



DRAFT

HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE held on WEDNESDAY 29 JUNE 2005 at 7:00PM at the Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT: Councillor Neil Watson (Chair)
Councillor Charlie Smith (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Fiona Colley

**NON-VOTING
CO-OPTED
MEMBERS:** Mr Al-Issa Munu – Tenant Representative
Ms Althea Smith – Tenant Representative

OFFICERS: Debbi Gooch – Legal Team
Eamon Lally – Corporate Policy
Ann Pettifer – Housing Strategy & Policy Team
Robert Weallans – Housing Strategy & Policy Team
Peter Roberts – Scrutiny Team

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Received from Councillors Michelle Pearce, Veronica Ward and Anne Yates and Mr Dave Clark and Mr John Nosworthy.

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

There were none.

DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were none.

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.

MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2005 be agreed as a correct record of proceedings and signed by the Chair:

1. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP (see pages 1 – 2)

- 1.1 Members of the Sub-Committee expressed concern that the terms of reference did not specifically include equalities issues, particularly in view of statutory obligations under the Race Relations Act and the recent Ouseley review. The Chair indicated that he would raise this with the parent committee.
- 1.2 Concern was also raised that when members were not able to attend meetings they should submit apologies and, if possible, arrange attendance of reserve members.
- 1.3 The Sub-Committee noted its terms of reference and membership.

2. COMMUNITY STRATEGY REVIEW (see pages 3 – 10)

- 2.1 The representative from Corporate Policy introduced the process for beginning to draft the Community Strategy for 2016. Southwark Alliance had circulated topic papers as a way of stimulating initial discussion and to start developing a vision for Southwark. The Council was required to respond formally to these by the end of July.
- 2.2 The Sub-Committee was concerned that, generally, the topic papers did not have a sufficient focus on housing, which should be seen as underlying many of the priorities for the borough. Specifically, the Community Strategy should take account of and make reference to the Council's Housing Strategy.
- 2.3 There was general support for promoting town centres. The Sub-Committee also focussed on particular areas in the borough and highlighted the need for regeneration outside the immediate Bellenden Renewal Area (e.g. Choumert Road). In a wider context, the Sub-Committee also stressed that the Community Strategy, when drafted, should give due weight to the impact of the Thames Gateway development. Account should also be taken of the fact that increasingly legislation operated across the whole of London and across boroughs, i.e. decision making in 10 years' time might not be devolved to individual boroughs.
- 2.4 There was concern about the mix of housing in terms of size of properties. Currently, insufficient account was being taken of the numbers of overcrowded dwellings in Southwark and the consequent demand for larger housing units.
- 2.5 Members of the Sub-Committee stressed the importance of the Community Strategy including a distinct section on equality, diversity and community involvement. It was also considered essential that, at the drafting stage, the Community Strategy take account of government guidelines, particularly in respect of monitoring and review mechanisms.
- 2.6 The Sub-Committee raised concern that Council policies (specifically the UDP) should refer to the most up to date version of the Community Strategy. A particular concern was raised that the draft of the UDP currently under discussion would not refer to the correct version of the Community Strategy. Officers explained that the UDP, together with other Council policies, was drafted in a way that was intended to allow flexibility and to reflect any changes to other policy documents.

- 2.7 The Sub-Committee noted that the two cop-opted members representing leaseholders had been unable to attend the meeting and agreed to revisit the Community Strategy at its next meeting in order to give them the opportunity to make any comments.

RESOLVED:

1. That the above comments be referred to Overview & Scrutiny Committee and taken into account in the Council's formal response to Southwark Alliance.
2. That the consultation document Southwark 2016, Your Chance to Help Shape the Future, be circulated to co-opted members and the Sub-Committee consider their comments at its next meeting.

3. HOUSING STRATEGY (see pages 11 – 77)

- 3.1 Officers from the Housing Strategy & Policy Team introduced the draft Housing Strategy.
- 3.2 The Sub-Committee noted that chapters 4 and 5 of the Strategy referred to the ongoing stock options appraisal and was concerned that this did not pre-empt the work of the Options Appraisal Working Group. Officers confirmed that the appraisal referred to was being steered by the Working Group and that therefore the Strategy only reflected the policy position as at the present time. The Strategy also referred to the development of tenants compacts and concern was expressed as to whether these were being implemented. Officers indicated that the tenants and residents compact had been in place for three years and that a review was to be undertaken by the Housing Partnership Board.
- 3.3 The Sub-Committee questioned whether the council stock condition survey had been concluded and whether it provided adequate foundation for the assumptions within the Strategy. Officers responded that the council stock condition survey had been concluded following extensive validation checks and was considered sufficiently robust to support assumptions in the Strategy. The Sub-Committee asked that when the Strategy was submitted to Council Assembly it contain the most up-to-date figures in terms of the investment programme. Officers stated that the Strategy included the most up to date programme available.
- 3.4 The Sub-Committee stressed the importance of consultation, particularly in terms of publicising consultation and allowing an adequate timeframe, and the importance of monitoring the Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA). Officers reported that consultation on the new Housing Strategy had been extensive and had taken place at key stages in its development over a period of more than 12 months. Implementation of the recommendations coming out of the EIA would be monitored and, in addition, the annual review of the Housing Strategy would include ongoing equalities impact assessment.
- 3.5 If possible, members of the Sub-Committee were keen that the Housing Strategy acknowledge that the Council's priorities in terms of funding might change, for example reflecting a diversion of resources to Every Child Matters, the Thames Gateway, or following changes to Housing Benefits. Officers explained that risk assessments included in each of the strategic objective chapters identified external risks, i.e. those outside the Council's control, including the potential for the Housing Corporation to divert resources to other areas, such as the Thames Gateway. Decisions about the relative priorities of revenue services remained within the Council's control.

- 3.6 Concern was raised as to whether tenants were being charged for costs of the Choice Based Lettings scheme and when the scheme would be implemented. This was identified as an issue to raise with the Executive Member for Housing. Officers commented that there was a net cost associated with the introduction of choice-based lettings and changes in the allocations policy and that provision had been made in the Housing Revenue Account in the current year to meet this cost.
- 3.7 Members identified a specific problem of tenants wishing to move out of under-occupied properties but who were prevented from doing this by rent arrears (creating the situation where property was not released and arrears continued to rise). Targets were also challenged – particularly for numbers of new-build 3+ bedroom properties and affordable homes, and for reduction in the numbers of under-occupied council properties. Officers underlined the need to balance the Council's policy to maximise income collection against the policy to release larger housing units. Transfers of tenants in rent arrears were permitted at Officer discretion where satisfactory agreement had been reached on paying off the arrears. Targets for new affordable homes, including larger homes, were in line with the Council's Unitary Development Plan (UDP), which in turn generally conformed to the London Plan. The under-occupation targets were for numbers of moves under the under-occupation scheme and would be reviewed over the life of the Housing Strategy. They were assessed as achievable moves under the scheme.
- 3.8 The Sub-Committee asked that a definition of "affordable housing" be included as a footnote to the Strategy but at the same time questioned what Southwark residents could in reality afford and whether the standard formula for what was "affordable" was meaningful.

RESOLVED: That the above comments be referred to the Executive and taken into account in consideration of the Housing Strategy.

4. WORK PROGRAMME 2005/06 (see pages 78 – 89)

- 4.1 The Sub-Committee discussed possible items for inclusion in its 2005/2006 work programme.

RESOLVED: That the following be considered as provisional items for inclusion in the Sub-Committee's 2005/2006 work programme:

- Best Value Review of Housing Management (review following implementation)
- Recommendations of Stock Options Appraisal Working Group
- Housing Revenue Account – budget review
- Effectiveness of tenants compacts

- Private sector renting (e.g. return of deposits to tenants; Southwark's ability to take action where landlords act illegally)
- Empty properties – council action/encouragement to ensure vacant private housing stock is occupied as quickly as possible

The meeting closed at 10.10 pm.

DRAFT

CHAIR:

DATE: