

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 22 July 2014 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Carl Handley (Chair), Peter Bernards (Vice-Chair), Paul Bell, John Coughlin, Amanda De Ryk, Maja Hilton, Simon Hooks, Olurotimi Ogunbadewa, Jonathan Slater and Susan Wise

ALSO PRESENT: Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager) Mark Dow (Service Group Manager - Housing Needs), Jeff Endean (Housing Programmes and Strategy Team Manager), Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing), Salena Mulhere (Overview and Scrutiny Manager), Andrew Potter (Chief Executive) (Lewisham Homes), Clare Ryan (Housing Matters Consultation Manager) and Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services)

1. Confirmation of the Chair and Vice Chair

Resolved: to confirm Councillor Carl Handley as Chair and Councillor Peter Bernards as Vice Chair of the Select Committee.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2014

Resolved: to agree the minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2014 as an accurate record.

3. Declarations of interest

Councillor Wise declared a non-prejudicial interest in relation to item four as a member of the board of Lewisham Homes.

4. Lewisham Homes annual report and business plan

Andrew Potter (Chief Executive, Lewisham Homes) introduced the report; the following key points were noted:

- Lewisham Homes (LH) was a company wholly owned by the Council to deliver housing management services.
- The business and delivery plan set out LHs' performance for the previous year (2013/14) and its priorities for the coming year (2014/15).
- One of the key challenges in the previous year had been achieving the target for rent income collection.
- LH had successes in the previous year in re-letting properties; the delivery of the decent homes programme and performance on repairs.
- In the coming year LH would prioritise- customer service; improvement of communal areas; delivery of decent homes and the delivery of the New Homes Better Places programme.

In response to questions from the Committee, the following key points were noted:

- Complaints about decent homes work often had to be referred to contractors. This increased the amount of time it took to resolve issues,

which was the principal reason for the target for responding to complaints being missed.

- The last customer survey had been in 2012, when customer satisfaction was 69%. The Housing Matters consultation found that customer satisfaction was above 70%. It was hoped that when the next satisfaction survey was carried out, satisfaction would be much closer to LH's 80% target.
- Grounds maintenance had previously been provided by contractors. In the coming year, these services would move to the direct management of Lewisham Homes. It was hoped that this, along with other improvements in the core delivery of services would improve levels of satisfaction.
- The new build programme had been added to the organisational risk register in recognition that this was something that the organisation had not done before.
- The 'failure to secure the future of Lewisham Homes' had been added to the risk register because the management agreement with the Council was due for renewal.
- There were currently 14 board members, with space for one more resident board member, who was in the process of being recruited.
- LH had an enforcement team, which gathered information and intelligence from a range of sources to identify illegal occupants.
- A system of routine tenancy checks using photographic ID was already in place.
- Around 50 illegal occupants a year were removed from LH properties.
- LH would soon be introducing a credit score checking system. This had been successful in other boroughs at identifying illegal occupants.
- Checks were also carried out on people who wanted to exercise the right to buy. A number of cases each year were referred to the Council's anti-fraud and corruption team.
- It was difficult to say where right to buy tenants raised the capital required to buy their homes because each case was different.
- The number of homes bought under right to buy had increased from 17 two years ago to 110 last year. This was thought to be the direct result of the increase in the right to buy discount to £100k. LH re-let around 500 homes a year so a loss of 100 lets each year was substantial.
- The reduction in properties, and rental income through right to buy was not combined with a reduction in costs, so the increase in sales would have an impact on LHs sustainability.
- The figures on voids were skewed by a small number of properties requiring extensive works and performance on sheltered housing – which was more difficult to let. Ordinary void properties were usually refurbished and re-let within a month.

In response to questions from the Committee, Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services) advised the Committee that:

- The Council would be negotiating the terms of the new management agreement with Lewisham Homes before renewal in 2017. However, there was no question over the organisation's future.
- The Housing Matters consultation had demonstrated that many residents were happy with the current provision of housing services through Lewisham Homes.

- It had been agreed that the immediate course of action should be to deliver on the promise to build new homes.
- The option remained open in the future to change the form of LH, but this was not being pursued at present.

Resolved: to note the report.

5. Homelessness applications and performance

Mark Dow (Housing Needs Manager) introduced the report; the following key points were noted:

- As previously reported to the Committee, there had been an increase of 28% in the number of household accepted by the Council as homeless in the past four years.
- The increased use of bed and breakfast accommodation and its associated costs had been noted in a report to Committee in early 2014.
- In the past, people presenting as homeless typically had difficulties with parents or other relatives, however the recent increase appeared to be from people who had trouble sustaining their tenancies in the private rented sector.
- A great deal of effort had been focused on preventative rather than reactive work.
- It was anticipated that there would be a fall in demand this year – as well as an increase in the level of lets available, which should help to alleviate the pressure on temporary accommodation.

In response to questions from the Committee, the following key points were noted:

- The rollout of universal credit continued to be delayed by the government. Nonetheless, information from the direct payments pilot in Southwark showed some positive results.
- The cost of homelessness was the second biggest budget pressure for the Council, behind the cost pressure associated with people with no recourse to public funds.
- There had been times in the past few years that there weren't any households temporarily accommodated in bed and breakfast– but the current political and economic climate, combined with the lack of housing supply had created an increasingly challenging situation.

Resolved: to note the report.

6. New Homes Better Places: update

Jeff Endean (Housing Strategy and Programmes Manager) introduced the report; the following key points were noted:

- The delivery of the new homes programme was owned by the Council, but it was being delivered by Lewisham Homes.
- The ambition was to build 500 new homes over four years.
- The first of the new homes was due to be completed in early 2015.

- The first set of 100 homes had been agreed for consultation across six sites.
- The intention was to maximise the funding available for the delivery of new social homes. In order to do this, the proposal was to sell 20% of the homes being built.
- Lewisham had £44m available for the New Build Programme, which in itself would enable the construction of around 300 new homes. The previous decision to build some homes for private sale would allow any profits from these sales to be used for the construction of new social homes. This approach would enable the construction of approximately 70 additional social homes.

In response to questions from the Committee, the following key points were noted:

- There was a range of consultation being undertaken as part of the new build programme. There was general consultation around the sites of new builds, specific consultation with tenants and leaseholders and statutory consultation with secure tenants.
- It was agreed that the Council could learn how to better coordinate its consultation to ensure that the messages being received by the community were as consistent as possible.
- More complex developments, involving wider estate regeneration would be brought forward in latter phases of the new build programme.
- The consultation would focus on ensuring that, by the time of planning application, all parties were informed about the changes being proposed.

Resolved: to note the report and to receive a further update on the Programme at the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 2 September.

7. Select Committee work programme

Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the report.

The Committee discussed the work programme and agreed:

- To call an additional meeting on 2nd September in order to receive the New Homes Better Places report in advance of Mayor and Cabinet on 3rd September.
- To ascertain whether the Housing Scrutiny Committee in Newham would be willing to facilitate a visit from Lewisham's Housing Select Committee.

The Committee also agreed to add the following items to the Committee's work programme:

- An examination of options for households in housing association properties to downsize or move to more accommodation more suited to their needs- focusing on the contrast between policy and activity.
- A scoping report setting out the options for a review of communal heating systems in new housing developments.
- An invitation to registered providers in order to assess their performance.

Resolved: to agree that the Committee's suggestions be added to the provisional work programme for submission to Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel.

8. Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet

None

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm

Chair:

Date:
