

# MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 3 April 2013 at 7.30pm

PRESENT: Councillors Carl Handley (Chair), Vincent Davis (Vice-Chair), Anne Affiku, Paul Bell, Amanda De Ryk, Darren Johnson and Sam Owolabi-Oluyole.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Liam Curran, Patsy Foreman and Alan Hall.

ALSO PRESENT: Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services), Jeff Endean (Programme Manager – Housing Matters), Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing), Madeleine Jeffery (SGM: Housing Strategy and Policy), Louise Spires (Strategy, Policy & Development Manager), Customer Services), Joseph Dunton (Scrutiny Manager), Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager) and Roger Raymond (Scrutiny Officer).

## 1. Confirmation of Chair and Vice-Chair

1.1 **RESOLVED:** That Councillor Carl Handley be confirmed as Chair of the Housing Select Committee; and Councillor Vincent Davis as Vice Chair.

## 2. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2013

2.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2013 be signed as an accurate record of the meeting

## 3. Declarations of Interest

3.1 Councillor Bell declared a non-prejudicial interest as a Lewisham Homes Board Director.

## 4. Work programme report 2013-2014

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

- The draft work programme for 2013-14 for this Committee was published in the agenda papers. Members were invited to discuss the report and agree changes and amendments as necessary.
- There was also a scoping paper for an 'Emergency Services Review' as agreed at Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- There have been further suggestions for the work programme:
  - Newham Public Sector Licensing Scheme
  - Local Authority Borrowing Cap

4.2 In discussion with officers and Members, the following key points about the work programme were noted:

- The Committee agreed to expand the 'Discharge into the 'PRS/Out of Borough Procurement' item, to a broader item called 'Housing Supply and Demand' that will be spread over two meetings, and will also consider inviting guests such as

representatives from Crisis/other London boroughs/tenants for the evidence sessions.

- The Committee to add an item about reviewing Lewisham's existing housing stock to identify any potential to create additional rooms within flats or houses to address overcrowding. The Chair said that the Government has made a £100m pot of funding available for various housing investment initiatives and that more may become available in the future to convert or extend existing homes. If it does, the Council could make a bid to receive funding. Officers had requested a list of properties from Lewisham Homes which might be suitable for extensions or conversions to submit in bids when funding becomes available. The Committee would then receive an update later in the year
- Any visits arranged for the Committee should be expanded to all Members where appropriate, or when Committee members cannot attend.
- An item on the review of Housing Strategies and Policies will be delayed until the next municipal year. By the end of 2013-14 officers should have the necessary policy positions to begin to update the strategies and policies that are due to expire at the end of 2014.
- The Homelessness Strategy update will be influenced by legal changes, the issue of allocations, welfare reform impacts and the policies of other boroughs in respect of homelessness.
- An update on the Newham Public Sector Licensing Scheme will be added to the work programme, and scheduled for the October meeting, to assess its impact over the first six months.
- The Committee agreed to the scope of the Emergency Services Review, under the terms of reference agreed in the report, in the May and June meetings. It was also suggested that representatives from Lewisham Homes and the Fire Service be invited to attend.

4.3 **RESOLVED:** The work programme be agreed, and updated in light of the recommendations made at the meeting.

## 5. In-depth review into low cost home ownership: draft report and recommendations

5.1 Joe Dunton (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the report. The key points to note were:

- The draft report for the Review into Low Cost Home Ownership was published in the agenda papers.
- Amendments have been suggested for the report and its recommendations, and are listed in Appendix A.

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

- For Recommendation 1, it was agreed that the words "all the pitfalls" be inserted, so it now reads: "Lewisham Council and partner organisations need to ensure that all residents are aware of both the benefits and all the pitfalls of choosing to buy a home through the Right to Buy Scheme."
- Officers would have to take legal advice on Recommendation 2, on whether the Council can limit this for leasehold properties.
- The present Recommendation 11 is no longer required, and Recommendation 10 to be expanded to read: "The Council should explore the viability of making sites available for Self Builders. Where appropriate, this might include sites which are being considered for infill development under the Housing Matters Programme. The Council should ensure that any housing development it supports in this way adheres to CLT principles by remaining affordable and continuing to help meet local housing needs."

- The present Recommendation 12 should be expanded to include Community Land Trusts, as they are not only for self-builds.
- Recommendation 13 to be amalgamated with Recommendation 10.
- Remove specific named groups other than Credit Union from Recommendation 14.
- Officers will look at Recommendation 15, as they do not want to duplicate work that is taking place in other organisations.

Other recommendations were suggested, and the following was noted:

- The issue of training for self-build groups and community land trust to be added to the present Recommendation 15, so there are assurances on the competency and ability of self-build groups.
- Self-builds should be restricted to Lewisham residents only.

5.3 **RESOLVED:** That the report be agreed, after the suggestions to amend the report and recommendations are made. The revised recommendations are listed in Appendix B.

## 6. Housing Matters Update

6.1 Jeff Endean (Programme Manager – Housing Matters) introduced the report. The key points to note were:

- On 16 January 2013 Mayor and Cabinet agreed that the Council should commence consultation regarding four potential new build schemes as part of the Housing Matters programme, for which a target of delivering at least 250 new homes in the next five years had been set.
- Following the creation of the target of 250 new homes, officers reviewed potential sites on which those homes might be built. Pollard Thomas Edwards architects were appointed to test the feasibility of building on 13 sites, and where appropriate to develop outline designs for new housing provision. Drivers Jonas Deloitte was also appointed to assess the financial viability of the options being developed.
- At the Housing Select Committee meeting of 8 January 2013, and subsequently at the Mayor and Cabinet meeting of 16 January 2013, the early progress in undertaking this work was reported, and it was recommended that officers commence consultation with residents on four of the 13 sites under consideration. These sites offered the potential of up to 76 new homes.
- The four sites that have been identified and being consulted on, are:
  - Mercator Road, Lee Green
  - Wood Vale, Forest Hill
  - Dacre Park/Boone Street, Blackheath
  - Longfield Crescent, Forest Hill
- Consultation events were held as well as targeted door knocking during the consultation process for each site. Distribution of statutory S105 consultation letters will take place very shortly on the Mercator Road, Lee Green site, while further work will be carried out to resolve potential issues during the consultations for the other sites.
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- The sites deemed to be non-viable at the present time are as follows:
  - Perrystreete, Forest Hill
  - Ermine Road, Ladywell
- Chiddingstone, Lewisham Central has been identified as place designated for housing older people.
- The following sites are currently being reviewed:

- Home Park, Bellingham
- Dacre Park/Boone Street (second site), Blackheath
- Lawn Terrace, Blackheath
- Mercator Road (second site), Lee Green
- Achilles Street, New Cross
- Bampton Estate, Perry Vale
- Church Grove, Ladywell has been identified as a self-build site

6.2 In response to questions the Committee were advised:

- The Council may come back to the ‘non-viable sites’ at a later date. The architects were unable to devise a desirable scheme that would fit with the surrounding buildings to proceed promptly, unlike the four proposed sites.
- In the Home Park, Bellingham development, the provision of a community centre is still being explored.
- Officers will look at recent planning judgements in Blackheath when developing options for new homes on Lawn Terrace, Blackheath, before proceeding.
- There would be some partnership working with London & Quadrant (L&Q) if the Council is going to be able to proceed with the Bampton Estate, Perry Vale site. L&Q have performed improvements on the properties and areas where the Council have transferred property to their control.
- Community groups have approached the Council about developing the Church Grove site, and officers are studying their proposals.
- Officers are aware that the other sites – apart from the first four proposed sites – consist of more complex situations in respect of planning and consultation, but will look to progress where they can in light of the financial constraints they operate under.

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

## 7. Matters to be referred to Mayor & Cabinet

7.1 Referral on agenda item: In-depth review into low cost home ownership: draft report and recommendations.

The Committee recommends that:

- That the In-depth review into low cost home ownership report be agreed, after the suggestions to amend the report and recommendations are made.

The meeting ended at 9.43 pm

Chair:

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Date:

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Recommendations**

The Committee would like to make the following recommendations:

[Please note, these are draft recommendations to be considered and approved by the Committee]

R1. Lewisham Council and partner organisations need to ensure that all residents are aware of both the benefits and the pitfalls of choosing to buy a home through the Right to Buy Scheme.

R2. Lewisham Council should explore options to limit the number of RtB leaseholders sub-letting their properties or selling them to local private landlords. This could include exploring options for charging leaseholders for renting their property in the first five years and looking at options for giving the council first refusal on the property in the event of a sale.

R3. Lewisham Homes should promote the Cash Incentive Scheme alongside Right to Buy to ensure that tenants are aware of all the options available to them.

R4. Lewisham Council and partner organisations need to ensure that all residents are aware of both the benefits and the pitfalls of choosing to buy a home through a Shared Ownership / Shared Equity scheme.

R5. The Housing Select Committee support the South East London Housing Partnership in their efforts to maintain a portal website to make it easier for residents to navigate the range of Shared Ownership / Equity options available locally.

R6. Lewisham Council and partner organisations should consider promoting all Low Cost Home Ownership options together so that Right to Buy and Shared Ownership/Shared Equity so residents can make an informed comparison between the various options available to them. Additionally potential homeowners could be reminded of the responsibilities that come with home ownership generally.

R7. Lewisham Council should measure the demand / interest in self build locally

R8. Lewisham Council should promote the Mayor of London's "Build your own home – the London Way" and the Community Right to Build funding pots to local residents who are interested in self build.

R9. Lewisham Council should work with local partners such as the credit union to open up new finance options for any potential Self Build / Custom Build projects in the borough.

R10. Lewisham Council should explore all options for providing appropriate affordable land to Self Build projects that help meet local housing needs.

R11. Lewisham Council should re-explore the sites that have been considered for infill development under the Housing Matters Programme with a view to making any suitable sites available to self builders.

R12. Lewisham Council should explore a Community Land Trust as an option for releasing land for self build projects, low cost sale and/or social housing rent.

R13. Lewisham Council should re-explore the sites that have been considered for infill development under the Housing Matters Programme and any other potential sites with a view to making any suitable sites available to groups wishing to set up a Community Land Trust.

R14. Lewisham Council should work with partners such as the Credit Union or other Community Development Finance Institutions to open up new finance options for any potential CLT in the borough.

R15. Lewisham Council should create a local version of the CLT Handbook to simplify the process for any local community groups thinking of approaching the Council to set up a CLT.

R16. A further report on low cost home ownership, including updated information relating to the recommendations set out in this report should be brought before the Housing Select Committee in the 2013/14 municipal year.

3.1. Right to Buy (RtB) is a policy introduced in the late 1960s in Greater London that gives secure tenants of Council and Housing Association (HA) homes the legal right to buy the home they are living in. This was rolled out nationally by the Government by the 1980 Housing Act. Councils are permitted to retain the receipts and use them to develop new, replacement affordable homes. Preserved Right to Buy refers to situations where a council home has been sold to another landlord (such as a HA) whilst a tenant is living in it but the tenant has retained the right to purchase the property. Right to Acquire (RtA) is a similar scheme that is available to tenants of self contained Registered Provider properties built or purchased after 1st April 1997.

#### Recent Policy Changes

3.2. In March 2012 the then Housing Minister, Grant Schapps, announced the final guidance on a series of major policy changes designed to reinvigorate the governments RtB scheme. This included an increase in the maximum discount from £16,000 to £75,000 (depending on the type of property and the length of time the tenant has lived there) that has applied since 1st April 2012. The discount was increased to £100,000 for houses in London from 25th March 2013. The increased discount does not apply to properties that are eligible under Right to Acquire.

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4.8. The evidence supplied to the committee by the officers and marketing representatives from London and Quadrant (L&Q) and Family Mosaic suggests that there are a few advantages of Shared Ownership and Shared Equity products. In particular they offer residents another option for getting a foot on the property ladder. This could be especially beneficial to those on the housing waiting list who will never realistically be a high enough priority to be housed in social/affordable rented accommodation. These tend to be low income, working households who are unable to buy on the open market. Some buyers of a shared ownership property eventually buy 100% of the equity, suggesting it is an option for low cost home ownership.

4.9. Shared Ownership and Shared Equity products are often criticised, as home owners can become “trapped” with a high rent and a high mortgage payment if their financial situation changes; however, the evidence provided to the committee by Debbie Coombs (Family Mosaic) and Lucy Chitty (L&Q) suggested that it was possible for tenants to staircase down to a lesser share of the ownership or even to a normal tenancy arrangement. This could be attractive to residents who would be concerned that they would stand to lose a home bought on the open market if they fell into financial difficulties.

4.10. This stair casing option would mean that Shared Ownership and Shared Equity Options are potentially more attractive than other routes people on low incomes have taken into low cost home ownership such as sub-prime mortgages, which came with a higher interest rate and a higher risk of repossession for the homeowner, or interest only mortgages with no capital repayment vehicle, that often failed to result in full home ownership despite the homeowner paying interest charges over a prolonged period.

4.11. Additionally, the evidence provided by Family Mosaic and L&Q suggested that they offered additional support to residents in financial difficulty, including: referrals to a credit control team who offer information, advice and guidance on selling their home, stair-casing down and managing arrears.

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#### **Recommendation:**

R6. Lewisham Council and partner organisations should consider promoting all Low Cost Home Ownership options together so that Right to Buy and Shared Ownership/Shared Equity so residents can make an informed comparison between the various options available to them. Additionally potential homeowners could be reminded of the responsibilities that come with home ownership generally.

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5.13. The committee also considered the Mayor of London's funding prospectus – "Build your own home – the London way" – as part of their evidence on self build. This funding prospectus is linked to the "Laying the Foundations" white paper and offers Londoners the chance to bid for a share of an £5 million pot of funding to support Custom Build Housing. Since the committee considered this evidence the government have also announced that they are opening up the £14 million fund to support Community Right to Build to applications from groups planning self build projects.

**Recommendation:**

R7 Lewisham Council should promote the Mayor of London's "Build your own home – the London Way" and the Community Right to Build funding pots to local residents who are interested in self build.

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6.7. It can be difficult for those wishing to purchase a home in the CLT to obtain a mortgage from a high street bank as banks are concerned about their position in the event of a default. To mitigate against this, the East London CLT have taken a position that in this situation, the bank could sell the property on the open market. Additionally Local Authorities, including Lewisham, have provided mortgages in the for tenants who wanted to take up a Right to Buy option and this is something that could possibly be explored again.

**Recommendation:**

R13 Lewisham Council should work with partners such as the Credit Union or other Community Development Finance Institutions, such as the Ecology building Society, to open up new finance options for any potential CLT in the borough.

6.8. Buying a home in a CLT may not be as cheap as some of the other options being explored as part of this review but it is open to anyone in the local community and does not have the same restrictive criteria as other schemes such as shared ownership and right to buy. Additionally it is possible that the Local Authority can control the cost of a property in a CLT by ensuring that land is made available on favourable terms whether sold at a discount or transferred for a nominal fee.



## **Appendix B**

### **Revised Recommendation of the Low Cost Home Ownership Review**

#### Recommendations

The Committee would like to make the following recommendations:

R1. Lewisham Council and partner organisations need to ensure that all residents are aware of both the benefits and all the pitfalls of choosing to buy a home through the Right to Buy Scheme.

R2. Lewisham Council should explore options to limit the number of RtB leaseholders sub-letting their properties or selling them to local private landlords. This could include exploring options for charging leaseholders for renting their property in the first five years and looking at options for giving the council first refusal on the property in the event of a sale.

R3. Lewisham Homes should promote the Cash Incentive Scheme alongside Right to Buy to ensure that tenants are aware of all the options available to them.

R4. Lewisham Council and partner organisations need to ensure that all residents are aware of both the benefits and all the pitfalls of choosing to buy a home through a Shared Ownership / Shared Equity scheme.

R5. The Housing Select Committee support the South East London Housing Partnership in their efforts to maintain a portal website to make it easier for residents to navigate the range of Shared Ownership / Equity options available locally.

R6. Lewisham Council and partner organisations should consider promoting all low cost home ownership options together so residents can make an informed comparison between the various options available to them. Additionally potential homeowners should be reminded of the responsibilities that come with home ownership generally.

R7. Lewisham Council should measure the demand / interest in self build locally

R8. Lewisham Council should promote the Mayor of London's "Build your own home – the London Way" and the Community Right to Build funding pots to local residents who are interested in self build.

R9. Lewisham Council should work with local partners such as the credit union to open up new finance options for any potential Self Build / Custom Build projects in the borough.

R10. The Council should explore the viability of making sites available for Self Builders. Where appropriate, this might include sites which have been considered for infill development under the Housing Matters Programme. The Council should ensure that any housing development it supports in this way adheres to CLT principles by remaining affordable and continuing to help meet local housing needs.

R11. Lewisham Council should ensure that any investment of resources, whether land, capital or officer time by the Council into a CLT, self build project, or other low cost

home ownership option is justified with reference to meeting council objectives in meeting local housing needs.

R12. Where the Council has invested its resources it should ensure that it is able to nominate existing tenants from the housing register for participation in self build groups or for finished properties, where these are provided.

R13. The Council may need to establish, in partnership with CLTs and other Housing Providers, a separate register of local residents who are interested in self build or other forms of low cost home ownership.

R14. Lewisham Council should explore a Community Land Trust as an option for releasing land for self build projects, low cost sale and/or social housing rent.

R15. Lewisham Council should work with partners such as the Credit Union or other Community Development Finance Institutions to open up new finance options for any potential CLT in the borough.

R16. Lewisham Council should ensure that interested residents are signposted to available information regarding CLTs including examples of best practice and existing practical and legal guidance.

R17. Lewisham Council should ensure that any group receiving any form of assistance from the Council to set up and manage a CLT has the required level of expertise.

R18. A further report on low cost home ownership, including updated information relating to the recommendations set out in this report should be brought before the Housing Select Committee in the 2013/14 municipal year.