



Overview & Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES of the of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Monday 15 July 2024 at 7.00 pm at 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Wingfield (Chair)
Councillor Irina Von Wiese
Councillor Suzanne Abachor
Councillor Cassandra Brown
Councillor Victor Chamberlain
Councillor Laura Johnson
Councillor Richard Leeming
Councillor Margy Newens
Councillor Catherine Rose
Councillor Martin Seaton
Jonathan Clay (co-opted member)
Marcin Jagodzinski (co-opted member)

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor John Batteson, Cabinet Member for Climate
Emergency, Jobs and Business
Councillor Sarah King, Cabinet Member for Council Homes

OFFICER SUPPORT: Sarah Feasey, Deputy Head of Law
Everton Roberts, Head of Scrutiny

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sam Foster and Martin Brecknell (Co-opted Member).

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

There were no late additional items.

Item 6 – Report on the decision to self-refer to the Regulator for Social Housing regarding the status of the Council's domestic electrical inspection condition reports (DEICRs) was circulated on supplemental agenda No.1

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2024 were approved as a correct record.

It was reported that the outstanding Minutes would be circulated to the next meeting for approval.

5. UPDATING THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ON DELIVERY OF THE COUNCIL'S CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN FOR 2023/24

The committee received an update on the climate change strategy and action plan for 2023/24, and the priority workstreams for 2024/25.

The committee heard from Councillor John Batteson, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency, Jobs and Business, Toni Ainge, Strategic Director of Environment, Neighbourhoods and Growth, Tom Sharland, Climate Change Programme Director and Tom Buttrick, Climate Change Programme Manager.

Councillor John Batteson introduced the item. He reported that there had been a lot of great work and good progress, referencing examples such as the Streets for People campaign, the launch of the Southwark Community Energy fund, the creation of new jobs, and the Southwark Green Investment. He stressed that there were a lot of challenges in delivering the climate action plan, most notably funding, and advised that in 2021 the estimated capital costs for delivering the work required to meet net zero was £3.92b, this figure was anticipated to be higher now due to inflationary costs, with a more recent estimate from another London local authority indicating that the figure was now closer to £10b. Councillor Batteson reassured the committee that the council was aware of the challenges and had a plan to address them. The climate team were refreshing the action plan over the next year, as the council reached the halfway point to 2030.

The committee received a presentation on the Climate Action Plan 2023/24 [available to view on the meeting agenda page], which covered the highlights from the past year and issues the Climate Team would be focussing on in the year ahead.

Tom Sharland, Climate Change Programme Director explained that the Climate Action Plan was split across six key themes: greener buildings; Active and sustainable transport; Thriving natural environment; Circular economy with green jobs; Renewable energy; Resilience and adaptation. The first five themes focused

on emissions reduction and reducing carbon, and the last theme [resilience and adaptation] had a focus on how the borough can adapt and become more resilient to things such as flooding and overheating.

There were 117 actions being delivered by teams across the council. Each action had a risk rating of deliverability – 104 (89%) were rated green, 10 (9%) were rated amber, and 3 (3%) were rated red. It was highlighted that there were some large actions, particularly around building retrofits and how buildings were made more efficient, that fell within the red rating and required significant areas of investment, resource and expertise. Overall, it was a positive picture with a lot of work happening, but with a recognition that some areas needed a wholesale change to enable issues to move a lot quicker.

Tom reported that along with funding, part of the challenge was the council seeing change in the borough and taking residents and key partners forward at the same time. There was also the challenge of resource within the council to equip staff with the knowledge to understand issues such as building retrofit which was complex, and the wider resource and skills in the borough to enact the level of change needed in a short period of time. In order for the borough to hit targets there was a need for behaviour change from residents, stakeholders, and people across the borough to start enacting positive change. A number of engagement groups were launched last year, along with an approach to working much more widely across the council.

Tom brought to the committee's attention a number of delivery highlights in 2023/24 and upcoming delivery priorities for 2024/25 (highlights contained in the presentation document).

After the presentation, questions and discussion took place around the following:

- Working with key partners
- Keeping the overview and scrutiny committee updated on progress.
- Previous environment scrutiny commission report in relation to energy and heat savings, and arising recommendations around 'fabric first approach; use of SELCHP, and building properties of an environmental standard that are not reliant on connecting with SELCHP
- Staff training around climate action strategy
- Cost of delivering climate action programme, and seeking coalition with other partners/councils to make the case to government around funding
- Refresh of the Climate change strategy in 2025
- Funding gap in relation to retrofitting council homes
- Green buildings fund

- Actions and progress in respect of scope three emissions, and teaming up with local authorities with shared suppliers on bigger contracts
- Difficulty in scrutinising carbon impact due to the way information is presented to the committee
- Making greater use of the Green Investment Fund
- Funds the council has bid for over the last year
- Climate Supplementary Planning Document
- Energy purchases for schools
- Increasing resident participation and ensuring their voices are heard

RESOLVED:

That the committee receive regular updates on the delivery of the Climate Change Strategy (frequency and format to be determined).

6. REPORT ON THE DECISION TO SELF-REFER TO THE REGULATOR FOR SOCIAL HOUSING REGARDING THE STATUS OF THE COUNCIL'S DOMESTIC ELECTRICAL INSPECTION CONDITION REPORTS (DEICRS)

The committee received a report from the strategic director of housing on the decision to self-refer to the regulator for social housing regarding the status of the council's domestic electrical inspection condition reports.

The committee heard from Councillor Sarah King, Cabinet Member for Council Homes, Hakeem Osinaike, Strategic Director of Housing and Stuart Davis, Managing Director of Southwark Construction.

Councillor Sarah King welcomed the item being on the agenda as it provided a good opportunity for further scrutiny on what led to the decision to self-refer, the programme of work that had been put in place to ensure that the council reached compliance, and the lessons that needed to be learned going forward.

Councillor King explained that on joining the council, the strategic director of housing had undertaken a full review of the housing department and the services it provided. Once the strategic director reported on compliance findings an immediate decision was taken to self-refer. The decision to self-refer was accompanied with a comprehensive communications plan, recognising that a decision of this type was likely to cause concern for many residents.

Councillor King signalled that further consideration would be given to electrical safety in leasehold properties, and that the council would be prioritising this and

looking at how the council communicates and supports leaseholders in arranging their own electrical safety checks to ensure that whole estates were safe.

The committee then heard from Hakeem Osinaike who explained that having found that the council had not been doing electrical safety checks in all council properties, a decision was taken to do a self-referral to the regulator for social housing, but at the same time actions had been put in place to get to compliance as quickly as possible. Funding was available to do the tests and to carry out any remedial actions required following tests.

Hakeem stressed that this had not been a case where officers had taken a lackadaisical attitude to health and safety. The council had been carrying out electrical testing in high rise buildings, both in dwellings and communal areas, but having not done so in all the other places that the council was responsible for managing, it meant that the council was not compliant, hence the referral to the regulator.

Following the report introductions, questions and discussion took place around the following:

- Current number of homes with compliant test certificates
- Communication with residents - how this will take place
- Access to properties to carry out tests, and provision available to enforce this
- Length of time taken to get testing programme in place
- Statutory and regulatory requirements – provision in place to evaluate, sense check and ensure they are met
- Other major housing providers who have not been able deliver against the regulations specified
- Adequacy of current information technology (IT) system(s) to manage the complex range of data held by the council and suitability for rolling out this work
- Assisting leaseholders with electrical testing
- Provision of electricians to undertake the testing

RESOLVED:

That the committee be provided with an update on progress in due course.

7. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMMES FOR 2024/25

The committee discussed potential items for the 2024/25 municipal year.

RESOLVED:

1. That the overview and scrutiny committee annual work programme be as follows:
 - Digital Systems and Workflows – CRM System for resident responses (including looking at how the council liaises with residents, and right contact first time)
 - Refresh of Southwark Stands Together and Southwark Equality Framework – Pre decision scrutiny
 - Annual Workforce Strategy
 - Budget scrutiny process
 - Governance and oversight of the Housing revenue account and recovery plan
 - Governance and oversight of Housing Services
 - Cabinet/Senior Management Strategic Responsibility
 - Enhancement of participation of residents and community groups in the scrutiny process (looking at different models of scrutiny)
 - Interview with the Police Borough Commander
 - Council Homes Disposals Policy
 - Housing associations
 - Southwark New Homes Programme
 - Customer Services (to also include digital inclusion/exclusion)
 - Process around bidding for government grants (to be looked at as part of the budget process – but as a standalone item)
2. That it be noted that the commissions will be setting their own work programmes.

The meeting ended at 9.35pm

CHAIR:

DATED: