

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 4 December 2013 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Carl Handley (Chair), Vincent Davis (Vice-Chair), Paul Bell, Liam Curran, Amanda De Ryk, Patsy Foreman, Vicky Foxcroft and Darren Johnson and ex-officio Member Councillor Alan Hall

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Alan Hall, Andrew Potter (Chief Executive, Lewisham Homes), David Austin (Head Of Audit and Risk), Steve Bonvini (Operations Director, Regenter B3), Charlotte Dale (Scrutiny Manager), Jeff Endean (Housing Programmes and Strategy Team Manager), Peter Gadsdon (Head of Strategy & Performance, Customer Services), Mark Humphreys (Group Finance Manager, Customer Services), Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing), Clare Ryan (Housing Matters Consultation Manager), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services), Selwyn Thompson (Group Finance Manager - Budget Strategy), Councillor Susan Wise (Cabinet Member for Customer Services), Nimisha Patel (Head of Housing) (Pinnacle) and Tracey Jones (Operations Manager, Regenter B3)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2013

- 1.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2013 be signed as an accurate record of the meeting.

2. Declarations of interest

- 2.1 Councillor Bell declared a non-prejudicial interest in relation to item 5, as a Lewisham Homes Board Director. Councillor Hall declared a non-prejudicial interest in relation to the same item, as a Phoenix Community Housing Board Member and a Member of the Lewisham Co-operative Party.

3. Response to Housing Select Committee referral on the Emergency Services Review

- 3.1 Councillor Hall commended officers and members for their engagement in the review.
- 3.2 **RESOLVED:** That the referral response be noted.

4. Brockley PFI Mid Year Review

- 4.1 Steve Bonvini introduced the report and Tracey Jones and Nimisha Patel contributed to the discussion. In response to questions from the Committee the following points were noted:
 - A new resident engagement manager had been appointed who would focus on establishing more varied ways of engaging with residents.
 - The targets for emergency repairs were a response within 2 hours and the repair carried out within 24 hours.

- The complaints system was being reviewed, trends examined and lessons learnt. It had been noted that service requests had sometimes been incorrectly logged as complaints.
- One to one assistance was being provided in relation to residents affected by recent welfare benefit changes.
- Leaseholder bills had been delayed due to a delay in the audited accounts being signed off, as a result of information from the local authority arriving late.
- The PFI had been in operation since 2007 and was due to continue until 2027. There was a termination clause in the contract that would be triggered if Regenter B3 defaulted on the contract.
- The payment portal, which was managed by Lewisham Homes, had suffered from a number of technical breakdowns.
- In relation to parking on estates, parking controls would be in place before Christmas, with 'private parking' signs and priority for residents.
- The damp and mould survey had indicated that the majority of damp, mould and condensation issues were lifestyle related, although Regenter were recommending to the Council that envirovent bricks should be installed in a number of properties.
- Regular leasehold forums were held and the organisation also engaged with the Brockley Leaseholders' Association and would attend meetings if invited.
- It was likely that the number of complaints received in the past couple of months by councillors, from leaseholders in the Regenter B3 area, was due to the letters recently sent out regarding bills and major works arrears.

4.2 It was agreed that the damp and mould survey information would be circulated to the Committee; alongside a breakdown of complaints received since 2007 showing the split between leaseholders and tenants.

4.3 **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted and (a) the damp and mould survey information and (b) a breakdown of complaints since 2007 be circulated to the Committee.

5. Lewisham Homes Mid Year Review

The agenda was taken out of order and the item on social housing complaints (item 9) was considered prior to this item.

5.2 Andrew Potter introduced the item and outlined recent successes and challenges.

5.3 The Committee discussed resident involvement and the democratisation of the Board and in response to questions from Members of the Committee the following points were noted:

- How to forge a closer link between area panels and the Board would be considered in the new year.

- Resident involvement was wider than sitting on the Board and many residents wanted to be involved but did not want to have the statutory responsibilities associated with Board membership. Only a few people put themselves forward for Board vacancies despite (a) the vacancies being heavily advertised and (b) support being offered to residents to help them fill in the application form. Training was also offered to applicants who were not selected to help them get selected next time.
- The Board was open to the suggestion of having democratically elected Board members but wanted to be clear about the future direction of the organisation first, so that any new governance arrangements would be appropriate to the organisation.
- Board Members had an intensive induction and annual training programme.

5.4 Councillor Wise stated that she would welcome more robust governance arrangements but that a lot would depend on how the organisation evolved. She suggested that the Committee might want to invite the Chair of the Board and a tenant Board member to a future meeting.

5.5 Other matters were discussed and the following points noted:

- Maintenance of some external areas was split between two or three agencies such as the street sweeping team, the estate caretakers and Glendale, but Lewisham Homes was in negotiation with the Council about taking on greater responsibility for communal areas.
- A 100% case audit of anti-social behaviour (ASB) cases was being carried out by an independent person to try to address low satisfaction levels and a new ASB manager had been appointed to try to change and strengthen the ASB team.
- Leaseholders were being given lots of notice about the large bills that they would be receiving and one to one arrangements to discuss bills were being made in the case of bills over a set amount.
- The decision had been taken to move away from an options consultation and not to pursue a stock transfer at this time. However, Lewisham Homes would carry on the consultation in a more local, intensive manner to engage residents in discussions about how the organisation was and could be managed. Councillor Johnson suggested the new consultation approach and associated resident engagement activities could be the topic of an in-depth review in the next municipal year.

5.6 **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted and that the results of the ASB Audit (and a high level summary) be provided to the Committee once completed.

6. **Strategic Financial Review update and Savings Proposals for 2014/15 and 2015/16**

6.1 David Austin introduced the report and the Committee discussed the savings proposals relevant to its terms of reference.

CUS01 (restructure of the entire Housing Strategy and Programme team): it was noted that the restructure had not taken place before now as the

management team had only recently been strengthened giving senior officers the confidence to streamline the team.

CUS04 (transfer of the hostels from the HRA to the General Fund): this transfer was technically and legally possible so it was expected that the Secretary of State would agree to it.

CUS05 (absorption of an element of the management costs of the Milford Towers project within the Council): this was possible as most of the properties had been re-let and Lewisham Homes was managing the properties very efficiently.

6.2 The Committee also discussed **CUS07** and agreed to recommend that the proposal be rejected.

6.3 **RESOLVED:** That a referral be made to the Public Accounts Select Committee stating that:

(1) The Committee would like to endorse the following three savings proposals:

CUS01 - Restructure of the entire Housing Strategy and Programme team

CUS04 - Transfer of the hostels from the HRA to the General Fund.

CUS05 – Absorption of an element of the management costs of the Milford Towers project within the Council.

(2) The Committee recommends that **CUS07** (the outsourcing of the Call Point out of hours emergency telephone service) be rejected because (a) it believes that there is no evidence that outsourcing saves money as outsourced contracts often cost more in the long run; and (b) outsourcing this service may result in a poorer quality service for residents.

7. Rent Setting Consultation

7.1 Mark Humphreys introduced the report and outlined the increases proposed. Councillor Bell asked if there was flexibility to reduce the increase. It was reported that whilst there was the flexibility, any reduction in the proposed rent increase would result in fewer resources available to the HRA business plan. Kevin Sheehan reported that rent levels were critical in terms of the overall money available to support housing stock over the next few years; that the rises were reasonable; and that pressures on individual tenants caused by the rent increase would be managed by making discretionary housing payments or helping people access other hardship funds.

7.2 **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted and more detailed information on evictions be circulated to the Committee.

8. Housing Matters consultation

8.1 Jeff Endean introduced the report and provided information on the next stage of the Housing Matters consultation and it was noted that the priority for the next phase of the programme would be for Lewisham Homes to undertake a more locally based conversation with residents focussing on involving residents in the delivery of services; improving services; and

discussing how investment should be targeted locally. In response to a question from Councillor Foxcroft it was agreed that residents would be asked if they wanted more residents on the Board and if they wanted them to be directly elected rather than appointed.

- 8.2 Jeff also reported that the Mayor had agreed, earlier in the evening, to commence consultation with the residents of the Council's two extra care schemes at Kenton Court, in Sydenham, and Somerville, in New Cross, to enable them to move to new build extra care housing if they wanted to.
- 8.3 The Committee discussed how the new build extra care schemes were commissioned, including the appointment of architects and the importance of being ambitious in terms of design.
- 8.4 **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted and that the designs for the new extra care schemes be considered at a future meeting.

9. Social Housing Complaints

- 9.1 Peter Gadsdon introduced the item and outlined the new process for social housing complaints which involved an additional stage after stage three, where a "designated person" (usually the Chair of the Housing Select Committee) would try to mediate a solution before the case would be considered by the ombudsman. It was noted that there had been two cases considered thus far and these were discussed by the Committee. In both cases officers acknowledged that it was disappointing that the complaints had not been resolved at an earlier stage.
- 9.2 Councillor Johnson suggested that in future, this report should focus on the strategic problems expounded by the complaints, rather than the complaints themselves, and examine the flaws in the system and the steps being taken to resolve them. This was agreed by the Committee.
- 9.3 **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted and that future reports focus on the lessons learnt from complaints.

10. Select Committee Work Programme

- 10.1 Charlotte Dale introduced the item and Members discussed what items they wanted to consider at the next meeting.
- 10.2 **RESOLVED:** That an item on the Church Grove Self Build project be added to the work programme for consideration at the February meeting; and the draft London Housing Strategy be considered at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

11. Referrals to Mayor & Cabinet

- 11.1 **RESOLVED:** That a referral be made to the Public Accounts Select Committee.

The meeting ended at 10.00pm

Chair:

Date:
