

Decisions of the Housing and Growth Committee

5 September 2022

Members Present:-

Councillor Ross Houston (Chair)
Councillor Anne Clarke (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Zahra Beg	Councillor Alex Prager
Councillor Richard Cornelius	Councillor Ella Rose
Councillor Paul Edwards	Councillor Daniel Thomas
Councillor Humayune Khalick	Councillor Sarah Wardle
Councillor Kath McGuirk	

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Housing and Growth Committee held on 13 June 2022 be approved as a correct record.

2. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS

There were none.

3. DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS

Councillor Edwards declared an interest in relation to item 10 of the Agenda, item 12 in the Minutes, New Lease for St Kiernan's Gaelic Football Fields at King George Playing Fields, by virtue of active support of a Gaelic Football club.

Councillor A Clarke declared an interest in relation to item 11 of the Agenda, item 13 of the Minutes, Fire Safety update, by virtue of being Chair of the Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning Committee at the Greater London Authority.

Councillor Edwards declared an interest in relation to item 12 of the Agenda, item 13 in the Minutes, Quarter 1, 2022/23 performance report for Re and The Barnet Group services by virtue of being a representative on the Barnet Group Board.

Councillor Wardle declared an interest in relation to item 12 of the Agenda, item 13 in the Minutes, Quarter 1, 2022/23 performance report for Re and The Barnet Group services by virtue of being a representative on the Barnet Group Board.

4. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER (IF ANY)

There was none.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS (IF ANY)

There were none.

6. MEMBERS' ITEMS (IF ANY)

There were none.

7. BRENT CROSS UPDATE

The Chair noted that the train station was reaching the final stages. A post office approved address had already been secured. The forecast was for construction to be completed in December this year. The formal opening was being agreed for next year. The station would generate income, but would be loss making initially. Although an expensive part of the project it was anticipated that it would help to unlock the regeneration potential across the area.

Members of the Housing and Growth Committee noted that this had been a long and complicated process to get to this point and that it had benefitted from support from cross-party support. With the opening the Committee agreed that it would be appropriate to reach out to a number of politicians, both past and present, including former Councillors and MPs to be invited to the opening.

Members queried whether the opening of the new train station would have an impact on Cricklewood Station and whether any guarantees had been secured. They were concerned that in the past different stations, and communities, had been played off against each other. Officers confirmed that they had received absolutely no suggestions that Cricklewood Station would be impacted.

Officers reported that the final consultation on Clitterhouse Playing Fields was being undertaken. Members thanked the Officers for their work at the site and gave their support for the planning applications. However they remained concerned about the level of input afford to residents as this was one of the largest green spaces. There was also a lack of information around some of the works which were still extant. Officers reported that a more detailed proposals were due to come to future meetings of the Committee.

During the discussions the Chair agreed to move in to Part II to allow Officers to provide responses to information in the Exempt report.

The meeting then resumed and it was resolved unanimously to agree the recommendations.

RESOLVED that the Housing and Growth Committee:

- 1. Note the progress across the Brent Cross programme as detailed in the report; notably on the station works programme and the opening of Claremont Park.**
- 2. Note the progress on implementation of the station funding strategy as construction neared completion and recommend for approval by Policy & Resources Committee on 29 September 2022, as set out in paragraph 1.21 of the report.**
- 3. Delegates authority to the Brent Cross Programme Director, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee to finalise and enter into the operational maintenance and lease agreements required to bring the station into use, as set out in Paragraph 1.23 of the report.**

4. **Note the approach to lease the former 'Food for All' building on Brent Terrace North to Brent Cross South Limited Partnership (BXSLP) as a mean time use, and delegate authority to the Brent Cross Programme Director in consultation with the Chair of the Committee to agree and enter into the required lease agreements to implement this approach, as set out in paragraph 1.44 of the report.**
5. **Agrees the approach to implementing an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) in the area in the vicinity of the new Station and Claremont Park to address short term needs, while a permanent Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) programme is implemented across the wider area, as set out in paragraph 1.59 of the report.**
6. **Delegates authority to the Brent Cross Programme Director to enter into variations to existing (Compulsory Purchase Order) CPO Undertakings and Agreements for CPO 1, 2 and 3 which support the delivery of land for the project agreements to secure arrangements and/or compensation around land required for the scheme, as set out in paragraphs 1.56 to 1.58 of the report.**
7. **Note that a revised Business Plan and a second Phase Proposal are expected to be submitted by BXSLP to the Council later this year as set out in paragraph 1.35 of the report. With an update to the Committee to follow.**

8. MOTION TO EXCLUDE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Committee resolved – that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended).

9. EXEMPT: BRENT CROSS UPDATE REPORT

Officers provided an update on the scenarios which could impact the Brent Cross programme covering a range of situations from best to worst. In response to Member questions Officers gave reassurance that work was being undertaken with partners and contractor to ensure that any issues were suitably mitigated against.

RESOLVED that the Housing and Growth Committee noted the exempt information as set out in Appendices 1 and 2 of the reports, updates on leases at the Brent Cross Retail Park, and from commercially sensitive matters on the BX scheme.

THE MEETING THEN RETURNED TO PUBLIC SESSION.

10. ASSET ACQUISITION STRATEGY

The Assistant Director, Estates and Acquisitions presented the report and informed the Committee that the strategy was designed to build on the Council's work to support local communities and invest in town centres. It set out the processes and procedures which would be used. They highlighted that an amendment had been identified in the wording

around implementation to ensure that the Strategic Opportunities Fund could be used in a timely and agile fashion in limited circumstances where it was not possible to get a report to the Committee. This included the addition of the wording “or the appropriate Officers” in a few places. Members queried whether this allowed for sufficient democratic oversight. Officers confirmed that any decisions made under this provision would be reported to the Housing and Growth Committee. The Committee agreed that the change should be made to read “or the appropriate officers in consultation with the Chair of the Housing and Growth Committee”.

Members noted that it would be impossible to codify for every eventuality due to the way the market was always changing, for example post pandemic and the desire to be more sustainable. Members noted that each case would need to be taken on its individual merits at the time and that it was important that any business case set out a clear exit strategy. Officers confirmed that the strategy helped to set the parameters and that a business case would be required to ensure that a full financial case was made to meet CIPFA rules.

**RESOLVED that the Housing and Growth Committee approve the changes to the Asset Acquisition Strategy as set out in the report subject to:
4 Post decision implementation [part of 4.1]**

4.1 The following will occur: Implementation of the amended strategy

This strategy will form part of the Council’s capital strategy documents Internal governance arrangements will be established

All potential acquisitions will be tested against the parameters contained within this strategy and the previously approved strategy document

The review of the existing portfolio will continue and further recommendations arising from this will be brought back to the Housing and Growth Committee or the appropriate officers in consultation with the Chair of the Housing and Growth Committee at the appropriate time

All individual acquisitions and disposals will have their own business case prepared, to be taken to members or the appropriate officers in consultation with the Chair of the Housing and Growth Committee for approval, as appropriate in accordance with the LBB constitution.

11. UPDATE TO THE STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY FUND TERMS OF REFERENCE

Officers presented the report noting that the fund had been created to allow the Council to move rapidly when required. They highlighted that minor amendments had been tabled as agreed in the previous item.

Members noted that they had already considered the benefits of the fund when discussing the Asset Acquisition Strategy and were supportive.

RESOLVED that the Housing and Growth Committee approved the changes to the Strategic Opportunity Fund principles including the tabled changes as set out below:

Report: Strategic Opportunities Fund: amendment to the principles for use

5.2.1 Finance and value for money [part of 5.2.1]

All potential acquisitions will be assessed against the criteria contained within this document, and the Asset Acquisition and Disinvestment / Disposal Strategy. Value

for money considerations will form part of this assessment. If an acquisition is made under delegated powers, the property purchase will be funded from the Strategic Opportunities Fund and brought back to the relevant chief officer with existing delegation under the constitution for approval or to another officer with delegated authority or if none to committee. If the value of the acquisition is beyond delegated powers, then a committee report (usually tabled at a specially convened Urgency Committee) will be required.

The aim is for all acquisitions to be at least General Fund neutral if not positive. There may be occasions where this is not achievable, but there are wider social, economic or regeneration reasons to undertake the acquisition. There will be ongoing compliance with the Prudential Code, Treasury Management Code and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) guidance.

12. NEW LEASE FOR ST KIERNAN'S GAELIC FOOTBALL FIELDS AT KING GEORGE PLAYING FIELDS

The Chair introduced the item and explained that this had gone through the Environment Committee and had come back to the Housing and Growth Committee as it was a lease for sign off.

Members queried whether the lease would be affordable when the amount increased and whether 60 years was an appropriate length. Officers responded that this had been negotiated by St Kiernan's Gaelic Football Club and had been approved at the Environment Committee.

RESOLVED unanimously:

- 1. That the committee approve this lease of the King George V Playing fields lease from the 14/10/2019 to 13/10/2079 for an initial annual rent of a peppercorn per year for the first five years, then £2,000 per year, subject as follows.**
- 2. That the committee delegates to the Deputy Chief Executive authority to consider any comments and objections received in response to the advertising of the proposed lease and to make a further decision whether to complete the proposed lease.**
- 3. That the committee delegates to the Deputy Chief Executive authority to consider and approve the terms for the proposed lease once negotiated with the tenant.**

13. FIRE SAFETY UPDATE

The Group Manager for Regulatory Services summarised the report. In particular they noted that they were actively prioritising their workload to ensure that action and monitoring was undertaken. It had taken time to get the programme in place and a case was going to tribunal. Due to the level of documentation, with sometimes hundreds linked to a single block of flats a new Officer had been brought in to provide support. The Chair noted that there had also been national changes which had had an impact and that a lot of positive work had gone into this. They noted that it was a positive milestone that the focus had now been able to shift to medium and low height blocks.

Members questioned that where inspections had been completed and improvement notices served, what the next steps were and their expiry. The Officer stated that this would vary from block to block and the level of work which was required. None of the

notices had a short period due to the time allowed for procurement and implementation. Two of the blocks already had work in progress with others having started the process and few having already completed the works. Where the works hadn't started early warning systems had been put in place as a form of mitigation.

Members queried whether any further work had been undertaken around communication with residents since it had been raised at the last meeting. They were keen to see providers encouraged to communicate more with residents. Officers confirmed that they had been looking at ways to improve communications. This had been difficult in areas where the council was unable to help directly and they needed to ensure accurate signposting so as not to mislead. They were working with the corporate communications team to improve this.

Members asked if any additional measures had been identified for top floor flats, and if so, what they were. Officers undertook to provide a written response.

RESOLVED unanimously that the Housing and Growth Committee note the fire safety update.

14. QUARTER 1, 2022/23 PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR RE AND THE BARNET GROUP SERVICES

RESOLVE The Performance Manager, Commissioning Group, presented the item. Introducing the report they highlighted that it had previously gone to the Financial Performance and Contracts Committee. However it was now disaggregated down to the individual theme committees and would be a regular item. They noted that there was still a backlog due to the COVID-19 pandemic and that there were difficult market conditions including the cost of inflation and rising interest rates which had impacted performance.

Members queried whether Officers were predicting an increase in homelessness due to the cost of living crises. Officers confirmed that they were very much aware of the situation and would be reporting back to the Committee as things developed.

RESOLVED that the Housing and Growth Committee note the Quarter 1 (Q1) 2022/23 performance for the contracted services delivered by Regional Enterprise (Capita) and Barnet Homes (The Barnet Group) that fall under the remit of the Committee. D that the Housing and Growth Committee noted the Quarter 1 (Q1) 2022/23 performance for the contracted services delivered by Regional Enterprise (Capita) and Barnet Homes (The Barnet Group) that fall under the remit of the Committee.

15. HOUSING AND GROWTH RELATED FEES & CHARGES

The Chair of the Housing and Growth Committee introduced the report as a standard that was brought to the Committee each year. The Head of Finance - Customer & Place and Assurance was present to respond to questions.

Members queried why, the increase was at 10%, matching inflation, where one of the major costs was Officer time and yet Officer pay was not increasing by 10%. They were concerned about the timing and how the fees were being spent. Other Members reported that other oncosts were rising far faster with areas such as heating and utility

bills. This had caused concerns in schools for example where the utility bills were due to increase more than three fold.

Officers noted that this report was on fees and that dwelling rents would be coming separately as this impacted the poorest in the community.

Members queried who would benefit from the increase in fees, whether this was the contractor or the Council. It was noted that the power to vary the fees was held by the Council and that this was one of the services that was being brought back in. As such the change in fees helped to protect the Council's position overall and avoid large jumps. Some Members remained concerned that this would have a disproportional impact on average, middle income residents.

Members of the Housing and Growth Committee voted:

For (Approval): 7

Against (Approval): 4

RESOLVED that the Housing and Growth Committee approve the proposed fees and charges for 2023/24 set out in Appendix A of the report that will be included in the budget proposals submitted to September Policy and Resources Committee for consideration and recommendation to Full Council in November 2022.

16. HOUSING & GROWTH FORECAST FINANCIAL OUTTURN AT MONTH 4 (JULY 2022)

The Head of Finance - Customer & Place and Assurance presented the report and noted the impact of the changes in interest rates on the programme of activity.

Members queried whether the change in the number of refusals allowed to those on the housing waiting list would cause issues and whether any assessment had been undertaken. They noted that the previous change to a single offer had been to speed up the process and improve efficiency. The Chair responded that the change would hopefully reduce the number of appeals which would offset this. Officers undertook to look at the potential implications.

Members asked about the draw down on reserves to prevent homelessness. Officers informed the Committee that funds had been put aside funding during the COVID period as a backlog had been anticipated and this was now being addressed.

RESOLVED that the Housing and Growth Committee notes:

- 1. the forecast financial outturn for 2022/23;**
- 2. the projected use of reserves.**

17. COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair confirmed to the Committee that following a review of the Forward Work Programme an additional meeting of the Housing and Growth Committee had been scheduled for Tuesday 25 October 2022.

The Housing and Growth training session had been rescheduled to be held before the meeting on the Wednesday 16 November 2022 at 5pm-6pm.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the Work Programme.

18. ANY OTHER ITEMS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES ARE URGENT

There were none.

19. ANY OTHER EXEMPT ITEMS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES ARE URGENT

There were none.

20. MOTION TO EXCLUDE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Committee resolved – that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended).

21. EXEMPT: HOUSING & GROWTH FORECAST FINANCIAL OUTTURN AT MONTH 4 (JULY 2022)

RESOLVED that the Housing and Growth Committee noted the current Brent Cross West programme forecast.

The meeting finished at 8.26 pm