

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Thursday, 16 May 2013 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Carl Handley (Chair), Vincent Davis (Vice-Chair), Amanda De Ryk, Patsy Foreman, Darren Johnson and Sam Owolabi-Oluyole.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Paul Bell and Liam Curran.

ALSO PRESENT: Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager), Steve Bonvini (Operations Director) (Regenter B3), Scott Cook (Partnerships and Service Improvement Manager), Jeff Endean (Principal Policy Officer), Mark Humphreys (Group Finance Manager, Customer Services), Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing), Colin Moone (Acting Housing Needs Manager), Roger Raymond, Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services), Andrew Potter (Chief Executive) (Lewisham Homes), Hilary Barber (Director of Corporate Services) (Lewisham Homes), Dominic Johnson (Head of Health and Safety) (Lewisham Homes), Tracy Jones (Operations Manager) (Regenter B3), Steve Langslow (Health and Environmental Manager) (Rydon's), Suzy Lloyd (Chief Executive) (SOLON), Nimisha Patel (Head of PFI) (Pinnacle), Suzanne Ste-Croix (Acting Contracts Manager) (Pinnacle) and Clifford Yeend (Divisional Manager) (Rydon).

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 3 April 2013

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 April 2013 be signed as an accurate record of the meeting.

2. Declarations of interest

There were none.

3. Housing matters update

3.1 Jeff Endean (Programme Manager – Housing Matters), introduced the report, the key points to note were:

- A report on new build housing that will be considered by Mayor & Cabinet on 22 May.
- The GLA launched the Building the Pipeline prospectus on the 8th March 2013 as part of the Mayor of London's Housing Covenant. The prospectus makes available £100m in London.
- Officers expect to submit bid for at least £940,000 to the GLA's Building the Pipeline fund. This is in addition to the bid of £4.5m that has already been submitted to the GLA Care and Support fund.

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

- In respect of providing open space and garden areas around the new housing, officers would look at all the options available.
- The Council intends to integrate residents fully into the consultation process.

- To date, seven organisations or community groups have expressed an interest in the Church Grove self-build site, and officers have worked alongside the National Self-Build Association to develop an appraisal process for the options on the site. The Council will convene a Panel who will then select which organisations or community groups are asked to develop plans for the site.
- The Council is open to working with other organisations who have financed self-build projects.
- The conversation with tenants and leaseholders on the two options for future investment is still in progress.
- The 500 homes have been identified from the initial 15 sites; there are a possible 54 sites in total, so this figure could rise as further feasibility work is carried out.

3.3 Suzy Lloyd (Chief Executive, SOLON), gave a presentation to the Committee,
the key points to note were:

- SOLON are a resident involvement consultancy based in London specialising in Independent Resident Advisor work. They have been working with residents in Lewisham for the past two months.
- They will provide independent and impartial advice to all residents.
- They have previous experience in dealing with resident consultations on stock option appraisals in other areas. Some have resulted in stock transfers and others have not. Those that have resulted in stock transfer include:
 - Wycombe
 - Braintree
 - City West Salford
 - 4 stock transfers in Lewisham
- The key challenges for the consultation are as follows:
 - Clarity about the two options
 - Explaining difficult concepts
 - Raising aspirations
 - Giving residents a voice
 - Building trust
- The Steering Group have now agreed their terms of reference.
- SOLON are looking to build the capacity of knowledge of the residents in a number of ways, such as:
 - Providing information on the Stock condition survey
 - A coach tour of the properties to get a better understanding of the estate.
 - Information on changes to housing finance
- The wider Independent Tenant Advice (ITA) service also consists of:
 - Freephone
 - Newsletters
 - Area Panel conference
 - Working with Tenant Resident Associations (TRAs) and Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs)
 - Sessions with sheltered residents
 - Session with Board of Lewisham Homes

- Focus Groups with uninvolved residents
- ITA will be producing a Newsletter, the first of which will be published shortly.

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

- Members were reassured that SOLON will present the information in a non-biased, balanced way and will not lead residents into the direction of one option or the other.
- The consultation process would be, and seen to be, led by the residents.
- The choice to put the independent advisory service back out to tender was decided by the Resident Steering Group, and from this new tendering process, SOLON was selected.
- Members were invited to Resident Steering Group meetings in the future so they can observe how they are conducted and how the information is being presented.
- The first newsletter from the ITA will be sent to Members once available.

Resolved: that the report and presentation were noted.

4. Lewisham Homes end of year review

4.1 Hilary Barber (Director of Corporate Services, Lewisham Homes), introduced the report. The key points to note were:

- The achievements for the year for Lewisham Homes were as follows:
- Repairs: the repairs service is meeting most of its targets:
 - 99.6% of repairs were completed on time, against a 99% target
 - 98.3% of repairs were completed on the first visit against a 95% target
 - tenant satisfaction with completed repairs is slightly below the 95% target at 94% but is an increase from 93% last year
 - the repairs contact centre has answered 91% of calls within 20 seconds, which is above the 90% target
- Rent loss: Rent loss through vacant properties was 0.81% (or £564k) for 2012/13, compared to 1.39% and 1.98% in the previous two years.
- Benefit changes: close working with the Council's Universal Credit Pilot team has led to a better understanding of the impact of the changes and developing strategies for households affected by the benefit cap. Targeting households affected by the 'bedroom tax', there were individual conversations with almost all households affected, which has helped them to understand the implications of changes. Support has been provided for tenants to plan how they will deal with the changes, as well as promoting employment initiatives and assisting with transfer applications.
- Health and Safety: after an independent audit carried out by British Safety Council (BSC) of Lewisham Homes health and safety framework a four-star rating was achieved in January 2013. This is an improvement from the three-star rating obtained in 2010 and shows a very positive direction of travel. The overall score achieved was 88.76% which was 4% short of achieving a five-star rating.

- Gas safety: gas safety continues to be a high priority for the Council and Lewisham Homes – the performance for the legally required annual gas safety checks remains high and achieved 100% at year end, compared to 99.97% and 99.98% in the previous two years.
- Sprinklers: a pilot sprinkler system has been installed in one of the sheltered housing blocks. This was a ground breaking pilot as it was the first of its type in London and was worked on in partnership with the London Fire Brigade.
- Areas for improvement were as follows:
- Dealing with empty properties: less time has been taken to re-let properties – an average of 62 days at the end of September, compared with 95 days last year. Three quarters of all 650 properties were let in 49 days or less, well within the 55 day target. However the average of 62 days is adversely affected by 15 hard to let sheltered housing flats and other properties with specific issues. These 15 were all empty for over a year; without them the average relet time would be 45 days.
- Improving ‘satisfaction’ in area such as ‘Caretaking’: satisfaction with caretaking was at 64% for the year as a whole, below the 70% target, but the trend is improving with resident satisfaction at 72% in the final quarter. The improvement is coming as a result of commencing the implementation of a Service Improvement Plan.
- Improvements in the area of rent collection: to continue the steady improvement in rent collection, as income collection rates are improved on last year’s performance. Rent collection for the period was 98.87%, an improvement on performance from 98.7% in the previous year.

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

- In respect of damp and mould, Lewisham Homes has been proactive since the Committee’s review into damp and mould. This includes:
 - A YouTube video was produced to provide residents with information on preventing damp and mould
 - 1-to-1 consultations with residents
 - Much more information and support to residents
- Lewisham Homes have re-assessed their procedures in respect of Anti-Social Behaviour to deal with the issues more effectively. They do have a good previous track record on working with the council officers, the police and partner organisations in combating Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB).
- One of their officers, Kevin Jones, is overseeing a project to improve their Caretaking facilities over the estate.
- Lewisham Homes has reviewed its procedures in respect of empty properties to attempt to lessen the possibility that properties will not be occupied by squatters in the future.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

5. Brockley PFI end of year review

5.1 Steve Bonvini (Operations Director, Regenter B3), introduced the report. The key points to note were:

- Regenter B3 has been working in Lewisham since September 2007.
- The achievements for the year for RB3 were as follows:
- In respect of the Complaints Service, RB3's performance over the year regarding answering correspondence on time has been inconsistent and deductions will be applied accordingly. They have put in place actions that will deal with the complaints in a more effective way. Following this, complaints have come down in 2012-13, compared to 2011-12.
- The target for income collection for RB3 is a rolling figure, and is set as a minimum of 0.5% above the average collection rate of the Councils housing providers. As at the end of March 2013, RB3 are reporting an average YTD collection rate of 99.1% of rental income against the Councils providers of 98.1%.
 - Days for staff to concentrate on a dedicated activity e.g. court papers
 - Partnership working with Lewisham Credit Union
 - Establish evening rent arrears / welfare benefit surgeries
 - Strategic partnership working with Lewisham Homes
- In terms of void management, it is monitored monthly through a contractual KPI which measures the average time in letting minor void dwellings and a target of 28 days has been set. In 2011/12, there were a total of 45 voids leading to an average re-let time of 18 days. Rydon Ltd has received 55 void properties categorised as initial availability within the period. Re-servicing of the void properties have averaged 19.85 days. Some properties have required extensive decoration works and major works to bring the property back to a Decent Home standard.
- In terms of repair and maintenance, the average number of repairs carried each month for the half year to date is 403. There are three main Key Performance Indicators relating to the responsive repairs performance. It is noted that the number of responsive repairs requested by tenants compared to the same period last year has fallen by 39.
- The RB3 Residents Board represents all residents in the RB3 area and is the forum where discussion and consultation on issues of relevance to residents takes place. It has been meeting monthly since the contract began and participation has increased steadily from low levels initially to the current attendance by 20 to 25 residents at most meetings. Also, three new TRAs have been formed since the beginning of the contract bringing the number of TRAs in RB3 to 5.
- In terms of new energy proposals, have taken several initiatives forward as a result of the pilot: a new energy information leaflet has been produced and is now part of the sign up pack and the welcome home pack for new residents now includes energy saving bulbs and low temperature washing powder.
- Areas for improvement were as follows:
- In terms of ASB, work is being carried out to improve their response to issues of ASB. For example, the review and examination of some high profile ASB cases has resulted in a refreshed approach to the management of these cases. There is now a regular call over with housing managers to discuss and review cases, consider new initiatives and share good practice. They also work with the Safer Neighbourhood team and the local Police to tackle ASB and use a range of methods to resolve ASB – such as Mediation and ABC Acceptable Behaviour contracts, where appropriate. RB3 also work with the Councils Anti-Social Behaviour Action Team, and

LAMP (Lewisham Action on Mediation Project) who provide support through mediation.

- Leaseholder Valuation Tribunal: The Class action involving 23 individual leaseholders against the Council and Regenter has now been determined by the Upper Tribunal. The Major Works invoices have been recalculated and the Leaseholders involved have been issued with revised invoices based on this determination.

5.2 In response to questions the Committee were advised:

- The Leaseholder Valuation Tribunal means that residents would be entitled to a 2% cash-back on the management fee if the total bill was over the £10,000 cap.
- RB3 are aware of 6 properties on their estate with issues of damp and mould that Asset Management is looking into. If any other complaints are known, Members may forward the information to RB3 who will then be able to investigate the complaint.
- They have carried out surveys on 67 other properties, which may have problems with damp and mould.
- RB3 are also working with a company to experiment with a number of solutions to lessen damp and mould on its estate.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

6. Emergency services review

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

- The Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee had already received evidence from the Borough Fire Commander about the proposals in the draft fifth London safety plan.
- Other Select Committees would receive evidence for the Emergency Services Review related to their respective terms of reference.
- The information provided by officers about responses to the Lakanal House inquest and the ongoing work with housing providers in the borough, formed the first part of the Committee's contribution to the Emergency Services Review.

6.2 Scott Cook (Partnerships and Service Improvement Manager, Strategic Housing, Customer Services), introduced evidence for the Emergency Services Review. The key points to note were:

- Fire risk assessments had been undertaken to all high rise housing blocks in the borough, completing all fire safety works by March 2012.
- The findings of the inquest into the Lakanal House fire in Southwark were announced in March 2013. Housing providers in Lewisham had been asked to respond.
- The six key areas of the recommendations from the Lakanal House inquest were:

- Publication and promotion of fire safety
- Signage in high rise residential buildings
- Policy and Procedures concerning fire risk
- Training of staff engaged in maintenance and refurbishment work on existing buildings
- Access for emergency vehicles
- Retro fitting of sprinklers
- Officers in Strategic Housing had asked Lewisham's housing providers to respond to each of the recommendations. Key points to note were:
 - Fire safety and advice leaflets had been given to all residents in high rise blocks.
 - Lewisham Homes and RB3 were both 100% compliant on fire safety
 - Lewisham Homes and RB3 employed fire safety specialists
 - Both Lewisham Homes and RB3 were compliant on access for emergency services and vehicles
 - Many buildings managed by Lewisham Homes are being assessed for the feasibility of fitting sprinklers; prioritising sheltered blocks

6.3 In response to questions the Committee were advised:

- The Council worked closely with Lewisham Homes and RB3 to ensure that their buildings were 100% fire safety compliant, including the fitting of fire and escape doors, maintaining signage and carrying out risk assessments.
- Where the condition of buildings had deteriorated or there were older doors installed, maintenance operatives had been trained to ensure work was being carried out to the required standard.
- Lewisham Homes employed a specialist company to fit flat entrance fire doors and there would be further assessments once they had been fitted.
- Where work was being carried out as part of the decent homes programme Lewisham Homes worked to ensure that fire safety measures could be built into, or enhanced, as part of the works. One example was the inclusion of self-closing kitchen doors as part of the decent homes work upgrading kitchens.
- The Council had committed to assessing the feasibility of installing sprinklers in each of the developments proposed as part of the 'New Homes, Better Places' programme.
- The key to ensuring safety in high rise blocks was the effectiveness of measures to limit the spread of fire.
- In high rise buildings, each fire door (assuming it is fitted and maintained properly) should hold back the spread of fire by 30 minutes.
- There might be cases where tailored fire safety advice was required for high rise blocks, especially where the layout of buildings was not straightforward.

- Fire safety checks were carried out in Lewisham Homes' properties on a monthly basis. Problems would also be identified by caretakers during their daily checks of buildings and these would be dealt with accordingly.
- Any complaints/queries by residents in respect of fire safety were dealt with through the repairs and maintenance system.
- Work was ongoing to inform residents about fire safety.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

7. Housing supply and demand

7.1 Colin Moone, Housing Needs Service Group Manager, Customers Services, introduced the report. The key points to note were:

- Lewisham has about 116,091 dwellings in the borough, approximately 42.4% are owner-occupied, 24.3% are private rented, 31.1% are social rented properties, 1.2% are shared ownership and 1% living rent free (Source: 2011 Census).
- There are approximately 7,700 on the housing register in Lewisham. The register had been reviewed over the past year, bringing down the figure from about 18,000.
- Last year, there were 1,661 social rented properties available for letting throughout the borough.
- With data from April-December 2012, the average waiting time for those on the housing register for a 2-bedroom household was 109 weeks, and for a 4-bedroom household it was 285 weeks.
- In terms of temporary accommodation, about 1,165 have been placed in provision provided by a number of suppliers, for example hostels, private sector landlords, or bed and breakfasts.
- The two main reasons for being made homeless in the borough were loss of rented property and 'family/friend exclusion'. These two reasons accounted for over 80% of homeless applications and acceptances
- Lewisham had 205 out-of-borough placements in neighbouring boroughs in 2012. All London boroughs have signed up to an agreement to regulate inter borough placements, to ensure the host borough is not out-bid for properties within their own jurisdiction.
- Lewisham has a Rent Incentive Scheme, which is voluntary, and allows households to move to the private sector if they so wish. In 2012-13, 47 households were relocated under this scheme.
- In conclusion:
 - Housing register is currently 7,836
 - 1,000 new applications a year
 - 1,211 homeless applications last year; 700 accepted

- 1,661 lettings last year
- 1,165 households accommodated in temporary accommodation (TA)
- 618 in temporary accommodation in private sector
- Currently 10,000 landlords accommodating households on housing benefits
- There is not enough social housing supply to meet the demands of our community
- The volume of social rented housing available for letting in any one year just about meets emerging demand but does not address any of the backlog on the housing register

7.2 In response to questions the Committee were advised:

- Work has been carried out previously to convert properties to larger homes, and officers are submitting a bid to the GLA “Building the Pipeline” fund to support further deconversion and extensions as well as for more new build.
- As well as the Rent Incentive Scheme, there is the Private Sector Leasing Scheme, which is a scheme where Lewisham Council leases private rented property for a flexible term of up to three years. These properties are then let by the Council to homeless families in need of temporary accommodation. The difference between the two schemes is that the Council will manage the properties and cover any ‘empty’ periods that may occur on the Private Sector Leasing Scheme.
- Boroughs across London are trying to work together to tackle the issue of limited available accommodation for those registered as homeless. The places where people work, live, travel and socialise are quite interchangeable for a lot of residents, and that makes managing the use of properties by homeless households and individuals more challenging.
- There are a couple of ‘property exchange’ schemes that are available; Lewisham participates in the House Exchange scheme. If someone is a council or housing association tenant, then they can arrange to swap their house or flat with another tenant, provided their landlord agrees.
- The Council are working with developers to extract as much social housing as they can in new developments.
- On Convoys Wharf, while the Council’s planning policy position is to aim for up to 50% of housing to be affordable/social housing, this can only be achieved if it is financially viable and fits alongside the development of other priorities such as schooling and healthcare facilities.
- Officers would supply Members with information on:
 - Breakdown of the Homeless figures in respect of Reasons and Age
 - Number of homeless refusals and reasons.

Resolved: that the report be noted

8. Select Committee work programme

8.1 Timothy Andrew, Scrutiny Manager, introduced the report. The key points to note were:

- In respect of the item on 'Preparation for the Housing Benefit Cap in Lewisham' at the next meeting, Members asked that it cover the following areas:
 - Brighton's policy on the Under-Occupancy Charge, more commonly known as the 'Bedroom Tax'
 - Debts
 - Eviction policies

Resolved: that the work programme be noted.

9. Items to be referred to Mayor and Cabinet

None

The meeting ended at 10.15 pm

Chair:

Date:
