



HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE held on 10 NOVEMBER 2004 at 7:00PM at the Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT: Councillor Stephen Flannery (Chair)
Councillor Alfred Banya (Vice Chair)
Councillors Lorraine Lauder, Jane Salmon, Charlie Smith.

**NON-VOTING
CO-OPTED
MEMBER** Mr Al-Issa Munu - Tenant representative
Mr Lionel Wright - Tenant representative

OFFICERS: Glen Egan – Assistant Borough Solicitor
Miny Jansen – Housing Options Manager
Carina Kane – Scrutiny Team
Rachel Sharpe – Head of Strategy and Regeneration
Roger Young – Senior Renewal Officer
Harry Marshall – Divisional Housing Manager

ALSO PRESENT See Appendix 1.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Received from Councillor Tayo Situ and Dave Clark. Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Lorraine Lauder.

CONFIRMATION OF VOTING MEMBERS

The Members listed as being present were confirmed as the Voting Members.

NOTIFICATION OF ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS AS URGENT

None.

DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

Councillor Lorraine Lauder declared a personal interest in respect of item 3 (Housing Allocations Policy) as she was a council tenant.

RECORDING OF MEMBERS' VOTES

Council Procedure Rule 1.17(5) allows a Member to record her/his vote in respect of any motions and amendments. Such requests are detailed in the following Minutes. Should a Member's vote be recorded in respect to an amendment, a copy of the amendment may be found in the Minute File and is available for public inspection.

The Sub-Committee considered the items set out on the agenda, a copy of which has been incorporated in the Minute File. Each of the following paragraphs relates to the item bearing the same number on the agenda.

1 BELLENDEN RENEWAL SCHEME [Pages 1-3]

- 1.1 The Chair asked the sub-committee members to introduce themselves to everyone attending the meeting, and explained how the Bellenden Renewal Scheme was going to take place over 3 meetings. The evenings discussion would involve a presentation by Council officers about the scheme, following by questions by the sub-committee members, and the opportunity for others present to make any pressing comments. He also made it clear that questions could also be submitted in writing after the meeting.
- 1.2 Roger Young then gave a presentation about the Bellenden Renewal Scheme. The presentation covered tools used for consultation, case studies, impact, outcomes and successes. Key points from the presentation included:
- The budget was small (£12million over 10 years) compared to other regeneration programmes (e.g. £1.5 billion for Elephant and Castle).
 - A number of approaches were used to encourage people to give their views. These ranged from school visits, barbeques on estates, community workshops, taking 50 external business leaders on a bus tour around the area to obtain their perspective, involvement at the Bellenden Green Fair in 2000 and the Edfest, establishment of a Bellenden Advisory Board, identification of problem areas by giving local children cameras to take photos.
 - The key aims of the scheme, as determined by consultation, were: to make environmental improvements more sustainable; to provide income for local artists and suppliers; to change people's perception of the area; to attract funding to the area; to provide training opportunities for young people; and to bring people together. There had been no advancements yet on the aim to provide training opportunities for young people.
 - Methods for improving the area included group repair, face-lifting scheme, front shop scheme.
 - The face-lifting scheme was the cheapest, and aimed to achieve immediate impact (e.g. cleaning up brick-work, painting).
 - Local resident artists were employed to design street signs, gates etc. This was cheaper, and ensured that the money remained local.
 - The Bellenden Renewal Area gave the council an opportunity to try new techniques and see which worked, for extension to other areas – e.g. solar panels for heating hot water, rain-water harvesting.
 - Outcomes from the scheme included 36 empty property sites back in use, 11 new business, 31 new shop fronts, and 14 streets benefited.
 - Anecdotal evidence of increased community bonding – e.g. BBC "garden's army".
 - Aspects of the scheme had been included in various best practice guides, media releases, and had received award nominations.
 - The residents survey had indicated general agreement that Peckham had improved, but that general improvement was needed of lights and pavements in the area. The streets not included in the scheme were less satisfied.
 - The forward strategy for future renewal work included improvements for lighting and pavement (funding had been made available); Choumert Market, Peckham Rye. There was also the government changes to grants and loan equity release schemes to take into account.

- 1.3 In summary to his presentation, Roger explained the lessons that had been learnt from the scheme:
- Staffing levels – need to make it clear to residents about what can be done with the limited resources available (there were 1.5 council staff working on the regeneration, but assessments suggested that 6 were required).
 - Payment issues – need to obtain more money up-front (e.g. had been a number of cases where client's circumstances had changed and it was difficult for them to pay the remaining 90% following completion of the works).
 - Standard of work – about 97% of the works had gone well, however the remaining clients had an extremely difficult time. The council was looking to improve on this with partnering contracts for works (one contractual partner, long-term).
 - Consultants – this related to the low staffing levels, and the experience that people wanted to talk directly to council officers not to consultants
 - Changes to policies and legislation – the result being that the council was not able to carry out things which had been originally agreed.
- 1.4 Roger also said that in his view, participation in the renewal scheme had been outstanding, consultation had been good, but the information flow had been problematic because it was expensive to produce, and new residents did not have the information. He clarified that participation was about the people's aspirations for the area, consultation related to how to achieve the agreed end-aim.
- 1.5 Sub-committee members generally commented on how the presentation showed a lot of work and the significant impact of the scheme. Members then directed questions at officers.
- 1.6 Mr Munu asked about how the policies and legislation affected the 10-year time scale, and any contingency in place. Roger Young said there had been a reduction in government funding support for aspects of the scheme since the renewal started (e.g. originally for every pound spent on a property the government would subsidise £0.40). Rachel Sharpe added that the renewal plan for the area was not directly affected by the changes, however the specific support for schemes within the area were affected, and required the priorities to be reassessed each year.
- 1.7 In responses to questions from Cllr Alfred Banya, officers explained how properties were selected for group repair versus face-lift. Face-lifts were used on roads where the traffic was greatest as these were high visibility and enabled people to see that the area was improving. There was set of impartial criteria for group repair which included the condition of properties, the number of council properties and the amount of money available in the financial year (it was important to ensure there was enough funding to do both sides of the street in one year as funding could not be guaranteed the following year).
- 1.8 In terms of arrangements in place for contract monitoring, officers said that there was a manual outlining the procedures. The consultants employed their own liaison representatives.
- 1.9 Officers agreed to get back to the sub-committee with details of:
- Whether the voluntary contributions from locals could be costed rather than taken for granted
 - Breakdown of respective total expenditure figures for specific aspects of the scheme (e.g face-lifts, shop fronts etc).

- Figures for public expenditure per unit of property (face-lift vs group repair).
- 1.10 Roger Young gave further information about the Bellenden Advisory Board. This was set out to give advice and assistance on consultation, not to decide what changes would take place in the area. The members included local representatives, ward councillors and the local police officer. The advisory board was effectively replaced by community councils.
 - 1.11 Cllr Charlie Smith referred to the comment that part of the aim of the renewal team was to bring together the community, and asked how successfully it could be retained. Roger Young referred to the "Living South" magazine, and noted how the "Bellenden area" was used as a selling point for properties. He also gave an example of how Maxted Road residents had come together as a result of the scheme.
 - 1.12 Mr Munu noted that 3000 properties were targeted for consultation and 800 had responded to the questionnaires. Roger said that this was a high response given the large number of forms to be completed. He added that specific groups were then targeted to gain more information. In terms of receiving information, there was always a desire for more information, however there were costs involved. He reminded the meeting that the authority was only required to consult "from time to time" and they had done more than this.
 - 1.13 Mr Munu also queried why residents were being charged for costs. Roger discussed the equity, and gains in property value as a result. He said that no-one expected it would be free.
 - 1.14 Cllr Banya commented on the replacement of the advisory board with community councils. He said an Executive report in 2003 had suggested the Board be re-established. He suggested this should have been developed locally, to build on the richness of the scheme and asked what was being done to build on and create local cohesion stimulated by the process. Roger said there were only 1.5 council staff, but he was working with Russell Profitt from the Peckham Programme to draw on their resources and maintain sustainability.
 - 1.15 Cllr Lorraine Lauder asked about issues raised from feedback forms. Roger said the length of time contractors were on site was the main problem – particularly streets where the whole street was turned into a building site. Other issues included messy work by contractors in scheme one and quality issues with contractors in scheme two. Rachel Sharpe added that the scheme involved working individually with homeowners which was more complex and time-consuming than the relationship with tenants (where the council was the owner).
 - 1.16 The Chair then invited comments from the floor. Eileen Conn asked whether there were other changes for contractors apart from partnering. Rachel said there had been no final decision yet about a partnering contract for Bellenden and provided further details of the two partnering contracts in Alfred Salter and Peckham, and the advantages from a partnering approach.
 - 1.17 Jonathan said that he was impressed with the programme of works. In light of the press attention, Jonathan asked if there had been monitoring of demographic changes and influx of people into the area. Roger said the main movement was that there was now fewer private landlords (partly because of joint scheme with health to improve the quality of housing), and movement from two-bedroom properties to larger houses for families.

- 1.18 Michael from East Peckham said that it was very difficult to be critical of the presentation, and queried what officers would say in response to suggestions that it has contributed to creation of a middle class area which ostracised people in other areas. Roger commented that the government had tasked authorities to put up house prices, and that schemes which improved an area would attract more people and money into the area. There was no intention to turn it into a middle class area, but the improvements were more attractive than leaving the area as it was. Rachel Sharpe added that while it would be ideal to be inclusive to everyone, there were boundaries to regeneration areas.
- 1.19 Sarah from Lyndhurst Way asked about the artists used for the scheme. Roger said that only prominent artists were shown during his presentation but a number of other local artists were involved and ethnic artists outweighed others employed for the scheme.
- 1.20 Chris Moyler from Choumert Road said that he had not personally benefited from the scheme, but was pleased to see the improvements in the area. His major concern related to traffic in the area and that consultants had not appeared to change the traffic scheme proposals in response of public comments. Shelley Burke (Head of Overview and Scrutiny) said she would seek advice on whether traffic management schemes could be considered by Housing Scrutiny and that this to be reported back to the sub-committee.
- 1.21 In light of a comment about the unoccupied shops on Bellenden Road, Roger Young reassured the meeting that there was no intention to leave these unoccupied. One was going through a compulsory purchase order, the other was under negotiation with the owner.
- 1.22 Kelly asked how long it would be before the loaning system came in. Roger said there had been legal issues, these now appeared to be resolved and procedures for implementation were now in place.
- 1.23 Mrs Sydney expressed dissatisfaction about work that was badly done on her property (e.g. slates falling off the property) and said that she had been pressured to sign off the work. Roger replied that he was aware of this case and the council was in the process of taking the contractors to court. The forms signed were not the council's satisfaction forms (which had not been sent out yet as the work had not been completed), but were the contractor's forms. The Chair asked for an update on this issue for the January meeting.
- 1.24 Lionel Wright asked the sub-committee to recommend that the council should provide PowerPoint training for community groups who were making presentations to scrutiny sub-committees. The Chair said there was no requirement for Powerpoint presentations, the sub-committee was happy to accept information in any format and always respected the time and effort people put in to make presentations to the sub-committee. Krystina Stimakovits added that Peckham Voluntary Sector Forum could offer such support to local community groups.
- 1.25 The Chair asked Roger Young to attend the next two scheduled meetings on this topic. For point of clarification he mentioned he intended that copies of the mid-term review of the Bellenden Renewal Scheme would be sent to the sub-committee after the December meeting to enable an unbiased opportunity for public comments at the December meeting.

- 1.26 The Chair thanked everyone who had attended and invited them along to the December Housing Scrutiny meeting which would involve a presentation by the Bellenden Renewal Group and individual representations from anyone else who wished to speak.

RESOLVED That the meeting stand adjourned for 10 minutes.

The meeting reconvened at 9:25pm.

2 TENANTS HALL [pages 4-10]

- 2.1 Harry Marshall outlined the report to the sub-committee updating on progress with the Tenants Hall review. Key points included that the Terms of Reference had not yet been agreed as the item had been deferred at the September Tenants Council meeting; and that the Project Board had decided to push ahead with gathering information via a questionnaire and information-seeking exercise.
- 2.2 In response to a question, Harry confirmed that the wording of the questionnaire was agreed by the Project Board. The sub-committee asked to receive copies of the questionnaire once it was available.
- 2.3 In terms of the input from Housing Scrutiny, the Chair said that the purpose of the item was to ensure that the Tenants Hall review was being progressed. It was expected that the report produced by the Project Board would be referred to the sub-committee, who would then refer an agreed report to the Overview and Scrutiny and the Executive. The Chair also asked for an update report to be scheduled in for a meeting prior to the end of the current sub-committee membership and recommendations could then be made for the new sub-committee.
- 2.4 Mr Munu asked that minutes from the Project Board meeting be provided to prove that meetings took place, and to ensure that tenant representatives were in attendance. The Chair said this was not an acceptable reason, but the information could be provided to show how decisions were made. It was decided that the Project Board minutes would be circulated to the sub-committee following the next Tenant Council meeting, once tenant representatives on the Project Board had had the opportunity to report back to Tenants Council.
- 2.5 Cllr Jane Salmon asked whether it was correct that the council did not know how many facilities there were in Southwark. Harry Marshall said that facilities could become defunct without the Council being informed so it was a useful exercise to carry out.
- 2.6 Cllr Alfred Banya asked if other means of consultation had been considered apart from the questionnaire. Harry said he was not intending to pre-empt the Project Board, but that a key issue was that it was likely that certain groups did not have access to the use of halls, which would need further investigation and consultation.

- 2.7 Lionel Wright said he was sceptical of the review, and was concerned that the ultimate aim of the council was to reduce the number of halls under the control of tenants and residents' associations. Lionel added that some TRAS already shared facilities with community groups and might increase. However the theory that many community groups were being excluded from use of tenant halls had not been justified, but if true other solutions could be explored such as the Council encouraging applications to the National Lottery Fund. Mr Munu was unhappy that the only form of consultation appeared to be the questionnaire. The Chair reminded the meeting that the purpose was to receive an update report to ensure that the review was being moved forward. The Chair also commented that Mr Wright and Mr Munu were in a position to influence Tenants Council, and could ask the representatives on the Project Board to look into their concerns.
- 2.8 The Chair thanked Harry Marshall for his update.

3 HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY REVIEW [pages 11-59]

- 3.1 Miny Jansen discussed the agenda report, presenting the sub-committee with information about the consultation process and an outline of changes to the proposed policy as a result. Consultation overall had been generally positive. Concerns raised during consultation included: increased expectation about access; that homeless households would receive less priority compared to the current allocations policy; some concerns at the use of the term "bidding"; and scepticism over whether the council could make the policy work.
- 3.2 Miny said that there would continue to be on-going meetings to ensure that, in the event the policy was agreed by Executive and implemented, there would be support for those groups who may have greater difficulty accessing the scheme. Miny also reported that there had been some exploration of procurement routes, and this indicated that this was a limited market. Demand from other local authorities for similar systems could result in a delay to any implementation.
- 3.3 Cllr Banya asked about the Select Committee's recommendation in May to abolish choice-based lettings on the basis that they had the effect of increasing segregation and asked if there were contingencies in place. Miny explained that the Select Committee had been concerned that such policies favoured certain groups e.g. because they were more familiar with the area and ways of accessing housing locally. However, Miny said that Southwark's policy proposals safeguarded against this, because they took into account both housing need as well as how long people had been on the register. Other councils had a more radical approach which did seem to create inequalities, but Southwark's proposal was more balanced. Southwark also seemed less segregated than some other areas in the country, which should counter-balance the tendency of applicants choosing only those areas where members of their community had already settled. Miny added that regular monitoring of the outcome of the new policy was crucial.

- 3.4 In response to further questions from members, Miny said that about 15-20 boroughs were involved in similar schemes, and also that the range of properties available for letting allocations was limited to the properties which became empty. In terms of consultation with housing association organisations, only a few responded – those who replied were generally interested in costs and views were not expressed on the priority settings. There were very few detailed responses from voluntary organisations. Council officers had arranged regular meetings with four organisations to devise support arrangements for vulnerable applicants, as well as a longer term strategy for the ongoing development of these arrangements. Miny agreed to provide further information about the responses from these organisations to sub-committee members.
- 3.5 Lionel referred to the summary report about consultation and said that there was an inherent risk of bias in the council summary and the quotes used. Miny said that as noted on the report, it had been written by independent community consultation consultants.
- 3.6 Lionel Wright said that the word “bid” had not been liked by neighbourhood forums, but this had not been changed in the final draft policy. Miny said that this had been discussed at length by the review board following the consultation, who had decided that this was the most simple, concise way to explain it.
- 3.7 Lionel Wright acknowledged he had doubts about the bidding process and questioned Miny's statement about the degree of integration in Southwark. Lionel said that the lettings policies of previous Labour administrations in decades past had been a sort of apartheid policy, we were still living with the legacy of this in the North of the borough, and the Council should take heed of the concerns raised by the Select Committee. The Chair then ruled that the Committee's discussion had been limited to the process of consultation rather than the substance of the choice-based proposals, and lettings review and referred members to the officer's recommendation. Glen Egan reminded members of the purpose of considering the item at scrutiny, and suggested that if there were concerns about the policy content, representations could be made to Executive. Lionel Wright challenged the Chair's ruling and argued that the recommendation from the Strategic Director did not limit the scope of debate in the way that the Chair and Mr. Egan alleged.
- 3.8 Councillor Charlie Smith asked about the scale of consultation, and the reasons for the relatively low response rate. Miny confirmed that she understood the consultation exercise to be one of the largest undertaken in the council and said she had received positive feedback on this. There was some puzzlement about why there was not a higher response rate, but it could be concluded that people were more likely to provide comments if they were unhappy with the proposals than if they were generally satisfied.
- 3.9 Cllr Banya said that he was not fully satisfied with the consultation process and length of consultation. There had been a delay in getting the questionnaires out, and a three-month consultation over the summer period was not ideal. Miny said there had been flexibility in allowing responses after the closing date for consultation, for example the Neighbourhood Forum were supposed to do this. Responses received after the closing date had been considered, and there had been no significant different views to what had already been taken into account. While there was some delay in sending out the questionnaires, consultation information had already been widely circulated.
- 3.10 Lionel also raised concerns that it was important that the timeframe for consultation was of a sufficient length to enable proposals to be circulated to forums in a logical order.

RESOLVED

That Executive:

1. Note that the consultation carried out on the Housing Allocations Review Policy was one of the largest carried out by the Council and that the sub-committee is generally happy with the consultation undertaken;
2. Note the relatively low rate of response to consultation; and
3. Recommends that there could be future improvements to consultation undertaken on housing policies by ensuring the timeframe for consultation
 - a) accommodates the need to consult with the various housing-related associations, forums and councils in a logical order;
 - b) takes into account possible seasonal influences on response rates (e.g. summer holidays).

4 WORK PROGRAMME

- 4.1 Members were keen to do a site visit, preferably on a Saturday morning, around the Bellenden Area as part of the scrutiny on the Bellenden Renewal Scheme. This would be advertised so that residents and traders would have further opportunity to provide comments to the members.
- 4.2 Mr Munu was concerned that his briefing paper on race issues had not been included in the agenda for discussion as had been noted in the minutes from the October Housing Scrutiny meeting. As a result, Mr Munu said he would report the Chair to the Commission for Racial Equality.
- 4.3 Glen Egan recommended that Mr Munu put his concerns in writing for consideration by the legal team.

RESOLVED That the meeting be closed due to disruption.

The meeting closed at 10.45pm.

CHAIR:

DATE:

Appendix 1

The following people signed in the attendance record at Housing Scrutiny, 10 November 2004:

Mark Jonathan
P. Byrne
Matthew Bloxidge
Nayan Patel
Catherine Sydney
Krystina Stimakovits
Chris Moyler
Caroline Stanton
Liem Tumulty
Kay Pinnoell
Sarah Pollard
Colin & Fiona
Barber
D. Murphy
Gareth Owen
Michael Bukola
Carole Hancock
Eileen Conn
John Gorsuch
Gregg Hutchings
Joan Brown
A. Augustine
C. Lawson
G. Ptok
Jonathan Gaventa