

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING & REGENERATION SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2019

MP702 - TOWN HALL MULBERRY PLACE

Members Present:

Councillor Dipa Das (Chair)
Councillor Eve McQuillan
Councillor Andrew Wood
Councillor Shad Chowdhury

Co-opted Members Present:

Anne Ambrose Tenant Representative

Other Councillors Present:

None

Others Present:

Sandra Fawcett – Chair of the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum

Officers Present:

Abidah Kamali – Strategy & Policy Manager
Mark Baigent – (Interim Divisional Director, Housing and
Regeneration)
Fiona Crehan – High Streets and Town Centres Manager
Simon Hall – Interim Head of Growth
Rushena Miah – Democratic Services
Mark Slowikowski – Senior Strategy & Policy Manager

Apologies

Councillor Ayas Miah – Sent substitute Councillor Shad Choudhury
Councillor Shah Ameen
Councillor Helal Uddin
Councillor Sirajul Islam – Cabinet Member for Housing
Moshin Hamim – Co-opted Member, Leasehold Representative

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2019 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION:

4. SPOTLIGHT: HIGH STREETS AND TOWN CENTRES - SUPPORTING NEW AND EXISTING BUSINESS

[The Chair decided to change the order of business so the Draft Open Spaces Scrutiny Report was discussed first followed by the spotlight on High Streets and Town Centres. For improved readability the minutes will follow the order published on the agenda].

The Committee received the report and presentation of Fiona Crehan (High Streets and Town Centres Manager) on supporting new and existing businesses on the high street.

In response to the presentation the following discussions took place:

Ben Johnson Road

A Member asked if there were plans to renovate the Ben Johnson Road area and if the council had powers to change the use of units into retail outlets as opposed to the varied nature of the businesses. Officers responded that Ben Johnson Road had been identified as a potential scheme but resources had been allocated to higher priority areas. Officers mentioned that they could look at delivering small initiatives, to support businesses, improve attractiveness and offer but were hesitant to overstretch funds that had already been allocated to schemes.

With regard to the change of use query, officers explained that it was up to the landlord of a property to apply for a change of use classification. They said planning officers would only get involved if there was significant evidence that the unit was not a viable use of its existing classification.

ACTION: For the Enterprise Team to explore the growth of businesses at Ben Johnson Road and for Fiona Crehan to find out if there were any funds available to do a small scale project in the Ben Johnson Road area.

Concentrations of the same type of business

Members queried if there was anything that could be done to prevent the concentration of the same type of businesses in one area. Officers explained that the council could not force a business to close and that in some cases the concentration of businesses made commercial sense. For example the Indian wedding outlet shops in Bethnal Green were in direct competition with similar outlets in Green Street West Ham which was located outside the borough.

Community Cohesion

Members thanked the highstreets team for their work on Roman Road West which they said was urgently needed.

Members asked officers whether there was any community cohesion work in the pipeline. A Member had noted that some coffee shops for example were expensive and perceived to be inaccessible to the wider community. Officers explained that it was up to the business to set their prices and many had little opportunity to reduce prices due to high business rates and business loans.

Officers said the highstreets team was able to broker introductions between businesses and community groups to boost the business and to help it become an asset to the community. They also said they could ask business owners i.e. coffee shops to think about how they might attract more customers and advise them to use social media to attract new customers, facilitate meet up events and parent coffee mornings during less busy periods.

Supporting female entrepreneurs

Officers informed the Committee that there was increasing appetite from female entrepreneurs to trade from market stalls, currently a predominately male dominated profession. The Committee was informed that female entrepreneurs reported that they would feel more confident if there were more women working at the markets. The service informed the Committee that it had reserved a section of Petty Coat Lane market to support women to trade at market stalls. .

Toilets at Brick Lane

Councillor Choudhury raised a concern regarding the lack of toilets in Brick Lane. Officers acknowledged this was an ongoing issue. They said they had attempted to install urinals on the street but it was difficult given the proximity to people's homes or business which sparked objections. Businesses were also reluctant to allow non-customers to use their facilities. Closed facilities were not an option as they would result in drug use in the stalls. Officers said the team were looking into joining with the City of London toilet app.

Street lighting at Brick Lane

Councillor Choudhury informed that streetlights 8, 10 and 14 were not working and that no action has been taken further to a Streetline submission. He said he was considering raising the issue in a Member Enquiry. Fiona Crehan noted the issue and said she would follow up on it with the councillor outside of the meeting.

Following a request from the committee to include more greenery in Brick Lane, the Committee was informed that it would have to be in the form of planters because the ground was not viable for direct planting.

The Brick Lane Arch

The Committee applauded the work commissioned on the Brick Lane arch.

Meeting the housing and retail needs of a growing population

Councillor Wood was concerned that planners were not taking into consideration the impact of significant population growth, due to new high density developments, and the retail infrastructure needs of new and existing communities. He stressed the importance of ensuring retail and infrastructure needs of new and existing communities needed to be anticipated. He raised concerns that there did not appear to be any efforts to address the issue, particularly in the Isle of Dogs area.

Officers acknowledged the challenge and said it would require a tailored approach. They said retailers were exploring alternative methods of shopping for customer convenience and regeneration has made a positive impact on the footfall in Crisp Street as an example. Though they agreed a longer term approach would be required and agreed to talk to the planning and regeneration team about the issue. The Committee asked Fiona and Simon to return to the Committee at a future meeting to provide an update on their discussions.

London Living Wage

There was a discussion around what the council could do to ensure those employed on the high street were earning London Living Wage. Officers said there was an awareness programme run by the council that helped business owners become London Living Wage employers. There had not been a subsidy placed on smaller businesses to join the scheme as the council was not allowed to differentiate between a small business and a large corporation such as a bank. It was noted that though the council could conduct awareness raising work around the living wage they were not allowed to dictate how an employer ran their business. It was noted however that the council as one of the largest employers of the borough, did have procurement rules in place when commissioning certain services to ensure they were London Living Wage compliant

It was also mentioned that the Committee would be looking at Development of Council policy on London Living wage at the next Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting.

Town Centres & Regeneration Exhibition Event(s)

Fiona and Simon invited Members to take part in upcoming regeneration events regarding high streets and town centres. Officers sought the advice of the Committee on what topics could be covered and what format this could take. Councillor Choudhury requested the seminar be made public because he wanted to invite a cohort of business owners and residents to the event.

ACTION: For Fiona to speak to the planning and regeneration team about their plans for retail and community infrastructure in the context of high population growth and density in the borough (particularly in the Isle of Dogs area) and come back to the Committee with an update.

ACTIONS: Housing Committee Councillors to get in touch with Fiona and Simon to provide advice on the town centre regeneration engagement events.

ACTIONS: for the events to be listed in the Members circular and Members Hub.

RESOLVED:

1. To note the presentation.

5. DRAFT HOUSING OPEN SPACES SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee were given the opportunity to review and comment on the final draft of the Open Spaces Scrutiny Report. The Committee approved the report as presented.

GIS Mapping

There was a discussion around funding for geographic information system (GIS) mapping of housing open spaces. Officers responded that the recommendation had been noted but a decision had not been made to fund it in addition to existing and pressing council priorities. Sandra Fawcett advised the Committee that many aspects to the action plan could be accomplished with existing resources.

Pesticides

A Member raised a concern that Tower Hamlets Homes Residents had reported that THH was using harmful pesticides on their estate grounds. The Committee requested for Mark Baigent (Interim Divisional Director of Housing & Regeneration) to find out what kind of pesticides were being used and ask them to switch to a more environmentally friendly product. Mr Baigent said he would look into the issue.

Mark Baigent and Sandra Fawcett left the meeting after this item. It was noted that it would be Mark Baigent's last meeting as he would be leaving the Council. His replacement Karen Swift would be joining the Council on 30th September. The Committee thanked Mark for his service to the Committee and wished him all the best for the future.

RESOLVED:

1. To note and approve the Open Spaces Scrutiny Report.

ACTIONS:

1. Mark Baigent to find out what pesticides THH are using and if harmful to advise them to switch to an environmentally friendly product.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Chairs announcement:

It was noted that it would be Abidah Kamali's last meeting supporting the Committee. Abidah would continue at the council as a policy manager on a new policy project. The Chair thanked Abidah for her support to the

Committee over the course of the year. It was announced that Mark Slowikowski would be stepping in as a policy officer to the Committee as of the next meeting in November 2019.

Councils Contingency Plan

ACTION: Councillor Wood requested the council's Contingency Plan be reviewed by the Committee further to concerns at the handling of a gas leak in the Canary Wharf and Limehouse area, earlier in the afternoon. The Committee agreed to include this item on the forward plan.

Resident Engagement

ACTION: To include in the forward plan an update on how Social Landlords plan to / or are delivering the additional requirements of Resident Engagement as specified in the Social Housing Green Paper and Building a Safer Future consultation

RESOLVED:

1. To note the above actions.

The meeting ended at 8.10 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Dipa Das
Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee