty homes
- Provide timelines for utilising the Compulsory Purchase Order process and bringing private properties back into use.
- Provide data across the borough of type of private properties empty
- Provide data on furnished properties which are infrequently let.
- Provide information on how much is generated by the 50 % premium and could be generated by increasing this

- Invite Regeneration officers to attend to discuss 'buy to leave'.
- Look at the Private Homes Empty Homes strategy in development.
- Come back in 3 months time.

**6. CABINET MEMBER INTERVIEW PREPARATION**

It was agreed that scrutiny officers would provide dates for relevant interviews and suggested questions would be provided via email.

**7. DISCUSSION OF ANY OTHER OPEN ITEMS AS NOTIFIED AT THE START OF THE MEETING.**

**8. PART B - CLOSED BUSINESS**

**9. DISCUSSION OF ANY CLOSED ITEMS AS NOTIFIED AT THE START OF THE MEETING AND ACCEPTED BY THE CHAIR AS URGENT.**

### **Renewables Roundtable - Community-Led Pilot Projects**

The council is in the process of engaging a specialist consultant to assess and advise on the feasibility of three community-led renewable energy pilot projects at:

- Juniper House
- Haddonhall TMO
- Brenchley Gardens TMO

The projects are diverse - located in different parts of the borough, with different types of properties, and propose different models and are at different stages of development.

All three of the projects have been initiated on estates with strong resident communities. Haddonhall and Brenchley Gardens have well established Tenant Management Organisations, while Juniper House was a TMO for many years and has an active TRA.

#### Juniper House project

Juniper House is a 5 storey block with 75 flats on the border with Lewisham. While a TMO, Juniper House accumulated over £30,000 in its Surplus Fund. With the ending of the TMO, this money should be transferred to the Juniper House TRA. There has been some delay in processing this change and the TRA has yet to receive the funds.

Juniper residents have been developing plans to use this surplus to pay for the installation of PV panels on the block's roof. The TRA obtained electricity consumption figures and has worked with PV suppliers to develop proposals. Before the work can progress, the council needs to assess the implications of PV installation. It is also necessary to understand how the benefits of reduced communal electricity costs could be distributed to the TRA or directly to residents, in service charges.

#### Haddonhall project

Situated by the Bricklayers Arms roundabout, Haddonhall TMO has been working with South East London Community Energy (SELCE) to explore a scheme by which shareholders would invest in PV panels to be sited on the estate to generate income through feed in tariffs.

#### Brenchley Gardens project

Located next to Honor Oak cemetery, the TMO is keen to explore the options for renewable energy generation on the estate, which is composed of both blocks and houses and has a considerable amount of communal land.

#### Consultant

The council does not yet have its own capacity to assess the technical feasibility of estate based PV schemes. It also needs to develop criteria for assessing their financial viability. It is important that community-led initiatives are assessed in a professional and transparent manner and that residents are fully informed about their potential benefits.

Christine Coonick of the Building Research Establishment (BRE) is an international expert on solar power who has advised numerous public and private sector organisations. Ms Coonick will undertake feasibility studies of the three pilot projects in January and February 2019. The consultant will visit each estate and talk with residents. LBS will facilitate access to all relevant areas and provide consumption and other information as required.

The consultant will provide a report on the technical feasibility of each project and will advise on capital funding, maintenance costs, as well as likely power and income generation. The consultant will also help LBS develop objective criteria for assessing the technical and financial feasibility of future community-led renewable energy projects.



**HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMISSION****MUNICIPAL YEAR 2018-19****AGENDA DISTRIBUTION LIST (OPEN)****NOTE:** Original held by Scrutiny Team; all amendments/queries to Fitzroy Williams Tel: 020 7525 7102

Name	No of copies	Name	No of copies
<b>Co-Opted Members</b>		Fitzroy Williams, Scrutiny Team SPARES	10
Ina Negoita (Homeowners' Council)	1	<b>External</b>	
David Eyles (Homeowners' Council Reserve)	1	Caroline Vicent	1
Cris Claridge (Tenants' Council)	1		
<b>Member</b>			
Councillor Helen Dennis	1		
<b>Electronic Copy</b>			
Councillor Neale Graham			
Councillor Paul Fleming			
Councillor Sunny Lambe			
Councillor Hamish McCallum			
Councillor Margy Newens			
Councillor Ian Wingfield			
<b>Reserve Members</b>			
Councillor Adele Morris			
		<b>Total: 40</b>	
		<b>Dated: Sept 2018</b>	