



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Communities, Regeneration and Housing Policy & Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a virtual meeting of the **Communities, Regeneration and Housing Policy & Scrutiny Committee** held on **Monday 15 March 2020**.

Members Present: Councillors Andrew Smith (Chairman), Barbara Arzymanow, Antonia Cox, Paul Dimoldenberg, Elizabeth Hitchcock, Aicha Less, Pancho Lewis, Ian Rowley

Also Present: Councillor David Harvey (Cabinet Member for Housing Services), Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Communities and Regeneration), Debbie Jackson (Executive Director of Growth, Planning and Housing), James Green (Director of Development) and Hannah Nobel (Senior Asset Development Manager)

Expert Witness: Richard Valentine-Selsey (Associate Director, Research Analyst) at Savills

1. MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 No apologies were received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3. CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING SERVICES

- 3.1 Councillor David Harvey (Cabinet Member for Housing Services), provided a briefing on key issues within his portfolio. The committee received the update and held detailed discussions on the following topics:

- Members noted that access to outdoor space is important and asked about what can be done to improve access on some estates. They heard that the council could look more aggressively at concrete spaces and consider whether these spaces could be transitioned into garden and or park area.
- Members asked about the Housing Services call centre satisfaction statistics in relation to repairs. Cllr Harvey agreed to share more information on the statistics

for both the call centre stats that relate to how quickly a call is picked up and logged and also stats around the repair itself.

- Members asked about anti-social behaviour on council estates. They heard the aim of the council's new plan is to ensure that those people who are causing the most trouble were aware that going forward it will be easier for the council to move them on.
- Members discussed social housing and the challenges around providing affordable housing in central London with Cllr Harvey.

4. CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES AND REGENERATION

4.1 Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Communities and Regeneration) provided an update on key issues within her portfolio. The Committee received the update and held detailed discussions on the following topics:

- Members asked how the council would continue to connect and foster people's involvement in the voluntary sector. They heard there will likely be a need for Westminster Connects going forward as a link between the council and the voluntary sector.
- Members heard that the new plan for anti-social behaviour aims to ensure that it is addressed in a seamless way across the council and in cases where the police are involved. Currently the system has different strands which means it is sometimes not clear to residents where they need to go to seek help.
- Members asked about the new model for City Inspectors. They heard the previous model caused confusion. Going forward every ward will be getting a brief report from its inspector detailing what has happened in the ward over the previous fortnight.
- Members asked for more information on the Ebury development and whether the plan was to have separate blocks for leasehold house and social rented houses. Members heard that this was not the case and there would not be separate blocks for separate tenures.
- Members asked about the carbon neutral strategy for its regeneration developments. They heard that meeting the council's carbon targets will present challenges. Across all the builds the council is trying to reach carbon zero where possible.
- Members asked whether there would be an increase in service charges on the newly regenerated estates. They heard service charges will be kept to an effective minimum. However, the charge must cover the cost of maintaining and servicing the buildings.

- Members noted that it would be a good idea to have a more fulsome session on policing in the borough at an upcoming meeting.

5. REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

5.1 Debbie Jackson (Executive Director of Growth Planning and Housing introduced the report. The Committee also heard from Hannah Nobel (Director of Corporate Property), James Green (Director of Development) and expert witness Richard Valentine-Selsey (Associate Director, Research Analyst) at Savills. The committee discussed the following:

- Members asked about the mechanics behind why house prices had stayed stable, but rents had fallen due to the pandemic. Central London was hit hard by the fall in international students and tourism. This led some housing stock entering the wider private rented sector market which increased overall supply. This is something that is expected to rebalance over the first half of 2021.
- Members heard about the sales strategy for its schemes. They heard that the council reviews the strategy for each scheme at regular intervals, including whether it's appropriate for the units to be on the market or whether they could become rentals.
- Members noted that there was risk across the regeneration schemes because of delays caused by the pandemic. Members asked what the scale of this risk was, for example how many sites were behind schedule. They heard there had been a loss of productivity of about 20%-25% over the last 12 months. The construction industry had to evolve and create new working practices in light of the pandemic. On a positive note, the construction industry has been incredibly productive over the pandemic in comparison to other industries. Members noted it would be sensible to return to this the topic of risk and slippage across the regeneration schemes later in the year.
- Members expressed concern about foreign buyers being able to purchase units in the Council's schemes. They argued this contributed to pushing up property prices across the borough which made providing affordable housing more challenging and created more barriers for lower income families and first home buyers. Some members also expressed concern that foreign capital might be coming from countries without free enterprise systems which ultimately distorted the market. Officers commented that only one of the schemes (Luton Street) had had an overseas marketing strategy and most of the schemes they were marketed domestically. They also commented that young families have been purchasing units as owner occupiers purchasing the units in a number of the schemes.

6 2020/21 WORK PROGRAMME

6.1 The committee suggested the following topics for the Work Programme:

- Policing in the borough
- Rough sleeping
- Greening of social housing

The Meeting ended at 9:22pm.

CHAIRMAN: _____

DATE: _____