

**Minutes of the Extraordinary Community Wellbeing and Housing
Committee
22 April 2025**

Present:

Councillor S.M. Doran (Chair)

Councillors:

M. Arnold	L.H. Brennan	K. Howkins
C. Bateson	S.A. Dunn	
M. Bing Dong	K.M. Grant	

Substitutions: Councillors D.C. Clarke and P.N. Woodward

Apologies: Councillors O. Rybinski, R.V. Geach and A. Mathur

27/25 Disclosures of Interest

There were none.

28/25 In year growth bid for additional resourcing in Environmental Health

The Committee considered a report which sought agreement for an in-year growth bid of £133,000 to fund two additional full-time Environmental Health Officers to address increasing demand related to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and private rented sector work. It was explained that, if offsetting savings could not be identified, the posts would be funded from reserves. The additional staff would improve efficiency, resilience, and statutory compliance, with only one officer currently managing the bulk of HMO-related work.

The existing significant strain on the team was demonstrated, with 69 HMO applications awaiting processing and 30 still to be logged. The Committee highlighted the borough-wide article 4 direction (confirmed at Planning Committee on 8 January 2025) and the importance of backing enforcement

with resources, echoing frequent resident complaints and the workload unsustainability under current staffing levels. Some members raised concerns about the Council's financial position and questioned the permanence of the roles and the possibility of reallocating tasks within the existing team. Officers responded that existing team capacity was exhausted and that only fully qualified staff could manage complex HMO enforcement.

The Group Head, Place Protection and Prosperity clarified the need for permanent posts due to the ongoing nature of the work, particularly with the anticipated increase following the Renters Reform Bill. The Deputy Chief Executive also confirmed the high risk to the organisation if staff were not appointed and cautioned against relying on temporary contracts and agency staff, which offered limited recruitment potential. Some members noted the importance of loyalty from permanent staff, while others questioned whether limited processing capacity might reduce HMO proliferation.

The Joint Senior Environmental Health manager explained the qualifications and responsibilities required of an Environmental Health Officer, highlighting the complexities and legal risks involved in HMO regulation. Members discussed the financial implications, with the Deputy Chief Executive confirming full on-costs were included in the £133k figure. The issue of Environmental Health resourcing not being flagged earlier in the budget process was acknowledged, and the Group Head, Place Protection and Prosperity accepted responsibility for the omission.

Other discussion involved citing delays in licensing mobile homes as examples of resident harm due to staff shortages. The Committee clarified the legal position on operating HMOs without a licence and the statutory obligations under current legislation. In closing, concerns were raised about competitive recruitment, salary levels, and Spelthorne's relative market position.

The Committee **resolved** to:

1. Agree an in-year growth bid for 2025-26 of £133,000 pa to provide two additional full-time staff for the Environmental Health team to deal with Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and private rented sector work
2. Agree that if offsetting savings cannot be found in the Revenue Budget, that it will be funded as part of 2025-26 outturn from revenue reserves.

Meeting ended at 20:06