10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

No apologies for absence were received.

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

12. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Halebi and Councillor Balkan tabled suggested changes to the minutes of the 11 September 2017, which were as follows (amendments are detailed in italics):


Council’s Trading Company: Having heard about the proposal for a Council owned trading company in the presentation; Councillor Nick Halebi argued that the Council should be more innovative in its approach to investment products. He suggested to the Director of Housing that the Council should act as a guarantor to Waltham Forest residents who need support in raising funds for a house deposit. If the borrower defaults on the payments, the Council could take back the property instead of the bank or a private firm. This would enable the Council to retain its assets.

Councillor Halebi queried if the Housing Department had the resources to survey residents on the Council’s housing register, asking if they were more likely to
purchase their home or a property in the borough if the Council could act as a guarantor for their deposit.

Councillor Gerry Lyons challenged the usefulness of this exercise, stating it would be a drain on resources and was a futile effort as the response was going to be obvious.

Councillor Halebi went on to say that the survey should be comprehensively asking people, who wish to buy either the home they live in or a new build under the right to buy, whether they would be entitled to the same discount for the new build as they would if buying the home they live in.

Councillor Halebi also asked if help with relocation was available to people on the Council housing list and people in Council properties who wished to locate to another part of the country.

Page 12 of agenda pack – Waltham Forest Housing Performance 2016/17

**Council homes:** Members asked if there were plans to build more Council Housing. The Director of Housing explained that there is a cap on the Housing Revenue Account so there is not sufficient resource available to build additional Council housing outside of what has already been planned for.

Councillor Gerry Lyons asked why the Council was not making efforts to build upwards if land resource was scarce. The Director of Housing explained that due to various reasons demolition is often the least viable option.

In response to a series of questions from the Chair, the Director of Housing confirmed that the average re-let times have decreased and void turn around has improved. He said the Council has set a target of building 12,000 new homes by 2020 in its Local Plan. This includes homes currently in the pipeline and it is projected that this will be an achievable target.

Councillor Halebi asked whether a policy could be introduced which stipulated that land or joint venture projects which the Council or the Waltham Forest Development Company were involved in were only offered to Waltham Forest residents only.

Councillor Halebi then asked if a policy could be introduced which clearly stated that the Council would, under no circumstances, give duty of care to any person or persons who became homeless who did not have established residence in Waltham Forest for three years or more and that these persons be referred back to the borough that they originated from.

The Chair did not sign the minutes and asked that the above amendments were taken on board and presented for signing at the next Housing Scrutiny Committee.
13. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

None.

14. **MAYOR OF LONDON: THE DRAFT LONDON HOUSING STRATEGY**

Councillor Wheeler referred to the covering report and said that a more comprehensive summary would have been helpful. He added that it would have been useful if the report had provided officer’s opinions on the Strategy and suggestions as a result of those opinions. Darren Welsh, Director of Housing, said that he was happy to take Councillor Wheeler’s comments on-board and confirmed that he would ask Policy officers to provide more detail in future. He stated that officers were preparing a detailed response to the Strategy which he would be happy to circulate to Members of the Committee. Councillor Wheeler asked that Committee Members see the Strategy before it went for formal decision.

Scott Bryant, Senior Policy Officer, Greater London Authority provided a presentation which set out the Mayor of London’s five priorities for fully addressing London’s housing needs.

Following the presentation, Members asked questions on points of detail as outlined below.

Councillor Wheeler asked for clarification on what the Mayor of London’s definition of affordable housing was. Mr Bryant stated that the Mayor did recognise that the definition was blurred and said that the Mayor was keen to correct this.

Councillor Wheeler also referred to the fact that the London Borough of Waltham Forest would need to produce 750 affordable housing units within a year and expressed concerns about the local authority managing to meet that target. Mr Bryant explained that 50 per cent of new homes delivered would be affordable however, explained that from a practical perspective, it was known that it would take time deliver. Darren Welsh, Director of Housing, confirmed that Waltham Forest Council had delivered a higher percentage of affordable housing when compared to other London boroughs.

Councillor Wheeler described the Mayor of London’s target for affordable homes as challenging. Mr Welsh explained that relevant officers at the Council were looking at ways that they could maximise affordable homes.

Councillor Wheeler stated that, in addition to producing affordable homes, it was important to construct a neighbourhood that worked. Mr Bryant provided assurances that it was the Mayor’s intention to do that and explained that Chapter 5 in the Mayor’s Draft London Housing Strategy outlined a plan for achieving that aim. He added that the Mayor was open to further suggestions on how to construct a working neighbourhood as the Mayor recognised there were challenges to obtaining community buy-in.

Councillor Balkan pointed out that the Strategy lacked certain elements. She referred specifically to the fact that people might earn above the median London
wage, yet may not be able to afford their own home as it would depend on the individual’s outgoings. She said that it was important to fine tune the Strategy to ensure that people could afford the houses once they had been built. Mr Bryant explained that the Mayor was trying to address Councillor Balkan’s point by decreasing rates to allow people to save for a deposit. He did however acknowledge that there was an affordability gap and said that work needed to continue in this area to address it. Councillor Balakan made the point that houses needed to be accessible as well as affordable.

Councillor Balkan then referred to page 34 of the agenda pack which outlined ways of reforming and improving leaseholds. She said that if an individual wanted to rent a property they would be required to provide substantial identification, a criminal record check and confirmation from the work place however a leaseholder would, in the majority of cases, know nothing about the landlord. She stated that it was unfair that so much was expected from the tenant whereas very little was expected from the landlord. The Chair stated that should a landlord break the law, then that information should be available to the tenant. Mr Bryant referred to a rogue landlord website where tenants could visit and check the history of their landlord. The Chair gave the view that estate agents should let tenants know if the landlord had a negative history. She called for more open disclosure in that area.

Mr Welsh referred to some issues in the Strategy where the Mayor was seeking to do something whilst not having the powers. He stated that Waltham Forest Council would like to see the Mayor given more powers to enable local authorities to do what they needed to do. Mr Bryant confirmed that there were still discussions with Central Government undergoing on the issue of giving local authorities more powers.

The Chair referred to the fact that the Mayor was advertising affordable housing to Londoners only and asked what systems were in place to prevent overseas purchasing. Mr Bryant stated that the issue was still being considered by developers and required a voluntary agreement with them. He agreed that the situation presented challenges that were recognised by the Mayor. Councillor Wheeler asked if there was any scope for the Mayor to catch London based people as part of the London Plan. Mr Bryant said that he wasn’t sure and would check and report back.

Councillor Barnett stated that the Strategy would be challenging to deliver and said that even if the Strategy was delivered it represented a small piece of a larger jigsaw. He added that the Strategy would not resolve all problems associated with housing, such as the high price of London homes and people being unable to purchase properties as they were unable to afford the required deposit. Councillor Barnett then said that he would like to see more ambition in the Strategy. Mr Bryant agreed that an ambitious approach was necessary and confirmed that the Mayor was engaging Central Government on this issue. He stated that the Mayor was delivering the best Strategy he could with the powers available to him.

Councillor Halebi said that he would have liked to see the Strategy broken down by London boroughs as he was concerned about how the Strategy would relate to the London borough of Waltham Forest. He described the Strategy as too ambitious for London as a whole. He spoke of the importance of any building works that Waltham Forest Council was involved in, being earmarked for residents of that borough. He
said that the Government schemes to assist first time buyers were not wide enough. Councillor Halebi added that private renting was on the increase and suggested that research indicated that this was continuing to grow. He said that it was important to investigate how other countries dealt with this issue and referred to instances where countries used taxation to prevent landlords charging very high rents.

Councillor Beg said that the Strategy referred to the establishment of a construction academy scheme and asked how that would be delivered. Mr Bryant stated that the scheme was to ensure that Londoners had the necessary skills in construction. He stated that there was a question mark around when it would be delivered but confirmed that such academies would be locally used.

Councillor Beg then stated that the help to buy scheme was not mentioned in the Strategy despite the fact that it was reported to be running well. Mr Bryant confirmed that help to buy was present in the Mayor’s Strategy but was absent from his presentation. He confirmed that the Mayor was aware of the scheme and was supportive. He added that when the scheme ended in 2021 it was important to consider a suitable replacement for the scheme.

Councillor Beg referred to the £3.15 billion investment to deliver affordable homes and asked whether the figure was feasible to deliver 90,000 homes. He also asked whether it was likely that additional monies would be added to that figure. Mr Bryant agreed that the sum was not sufficient to tackle the issue and confirmed that Central Government had a range of funding streams that the Mayor was in discussions with them about. He acknowledged that significantly more investment was required into affordable homes.

Councillor Lyons made the point that house prices and private rents were on the increase and pointed out that housing associations, that had fewer resources, were moving closer to market rents. He added that there were very few council houses and they were not an option for most people. He said that there was a shortage of housing and of competition. Mr Brant stated that the Strategy recognised Councillor Lyon’s point. He confirmed that the Mayor intended to support Council’s to build new homes however, pointed out that the Mayor could only work with the funding provided by Central Government and added that the Mayor was constrained as he had to comply with the criteria set out for the funding.

The Chair asked how the GLA intended to support local authorities in delivering affordable homes. Mr Bryant confirmed that it was intended that 50 per cent of homes delivered in the Capital would be affordable. He added that significant support would be provided from the £3.15 billion and he stated that the Mayor aimed to work with local authorities to devise a plan to deliver an increased number of affordable homes. The Chair then referred to the £3.15 billion and asked how the sum would be allocated. Mr Bryant explained that allocations for the amount had already been set out and stated that he believed that a large amount had been allocated to 8 local authorities and a range of registered providers. The Chair asked that the breakdown in funding for those 8 mentioned local authorities be provided to the Committee.
The Chair referred to estate regeneration and asked how the GLA intended to fill funding gaps as a result of estate regeneration and maintaining or replacing affordable homes. Mr Bryant stated that the Mayor recognised the issue and acknowledged there may be a funding gap. He added that the Mayor believed that Central Government should step in with regard to this issue.

The Chair then asked whether there was a specific fund for housing for the disabled and any specific adjustments for disabled needs. Mr Bryant confirmed that there was a Disabled Facilities Grant and stated that the Mayor's view was that local authorities should maintain records of which properties had specific works for disabled access carried out. He added that the Mayor was calling for registered providers to put additional funds into adapting homes for disabled access.

Recommendations

(a) That the Director of Housing provides a breakdown of affordable housing delivered year on year for the last three years, which should include a breakdown of the types of affordable housing.

(b) That the Senior Policy Officer at the Greater London Authority (GLA) would check whether there was scope for the Mayor of London to attract London-based people as part of the London Plan.

(c) That the Senior Policy Officer at the GLA provides a breakdown of the £3.15 billion investment to deliver 90,000 affordable home starts by 2021.

15. HOUSING OPTIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN WALTHAM FOREST

Shabaz Hussain, Young Advisor and Jonny Zander, Founding Director Kaizen provided a presentation which outlined the Social Life/Kaizen commissioned research on housing options for young people in Waltham Forest. The presentation summarised the Council’s direction for young people in Waltham Forest and referred to the fact that some 550 young people participated in the engagement. They explained that the research would be used to inform the development of Waltham Forest Council’s Housing Strategy.

Councillor Halebi referred to the three locations where the research and engagement took place and asked why those specific areas were chosen. Mr Zander confirmed that it was decided to focus on three areas in depth and detail, rather than to get a scattershot of views from multiple locations in the borough.

In response to a question from Councillor Barnett, Mr Welsh confirmed that legal and financial implications arose from the recommendations in the Council’s response. He stated that each heading from the Council’s response would be converted into an action plan and said that where they could get partners to contribute, they would do so. Mr Welsh confirmed that the action plan would be circulated to Members of the Committee for their information.

Councillor Lyons stated that young people needed to be directed to help to buy schemes. Mr Welsh agreed that the scheme could be better marketed.
The Chair referred to signposting and asked how it would improve the housing situation of young people in Waltham Forest and address issues of affordability. Mr Welsh explained that signposting would provide advice and information to enable young people to know what options were available and how to access them. Mr Welsh explained that there was a need for signposting to be clearer and accessible.

The Chair then asked how many of the housing options detailed in the presentation were available to young people living in Waltham Forest and what percentage were affordable. Mr Welsh confirmed that just providing information on housing did not make that housing affordable and explained that new initiatives were needed. He added that overall affordable housing needed to be looked at and consideration was needed on how affordable housing could meet the needs identified.

The Chair then asked what percentage of affordable housing would be in the Council’s new housebuilding programme. Mr Welsh explained that that issue would be looked at as part of the Housing Strategy when officers looked at issues such as the demographic of the borough. Mr Welsh confirmed that the information would be before the Committee as part of the themed review on the Housing Strategy.

The Chair referred to the research which would be undertaken by the Council into affordable housing and asked how it would be taken forward. Mr Welsh confirmed that there would be an action plan, which he stated he would be happy to circulate to the Committee.

The Chair referred to the possibility of the housing team identifying best practice provision models of affordable housing for young people for further investigation. Mr Welsh confirmed that this point was already addressed in the Housing Strategy. Councillor Limbajee added that there was a need to increase the education of young people in relation to possible housing options and confirmed that the Council was moving in the right direction.

Recommendations

(a) That the action plan on housing options for young people be circulated to all Members of the Committee for information.

(b) That the percentage of affordable housing to be in the Council’s new housebuilding programme be circulated to Members of the Committee as part of the Committee’s themed review on the Housing Strategy.

(c) That relevant officers consider how best to engage young people with the Housing Strategy.

16. HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PERFORMANCE REPORT

This item was deferred.

17. HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ACTION LOG
The Chair was minded to take advice outside the meeting from the Director of Governance and Law as to whether it was appropriate to cancel the next Housing Scrutiny Committee on 24 April due to purdah and Members' potential commitments during that period.

Mr Welsh confirmed that the business scheduled for 24 April 2018 meeting could slip without consequence, with the exception of 'Themed Review: final report and recommendations'. He confirmed that he would look into the possibility of providing the Housing Strategy report to the Committee in March 2018.

The meeting closed at 9.32 pm

Chair's Signature

Date