

# MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 30 October 2013 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Carl Handley (Chair), Vincent Davis (Vice-Chair), Paul Bell, Liam Curran, Vicky Foxcroft and Darren Johnson and Alan Hall

APOLOGIES: Councillors Amanda De Ryk and Patsy Foreman

ALSO PRESENT: Charlotte Dale (Scrutiny Manager), Jeff Endean (Housing Programmes and Strategy Team Manager), Peter Gadsdon (Head of Strategy & Performance, Customer Services), Laura Harper (Housing Strategy Officer), Mark Humphreys (Group Finance Manager, Customer Services), Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services), Steve Beard (Development Consultant) (Phoenix Community Housing) and Irene Craik (Levitt Bernstein Architects)

## 1. Minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2013

- 1.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 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 Lewisham Homes Board Member; and Councillor Hall declared a non-prejudicial interest as a Phoenix Community Housing Board Member.

## 3. Housing Matters

- 3.1 The agenda was taken out of order and this item was taken after the item on welfare reform.
- 3.2 In response to questions from Councillor Foxcroft, it was noted that (a) information on the costs to date of the Housing Matters Programme had been circulated to Members by email and would be re-sent; and (b) that Lewisham Homes would be asked to include information on the democratisation of their Board as part of their mid-year review, to be presented at the next meeting. It was also agreed that the Cabinet Member for Customer Services would be invited to the next meeting to contribute to the discussion on this point.
- 3.3 Jeff Endean gave a presentation updating the Committee on the Housing Matters Programme which covered (a) the new build programme including confirmed new supply and sites in development; (b) the Church Grove self-build project; and (c) extra care housing plans. In relation to the latter, Irene Craik from Levitt Bernstein (the architects working on the Phoenix Hazelhurst Court scheme) presented a number of slides and Steve Beard, a development consultant for Phoenix, contributed to the debate.
- 3.4 The following points were noted in response to questions from Members on the first section of the presentation:
  - Officers were working with L&Q to see if a disused youth centre in Grove Park could be turned into 49 small affordable housing units that might be attractive

to under-occupiers. (L&Q managed the stock in the surrounding area so there were management advantages to them working on this scheme).

- Officers were working with Pocket Living to develop 26 mainly 1-bed units on Mercator Road which would be for sale at affordable levels (currently for households with an income of £66,000p.a. or less). This scheme was due to be considered at Mayor and Cabinet shortly.
- It was noted that there were a number of options for trying to ensure that new social rented and affordable rented housing stock was not subsequently bought under Right To Buy.
- 40 families appeared to be genuinely interested in building their own home at Church Grove. The potential self-builders were predominately on the Lewisham Housing Waiting List.

3.5 In response to questions from the Committee on the extra care housing plans, the following points were noted:

- Access to local facilities would be considered as part of the planning process for Hazelhurst Court, including improving access to the bus stop and investigating community transport options.
- Officers would consider carefully how current sheltered housing would be 'run down' as decanting elderly residents could be a very traumatic process. Often, visits to the new developments, liaising with relatives and moving groups of people together helped improve the process.
- Officers would look into (a) whether a room for visitors would be useful and utilised or whether the space would be better used providing further accommodation; and (b) what catering options should be provided on site.

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

#### 4. Welfare reform update

4.1 Peter Gadsdon introduced the item and a printed slide pack was provided to the Committee. The presentation included information on the council tax reduction scheme; local support scheme; under-occupation; the benefit cap; and the universal credit pilot.

4.2 In response to questions from members of the Committee, the following points were noted:

##### *Local support scheme:*

- Most of the people rejected from the local support scheme were rejected because they were not on a qualifying benefit, but signposting was taking place so the residents could access funding streams that they were eligible for.
- The Council did not have access to a detailed breakdown of the DWP loans provided the previous year so it was difficult to assess why the figures for the Council's scheme were so different. It was noted that the Council's scheme was different from the DWP scheme (e.g. it distributed goods as well as money) and that it was applying the scheme criteria stringently. It was further noted that even those councils who had copied the DWP scheme exactly were not awarding at the DWP level.
- The Council's scheme was being advertised, including at Job Centre Plus (JCP) and a number of referrals had come via JCP.
- The funding for the scheme formed part of the Council's overall budget; it could not be clawed back if underspent; and the amount to be provided next year was already known.

*Council tax reduction scheme:*

- Officers worked hard to ensure that residents who were genuinely unable to pay their council tax were supported whilst those who could pay but chose not to, were pursued. Residents who engaged with the Council were never sent down the bailiff route and every step possible was taken to avoid cases coming before the magistrate.
- Since the introduction of the council tax reduction scheme, 18,000 residents had received a bill for the first time and 6,000 summons had been issued for non-payment.
- The scheme would be reviewed after a year, at which point it could be modified if found not to be working well.

*Other matters:*

- The Council was supporting the 61 households in Lewisham that were subject to the benefit cap.

- 4.3 **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted and (a) figures for the number of people summonsed for non-payment of council tax who had a liability order granted by the magistrate, be supplied to the Committee; (b) more detailed information be provided on the Local Support Scheme (a breakdown of loans provided) and analysis conducted to establish why the numbers applying for loans had reduced from the DWP figures for the previous year; and (c) information on the number of Lewisham Homes households in arrears as a result of the bedroom tax be provided.

## 5. Housing Key Issues

- 5.1 Jeff Endean introduced the item and information was provided on Help to Buy and work targeting rogue landlords. It was noted that the avenues open to the Council to tackle rogue landlords could not, individually, have a huge impact, but by taking a co-ordinated approach to addressing the issue, landlords could be targeted on a number of fronts, making the overall impact more significant.
- 5.2 **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted and an update on the work being undertaken to tackle rogue landlords be provided to the Committee in due course.

## 6. Select Committee Work Programme

- 6.1 The Scrutiny Manager reported that the following items were due for consideration at the next meeting:
- Review of housing complaints process
  - Lewisham Homes Mid-Year Review (to include information on the democratisation of the Board)
  - Brockley PFI Mid-Year Review
  - Proposed rent and service charges increase.

It was also noted that the response to the Committee's referral on the Emergency Services Review would be considered at the next meeting; and the response to the referral on low cost home ownership (the Ladywell Leisure Centre site) at the February meeting. It was also noted that in addition to the items above, an item on the budget was likely to be considered to the next meeting.

- 6.2 **RESOLVED:** That the work programme be noted.

**7. Items to be referred to Mayor and Cabinet**

7.1 None.

The meeting ended at 10.15 pm

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_