

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 11 July 2017 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Alan Hall (Chair), Gareth Siddorn (Vice-Chair), Abdeslam Amrani, Paul Bell, Peter Bernards, Andre Bourne, Bill Brown, John Coughlin, Brenda Dacres, Amanda De Ryk, Carl Handley, Maja Hilton, Sue Hordijkeno, Councillor Joyce Jacca, Stella Jeffrey, Liz Johnston-Franklin, Helen Klier, Jim Mallory, Sophie McGeevor, David Michael, Jamie Milne, Pauline Morrison, John Muldoon, Olurotimi Ogunbadewa, Jacq Paschoud, John Paschoud, Joan Reid, Jonathan Slater, Luke Sorba, Alan Till and James-J Walsh

APOLOGIES: Councillors Chris Barnham, Suzannah Clarke, Colin Elliott, Simon Hooks, Mark Ingleby, Roy Kennedy, Hilary Moore, Eva Stamirowski and Susan Wise

ALSO PRESENT: Paul Aladenika (Service Group Manager, Policy Development and Analytical Insight), Andrew Potter (Chief Executive) (Lewisham Homes), David Austin (Head of Corporate Resources), Councillor Kevin Bonavia (Cabinet Member Resources), Sir Steve Bullock (Mayor), Charlotte Dale (Interim Overview and Scrutiny Manager), Jeff Endean (Housing Programmes and Strategy Team Manager), Barrie Neal (Head of Corporate Policy and Governance), Janet Senior (Executive Director for Resources & Regeneration), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services), Martin Corbett (Borough Commander) (London Fire Brigade), Gary Price (Senior Fire Safety Officer) (London Fire Brigade), Guy Ware (London Councils) and Emma Talbot (Head of Planning)

1. Minutes of the meetings held on 23 January and 27 March 2017

1.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meetings held on 23 January and 27 March 2017 be agreed as an accurate record.

2. Declarations of Interest

2.1 No declarations of interest were made.

The order of the agenda was changed, item 6 was taken next, followed by item 5, item 4, item 3, then item 7.

3. Business Rates Update

3.1 Guy Ware from London Councils was welcomed to the meeting. The presentation attached at Appendix A of the report was given and a discussion held on the content.

3.2 The following key points were made:

- The Local Government Finance Bill had not featured in the Queen's Speech and clarity was being sought from Government in relation to the future of the business rates devolution proposals.

- A key principle of the proposed London pilot scheme would be that there should be no detriment to any participant (as was the case in existing pilots). i.e. an individual borough would not be any worse off under the pilot scheme than it would have been under existing arrangements.
- In terms of the proposed governance arrangements, initial agreement to participate would need to be unanimous but subsequent decisions would be taken on a majority basis (with the rules governing what constitutes a majority, to be agreed).

3.3 In response to questions from Members, the following points were noted:

- The three way split of proceeds (incentives pot, needs pot, investment pot) had been proposed in order to gain Government approval and to ensure unanimous agreement on the part of the boroughs. The scheme needed to fulfil the Government's policy purpose (promoting economic growth, with incentives to encourage high performing boroughs to continue to perform highly) and ensure that the boroughs' desire for better cross-London infrastructure was met (the investment pot) whilst addressing varying levels of need across the capital (needs pot). However, the percentages allocated to each pot were up for negotiation.
- It would be essential that boroughs did not become reliant on any additional funding generated as was currently the case with a number of sources of local government funding that did not form part of base budgets.
- Existing pools had memorandums of understanding covering the way in which members could leave, and the notice required, and a similar memorandum would be drawn up for the London pilot.
- The proposals did not represent autonomy over London's finances (only representing approximately £200m) but were an important concession in terms of financial devolution.
- The Government might still be minded to pursue the pilot in order to drive growth and meet the requirement in law, for funding generated by business rates to be spent on local government services (taking into account the current surplus).

3.4 The Chair thanked Guy Ware for providing a very informative presentation.

3.5 **RESOLVED:** That the report and presentation be noted.

4. **Lewisham's Response to the Grenfell Fire**

4.1 The Chair introduced the item, thanked all those involved in responding to the fire, and welcomed the Mayor to the meeting. The Mayor echoed these thanks, outlined the Council's responsibilities to all Lewisham residents in terms of fire safety and talked about short and long-term responses, anticipating fundamental changes to fire regulations and public housing over time.

4.2 The Chair welcomed Martin Corbett, and his colleague Gary Price, from the London Fire Brigade (LFB) to the meeting. Martin made the following key points:

- The LFB was reassuring residents in Lewisham tower blocks that where they live is safe.
- Whilst the responsibility for fire risk assessments lies with housing providers, the LFB had set up a task force to help councils conduct audits of 'high risk' buildings (mainly those with ACM cladding). Three buildings in Lewisham had ACM cladding.
- As a result of the Grenfell fire, the LFB's tactical plans had changed and they now sent five, rather than four, appliances to fires in tower blocks (a decision taken two days after the fire).
- The LFB was also conducting home fire safety visits (available on request) to reassure and assist worried residents.

4.3 In response to questions from the Committee it was noted that:

- There had been no requests, to date, in Lewisham, for audits of any non-residential buildings, but the LFB worked with commercial buildings on a daily basis. Gary Price confirmed that 30 inspecting officers had been seconded to a task force to inspect premises identified with ACM, regardless of the residential/commercial status of the building. The audits included an assessment of access, hydrants, voids, compartmentalisation, fire stops, fire doors and escape routes. They also involved scrutiny of the fire risk assessment. In addition, there was a specialist hospital team that would be inspecting Lewisham Hospital in due course. Schools would also be inspected in due course.
- The same tests were being conducted on each ACM sample and additional tests could also be undertaken. All landlords of tall buildings in Lewisham had been asked to test their cladding to DCLG standards and were doing this. All had responded although the results of some tests were still outstanding.
- Whilst the LFB would always advocate the use of sprinklers, there was a spectrum of opinion on whether they were always the best option. Kevin Sheehan confirmed that their use in Lewisham's social housing buildings would be considered should a fire safety risk assessment suggest they might be of benefit and installed wherever they would be the safest option.

4.4 Martin Corbett and Gary Price were thanked for attending the meeting and it was noted that the programme of work arising from this tragedy would continue and would continue to be scrutinised.

4.5 **RESOLVED:** That the relevant Select Committees keep this issue under review.

5. The Conservative Party Manifesto, Queen's Speech and Brexit Update

5.1 **RESOLVED:** That the report be considered by each Select Committee to inform the 2017/18 work programmes.

6. Thames Water Scrutiny

6.1 **RESOLVED:** That the joint recommendations outlined at paragraph 5.11 of the report, be endorsed.

7. Items to be referred to Mayor & Cabinet

The meeting ended at 8.35 pm

Chair:

Date:
