

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 11 September 2013 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Carl Handley (Chair), Vincent Davis (Vice-Chair), Anne Affiku, Paul Bell, Amanda De Ryk and Vicky Foxcroft

APOLOGIES: Councillors Liam Curran, Patsy Foreman, Darren Johnson and Sam Owolabi-Oluyole

ALSO PRESENT: Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager), Charlotte Dale (Scrutiny Manager), Jeff Endean (Housing Programmes and Strategy Team Manager), Mark Humphreys (Group Finance Manager, Customer Services), Madeleine Jeffery (Private Sector Housing Agency Manager), Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing), Roger Raymond (Scrutiny Officer), Clare Ryan (Housing Matters Consultation Manager), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services) and Louise Spires (Strategy, Policy & Development Manager)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2013

- 1.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2013 be signed as an accurate record of the meeting.

2. Declarations of interest

- 2.1 Councillor Bell declared a non-prejudicial interest, as a member of the Lewisham Homes Board.

3. Mayoral response on the Housing Matters consultation

- 3.1 Jeff Endean (Housing Programmes and Strategy Team Manager, Housing Matters) introduced the report. The key points to note were:
 - At the Committee's meeting on 6 March 2013, it was noted that some residents had raised with Members their concerns that the ongoing Housing Matters consultation process was not giving equal consideration to the two remaining options.
 - The response to the Committee's concerns had been presented to Mayor and Cabinet.
 - The previous government had issued guidance in 2003 called 'Delivering Decent Homes – Options Appraisal', which provided guidance for local authorities' to enable them to determine how they would meet the Decent Homes Standard.
 - The current government had not changed this guidance nor issued any further guidance. Therefore, the Council had used the guidance issued in 2003 to shape the Council's current options appraisal about the future of its housing stock, particularly in regard to the section on involving tenants and leaseholders in the process.
 - Further guidance was issued by the last government on developing a communications and consultation strategy to underpin the options appraisal.

- Officers considered that the process that had been undertaken to date had met all of the requirements of the guidance, and furthermore that there was no evidence that the options have been presented in an unbalanced way.

3.2 In response to questions from the Committee, the following was noted

- When the Committee received reports on the Mayor and Cabinet's response, they should be more succinct and not repeat the arguments made in previous reports on the subject.

3.3 **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

4. Mayoral response on the democratisation of the Lewisham Homes board

4.1 Jeff Endean (Housing Programmes and Strategy Team Manager), introduced the report. The key points to note were:

- The Committee, alongside Business Panel, agreed that Lewisham Homes should, as a matter of urgency, be asked by the Mayor to consider the election of tenants and leaseholders to the board of Lewisham Homes.
- The Mayor responded that in terms of elected tenant representatives who could serve on the Lewisham Homes board, he said he was happy to pursue the suggestion in principle but had to be sure actions were pursued at the right time.

4.2 In response to questions from the Committee, the following was noted:

- Council officers would have continued discussions with Lewisham Homes to encourage them to provide the right support for more tenants to participate in an elected capacity.
- Lewisham Homes were, in principle, in favour of admitting more residents on the Board; but it was a matter of developing the right process so that elected representatives had the right skills.

4.3 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee write to Lewisham Homes to invite them to discuss the democratisation of the board.

5. Mayoral response on the low cost home ownership review

5.1 Louise Spires (Strategy, Policy & Development Manager) introduced the report. The key points to note were:

- The Mayor considered the attached report entitled 'Response to Housing Select Committee on Low Cost Home Ownership Review' at the Mayor & Cabinet meeting held on 10 July 2013.
- An action plan would be put together to deliver the recommendations in the report, and officers would report back to the Committee at its February meeting regarding progress.

5.2 In response to questions from the Committee, the following was noted:

- The plans for the Ladywell site were still being formulated, and no decision had yet been taken on the future of the site.
- The Mayor had indicated that he would like to see the Ladywell site used in a way that benefitted the community as a whole.
- The Committee would like to see the site development include housing for either social rent or self-build.

5.3 **RESOLVED:** That there would be a referral to Mayor and Cabinet:

‘The Committee believes that all future feasibility work on the former Ladywell leisure centre site should thoroughly explore the potential to provide low cost housing.’

6. Mayoral response on welfare reform

6.1 The Chair expressed to the Committee the Mayor and Cabinet’s comments that their recommendation was very gratifying and should be received with thanks. Also, that the Committee be thanked for its contribution.

6.2 **RESOLVED:** that the report be noted.

7. Housing matters

7.1 Jeff Endean (Housing Programmes and Strategy Team Manager), introduced the report. The key points to note were:

- Lewisham had completed its Phase 1 consultation for the Housing Matters Programme.
- The key findings of the Phase 1 consultation were as follows:
 - 2,144 residents were contacted during the door-knocking exercise.
 - 90% of respondents had some understanding of each of the options.
 - The survey found that 33% thought it was a good idea to evolve Lewisham Homes into a new organisation, 31% were not sure, and 35% did not think it was a good idea.
- It is reasonable at this stage of the Housing Matters programme, that many residents who were ‘not sure’ said they did not have enough information to make an informed view on the options being considered.
- The survey produced consistent residents’ priorities across all areas of the borough, with security and safety, improvements to communal areas and the completion of the Decent Homes programme most commonly mentioned by respondents.
- The next phase of the consultation would report back to residents the findings of the door-knocking exercise that Lewisham Homes carried out.
- It was anticipated that Phase 2 would be carried out in a localised fashion by splitting Lewisham Homes management area into 10 key areas. This would enable the feedback to be targeted and tailored to those areas. The Council was working with Lewisham Homes to develop the timetable for this but it would expect this activity to be completed by mid-December.

7.2 In response to questions from the Committee, the following was noted:

- Officers recognised that there was a lot of work that still needed to be done to inform and engage with residents about the proposals, before any final decision could be made on the options available.
- It was noted that if there were more tenants on the Lewisham Homes Board, then residents would have a better understanding of what a 'resident-led' body would look like, if this was the option they chose.
- It was noted that the timetable for the consultation and implementation of Housing Matters was lengthy, and would likely run beyond the next general election.
- Officers would supply the Committee with the breakdown of the expenditure on Housing Matters.
- There were 19 further potential sites for new build housing.
- The Mercator Road garage site potentially could begin in Winter 2013-14.
- The Council would seek to ensure that local businesses were involved in any future housing development projects.

7.3 **RESOLVED:** that the report be noted.

8. Housing supply and demand

8.1 Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing, Customer Services), introduced the report. The key points to note were:

- In October 2012 the Housing Register had reduced from 18602 to 7392 due to changes to the eligibility criteria. However, in August 2013 there were 8164 applicants on the Register - a 772 increase in 10 months.
- There were a number of options to manage demand, such as:
 - Making the best use of assets using schemes such as the Cash Incentive Scheme and Mutual Exchange programmes.
 - Utilising properties available due to the Under Occupation Charge: (there was a target of 139 moves per annum; 37 moved since April)
 - Other legislative and policy options that are available.
 - Mobility Schemes such as the GLA Mobility Scheme and LAWN type schemes:
 - More use of the Private Rented Sector (PRS). Approximately 50% of current homeless acceptances are from the PRS. Also, Private Rented offer can be a quicker solution to housing need than waiting for a social rented offer
- The average waiting times for Social Housing Offers:
 - 4 bed average wait - just under 6 years
 - 3 bed - 3 years
 - 1 and 2 bed - 2 years
- Local Authorities had a new power to discharge into the private sector. Use of 'Private Sector Offers' was a new power and local authorities were expected to develop clear policies on these and consider individual circumstances.
- Some local authorities like LB Ealing intended to fully discharge any full housing duty by way of a 'private rented sector' offer but only after full

consideration of household's individual circumstances and the facts that apply to that case.

- Lewisham had a number of considerations to make with this new power:
 - Not to adopt the power.
 - Consider it for suitable homelessness applications.
 - Use the power to end the duty for all accepted homelessness cases
- All options had implications for Lewisham in how it discharges its homelessness and housing applications.

8.2 In response to questions from the Committee, the following was noted:

- Officers would provide the Committee with information about the affordability of private sector rents, with specific emphasis on rents for single people.
- Initial indications were that Lewisham would not be likely to propose a solely 'private sector offer' for households in need. Some use of the new power could help to lessen the time families spend in temporary accommodation.
- It would have implications for Lewisham if other local authorities in London looked to adopt the new power to discharge into the private sector in some way, and Lewisham did not. The number of households presenting to Lewisham could increase.
- Members also discussed limiting the use of private rented sector offers based on eligibility for housing/length of residence in the borough.
- Officers noted that it might be prudent for Lewisham to wait and see how the new powers were used in other boroughs before making a firm decision not to use discharge into the private rented sector.
- No options would be presented to the Mayor and Cabinet before pre-decision scrutiny with the Committee.

8.3 **RESOLVED:** a) that no options would be presented to Mayor and Cabinet in respect of the power to discharge to the private sector, before pre-decision scrutiny.

b) that the report be noted

9. Key housing issues

9.1 Louise Spires (Strategy, Policy & Development Manager) introduced the report. The key points to note were:

- The new system for social housing complaints was reported to Housing Select Committee on the 6 March 2013. The Committee agreed that Chair of the Housing Committee would act as the main Designated Person and the remaining members of the HSC would act as designated people where there was a conflict of interest or the chair was unavailable.
- Lewisham as a borough has attracted funding to deliver 477 new housing units and the Council itself attracted £500,000 to bring 25 empty homes back into use.
- The CSR announced that £400 million from the New Homes Bonus would be pooled within Local Enterprise Partnership areas to support

strategic housing and economic development priorities. A subsequent document had been launched by the DCLG to consult on this proposal, with a closing date of 19th September. The council was currently working through the detail and preparing a response which would be fed back to the Committee at a future meeting.

- Family Mosaic had obtained £1.5m for the second block of housing in Phase 3 and £3m for Phase 4 from the Mayor's Housing Covenant fund. This added to the £26m funding already in place from the GLA.

9.2 In response to questions the Committee, the following was noted:

- The proposals for the Kender housing redevelopment in New Cross were still to be finalised. There would be some Section 106 obligations to fulfil. Once negotiations were complete, officers would inform the Committee of the final figures of the Kender land sale.

9.3 **RESOLVED:** that the report be noted

10. Private rented sector update

10.1 Madeleine Jeffery (Private Sector Housing Agency Manager) introduced the report. The key points to note were:

- Lewisham's Private Sector Housing Agency had been established at the beginning of August 2013 and it had begun to recruit key staff.
- Managers were in the process of working up a bid to DCLG as part of the "Rogue Landlords" funding that was currently available to secure funding for a cross-Council and key stakeholder "hit team" (including Environmental health, planning enforcement; HB and Council Tax fraud teams; special investigations; police; fire brigade; community services) who would co-ordinate their work to target the top 10 – 15 of the rogue landlords who operated in the borough.
- The Greater London Authority (GLA) had set up a London Rental Standard (LRS) Steering Group to contribute to the delivery of the Standard. Lewisham Council and LB Westminster represented the London Boroughs on this steering group alongside Camden as the host of the London Landlord Accreditation Scheme (LLAS) scheme.
- Officers met with DCLG in August 2013 to outline some of the frustrations faced by Council officers as they sought to tackle landlords where enforcement was the only option to change behaviour.

10.2 In response to questions from the Committee, the following was noted:

- Officers were happy to talk to colleagues from the St. Denis area of Paris to see if there was any best practice they could share with each other in the area of housing and rogue landlords.
- The powers that local authorities possess are quite limited in respect of rogue landlords. It may require further legislation to help local authorities deal with rogue landlords in their jurisdiction.

- 10.3 **RESOLVED:** that officers would look into the viability of exchanging information between officers in St Denis in Paris and Lewisham's private sector housing agency.

11. Emergency services review

- 11.1 Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the report. The key points to note were:

- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had agreed that its select committees would carry out a review of emergency services in Lewisham. The Housing Select Committee was tasked with determining impact of the changes as they related to the borough's housing.
- The Committee held two evidence sessions:
 - at its meeting on 16 May 2013, the Committee heard from Lewisham Homes and Brockley PFI about their work to ensure fire safety in their housing stock. The Committee requested further information about work being carried out to engage with residents, as well as Lewisham Homes' plans to install sprinklers in the borough's housing stock.
 - at its meeting on 19 June 2013, the Committee heard from Lewisham Homes about the results of a pilot project to install sprinklers in one of its sheltered accommodation buildings.
- The Committee were tasked with agreeing recommendations after hearing the evidence for their part of the review.

- 11.2 **RESOLVED:** the Committee agreed that the Chair be asked to draft recommendations on their behalf outside of the meeting.

12. Select Committee work programme

- 12.1 Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the report. The key points to note were:

- The items scheduled for the September meeting were as follows:
 - Housing Matters
 - Review of the housing complaints process
 - Newham landlord licensing scheme
 - Developing Lewisham's housing assets: upgrading existing stock

- 12.2 In response to questions the Committee were advised:

- The item on Extra Care Housing Plans for Older People would be presented to this Committee and Healthier Communities Select Committee.
- The Newham landlord licensing scheme had begun in January 2013 and Lewisham, Greenwich and Southwark, were looking at how the scheme developed before making a decision about whether it could work locally. Also, a thorough evaluation of the scheme was yet to be carried out by Newham, so October may be too early to scrutinise this item.

- There had been some developments in respect of the ‘Developing Lewisham’s housing assets: upgrading existing stock’ item, with Lewisham Homes implementing Asset Modelling software that will look to record their assets; and allow for planning to be carried out for future investment. Also the Under-Occupation Charge, commonly known as the ‘Bedroom Tax’, might mean that more properties may come available for residents, so more evaluation may need to be carried out before looking at an item on Lewisham’s housing stock.
- It was suggested to Members that the ‘Impact of housing benefit cap on Lewisham residents’ item could be brought forward from December’s meeting.
- The agenda item ‘Review of the Housing Complaints Process’ was moved to the December meeting.

12.3 **RESOLVED:** The agenda for the October meeting is as follows:

- Housing Matters:
 - Older people’s housing strategy
 - Self-build update
 - The new build programme
- Welfare reform update (including the impact of the housing benefit cap and the Under-occupation charge on Lewisham)
- Budget savings (if applicable)

13. Items to be referred to Mayor and Cabinet

13.1 There was a referral from the meeting at 5.3 under the item ‘Mayoral response on the low cost home ownership review’:

‘The Committee believes that all future feasibility work on the former Ladywell leisure centre site should thoroughly explore the potential to provide low cost housing.’

The meeting ended at 9.45 pm

Chair:

Date:
