

Housing Select Committee		
Title	Topics for in-depth review	
Contributor	Scrutiny Manager	Item 6
Class	Part 1 (open)	25 May 2016

1. Purpose

- 1.1 After speaking to officers and members, this paper sets out some possible topics for an in-depth review by the Committee. It provides a short introduction to three housing related issues and some brief comments on what the focus of the review could be.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Select Committee is asked to:

- Note the content of the paper
- Consider and agree a topic for an in-depth review

- 2.2 For further information, please contact John Bardens, Scrutiny Manager, on 02083149976.

3. Possible topics for an in-depth review

Housing mobility in Lewisham

- 3.1 Housing mobility schemes provide opportunities for social housing tenants to move to other parts of the country without having to move out of social housing all together.
- 3.2 They can help people who are living in overcrowded conditions or who need to move for work reasons find cheaper and more suitable places to live. They can also help people who are homeless or living in temporary accommodation.
- 3.3 There have been several national housing mobility schemes over the years – including *HOMES*, *LAWN* and *MoveUK*. Most recently, the Government set up *HomeSwap direct*, a mutual exchange scheme, and *Right to Move*, designed to help people move to take up work.
- 3.4 A number of local areas have also set up their own housing mobility schemes, providing incentives and help for people interested in moving – see, for example, the Wansdsworth, Barnet, Southwark and the Mayor of London “housing moves” schemes.
- 3.5 There is long-standing support for schemes like this from the Government and some commentators, for example, respected academic professor John Hills. And research has found a pent up demand among social housing tenants, particularly for larger homes and from growing families. But research from the Child Poverty

Action Group found that many people are reluctant to move too far in case they disrupt their children's schooling or get cut off from relatives and friends.

- 3.6 The Committee might want to hold an in-depth review into housing mobility in Lewisham. The review could look at how people feel and what Lewisham could do help more people find long-term housing solutions that work for them through schemes like this.

Mental health needs in social housing in Lewisham

- 3.7 Research has found that people with mental health conditions are more likely to live in worse housing, and that a lack of suitable housing-related support can lead to an escalation in care needs. At the same time, mental health problems can often go undiagnosed for a long time.
- 3.8 In social housing communities it is often frontline housing officers who are the first ones to notice mental health problems, and many housing providers provide support services for people with particular mental health needs. But research by the NHS confederation found that closer working between housing providers and mental health organisations can help to get better target support to those most in need.
- 3.9 To improve housing services for residents with mental health problems, some areas have established joint working agreements with local housing and mental health organisations – see, for example, Islington Council's Housing and Mental Health Joint Working Protocol.
- 3.10 The Chartered Institute of Housing also encourages landlords to offer mental health training to housing officers – and there have been reports of social housing landlords training frontline staff, including maintenance teams, to spot tenants at risk of suicide.
- 3.11 The Committee might want to hold an in-depth review into how housing providers and mental health organisation are working together in Lewisham. The review could look at what we know about the mental health needs of social housing tenants in Lewisham, and what could be done to help frontline housing workers identify issues and link up with local support.
- 3.12 Given that they are more likely to be experiencing mental health problems, the review could also cover residents who are homeless or in temporary accommodation.

Older people's housing needs in Lewisham

- 3.13 Claims that older people are under-occupying large homes that could house younger families have led some to call for initiatives to encourage older people to downsize. The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, for example, claimed that more than 2.5m homes could be released if older owners were given better incentives and information on downsizing.
- 3.14 Research has found that a third of older people would consider downsizing, but that fewer than a quarter make the move. And with just 2% of the country's housing stock estimated to be designed with pensioners in mind, it is often a lack of the right sort of housing in terms of size and accessibility that holds people back. Research

has also found that people interested in downsizing value being close to family and friends, having easy access to healthcare and being near shops.

- 3.15 Some commentators have said that local authorities should provide housing and financial support to people as they move into old age. The Institute of Chartered Surveyors, for example, has suggested that councils should arrange accompanied visits to suitable properties. While the All Party Parliamentary Group on Housing and Care for Older People suggested greater financial incentives in the form of tax breaks and equity loans.
- 3.16 The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors also said that communication about alternatives to staying in the family home was poor, meaning that options weren't being fully exploited.
- 3.17 The Committee might want to hold an in-depth review into how Lewisham helps older people find and move into suitable housing. The review could look at the attitudes to downsizing among older people in the Lewisham, as well as what has and hasn't worked well with current and past initiatives – locally and nationally.