

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 7 March 2017, 7.30pm

Present: Councillors Carl Handley (Chair), Peter Bernards (Vice Chair), John Coughlin, Maja Hilton, Simon Hooks, Liz Johnston-Franklin, Olurotimi Ogunbadewa, John Paschoud and Jonathan Slater.

Also present: Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services), Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing), Madeleine Jeffery (Private Sector Housing Agency Manager), Jeff Endean (Housing Strategy and Programmes Manager), John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager).

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2017

Resolved: the Committee agreed the minutes of the last meeting as a true record.

2. Declarations of interest

The following non-prejudicial interests were declared:

- Councillor Slater is a member of the board of Phoenix Community Housing.

3. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet

The Committee noted the Mayor & Cabinet response to referral on housing zones.

4. Housing and mental health – draft final report

John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- The Scrutiny Manager explained that the draft report is based on the findings from the three evidence sessions and the written evidence submitted. The report is divided into sections based on themes arising from these findings. The Chair has also circulated draft recommendations for members to consider.

The Committee discussed the report and draft recommendations. The following was agreed:

- The Committee agreed to incorporate draft recommendation 6 into draft recommendations 1 to 4.
- The Committee agreed to amend draft recommendation 8 to say that housing providers should only carry out vulnerability assessments where it appears necessary.
- The Committee agreed to amend draft recommendation 17 to say joint training should be carried out where it would improve the support provided to tenants.

- The Committee agreed to include an additional recommendation to independently review progress six months after the report and recommendations are considered by the Mayor & Cabinet.

Resolved: the Committee agreed the draft report considered as the final report of its review and agreed the recommendations as tabled by the Chair, subject to the amendments noted in the minutes. The Committee also agreed that the report and recommendations be presented to M&C for response.

The full list of agreed recommendations is set out below:

Helping housing providers and local partners to work together

1. Housing providers and local partners, including the Council, SLAM, Mind, and other local organisations that regularly deal with mental health issues, should work together to develop an agreement/protocol on dealing with cases of low-level mental health.
2. The agreement should:
 - Set out that all housing providers should provide proactive and appropriate tenancy support services for people with mental health needs
 - Set out how partners should work together, and what they can expect from each other, in cases of low-level mental health
 - Provide a directory of relevant local advice, support and services
 - Set out pragmatic guidance on information sharing and data protection
3. The agreement should be supported by regular panel/workshop meetings where housing providers and local partners can:
 - Share their knowledge, experience and best practice
 - Build an evidence base on the prevalence of mental health issues, including low-level mental health
 - Develop a common approach to dealing with low-level mental health issues
4. The resources and structures in place for the Lewisham hoarding protocol may provide a useful model for the setting up and running of the agreement and accompanying panel/workshop meetings.

Including private landlords

5. The agreement and directory of support services should be shared with private landlords as tool that they can also use to support their tenants.

Providing tenancy support services

6. All housing providers should provide proactive and appropriate tenancy support services for people with mental health needs who may be struggling.
7. Housing providers should make help with budgeting and managing debt a key part of their tenancy support services.

Helping housing providers to identify needs

8. Where staff have a concern about a tenant's vulnerability, housing providers should carry out a vulnerability assessment early on in each tenancy to get a better understanding of the tenant's physical and mental health, including whether they have any support or social workers.

9. Where a vulnerability assessment identifies needs, housing providers should follow this up with an appropriate number of home visits during the first year to make sure that tenants are accessing the support services they need.
10. Housing providers should reassure tenants that sharing information about their mental health will not affect their tenancy.
11. Housing providers should consider setting up a confidential phonenumber that enables staff and residents to share information anonymously if they're concerned about a person's wellbeing.
12. Some housing providers are trialling ways of categorising tenants according to their needs in order to provide more targeted interventions. Housing providers should closely monitor the results of these trials and share their experiences with each other.
13. Some housing providers are looking into ways of helping tenants by "positively influencing" their behaviour. Housing providers should share their experiences from this and how it may be relevant to cases of low-level mental ill health.

Training for housing staff

14. All housing providers should provide frontline staff with training on having "challenging conversations", to help them overcome difficulties encouraging people with low-level mental health issues to engage with support.
15. Housing providers should make sure that they've identified and provided mental health training, such as mental health first aid, to all staff likely to come into contact with tenants.
16. Mental health training for housing officers should be tailored to reflect their day-to-day experiences and be based on the situations that they are most likely to come across.
17. Housing providers and local partners should also hold joint training sessions between their respective staff on subjects and issues where it would improve the support provided to tenants to share their professional expertise.

Gathering more reliable data

18. Given the lack of reliable information on the rates of mental ill health, housing providers should look into best practice for making reliable estimates of this. As a start, this could include talking to L&Q about how they made their estimations.

Progress review

19. Six months after these recommendations are considered by the Mayor, housing providers, local partners and the council should arrange for an independent external review of the progress being made. This should be carried out by an organisation with relevant knowledge and experience, such as Shelter.

5. Handyperson service update

Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- The proposal for the Council to end the handypersons service was made as part of the housing service's £1.5m contribution to the Council's overall savings target. Ending the service would save £151,000.

- Following the proposal, HSC made a referral to M&C recommending, if the service was to be ended, that the Council speak to Lewisham Homes about providing a handyperson service at a reasonable price.
- The Council spoke to Lewisham Homes to see if there's a way that they can charge to cover the costs of running a handyperson service, in order to avoid drawing on the HRA.
- Lewisham Homes have since said that they're willing to advertise a handyperson service on their website – charging a total hourly rate of £41.34.

Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing) answered questions from the Committee. The following key points were noted:

- The proposed hourly rate should start from when handyperson starts the job on site – not from when they leave their office.
- Officers will get back to the Committee to confirm whether or not the proposed hourly rate includes VAT.
- Officers will also look into rounding the price to the nearest pound to make it simpler for potential customers.
- Lewisham Homes will not be making a profit, just covering their costs
- There shouldn't be any TUPE implications as it will not be the same service as before – the demand and level of services of the proposed service is unknown.

The Committee made a number of comments. The following was noted:

- The Council would need to be transparent about how it came to the price of £41.34 so that people appreciate the real costs of providing the service.

Resolved: the Committee noted the report.

6. Private rented sector offer policy

Madeleine Jeffery (Private Sector Housing Agency Manager) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- Mayor and Cabinet agreed to the principle of using private rented sector (PRS) offers to discharge the housing duty in March 2015. In October 2016 M&C agreed that officers should consult. This is an update on the results of the consultation.
- The rationale for the policy is to: help manage the increasing number of households in temporary accommodation; help households into more suitable, longer-term accommodation more quickly; and better prioritise the reducing number of social lets available.
- A PRS offer may be in or out of the borough provided it is affordable, in adequate condition and meets the requirements of the location policy. There will be exemptions from PRS offers where significant adaptations or substantial tenancy

support would be required. These households will instead be prioritised for social housing.

- Consultation was carried out from 20 January to 3 March 2017. As of 1 March there were 223 responses, 89% from households currently in temporary accommodation.
- In response to the question “do you agree that the Council should use the private rented sector to end (or ‘discharge’) its main housing duty to homeless households?” 46% disagreed and 36% agreed.
- 70% of respondents agreed that those requiring significant adaptations to their property should be exempt from the policy where possible. 65% of respondents agreed that those unable to sustain a PRS tenancy without substantial support should be exempt where possible.
- In response to the question “do you think the PRSO policy will have a positive, a negative or no impact on you? 40% said a negative impact and 12% said a positive impact.

Madeleine Jeffery (Private Sector Housing Agency Manager) answered questions from the Committee. The following key points were noted:

- When making PRS offers out of the borough, the Council will only be working with agencies it has an established relationship with and other reputable agencies. The main cost of the policy will be making incentive payments to landlords to extend tenancies from one to two years.
- There is currently no agreement on rates paid with local authorities outside of London, but they aim not to exceed Local Housing Allowance rates where possible. The Council also inform other local authorities if they are planning on placing someone in their borough.
- Officers agreed to transfer more detail from the policy’s supporting documents into the actual policy document itself.

Resolved: the Committee noted the report.

7. Discretionary licensing scheme

Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- The additional licensing scheme went live on 11 February 2017. As of 22 February, 29 landlords have completed the additional licence application.
- The Council is working with London Councils to share data across London and identify potential “Houses in Multiple Occupation” (HMOs). Officers have knocked on over 700 doors within identified hotspots to find potential HMOs.

- A recent raid found a HMO with 5 bedrooms, 17 occupants and a shed with beds and electricity. Two more raids are planned.

Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing) answered questions from the Committee. The following key points were noted:

- The rogue landlord team is part of the wider private sector housing agency team.
- The new government definition of HMO will cover small, two-storey HMOs.

Resolved: the Committee noted the report.

8. Annual lettings plan

Madeleine Jeffery (Private Sector Housing Agency Manager) introduced the report. The following key points were noted

- The report sets out how council intends to allocate the lettings that become available in 2017/18 between the different priority groups.
- There are currently around 9,500 household on the housing register. 1,142 properties projected to become available in 17/18. The projected total for 16/17 is 1,054.
- The average waiting time on the housing register for successful applicants has increased from 99.2 weeks in 15/16 to 104.3 weeks in 16/17. The average number of bids for property per household in 2016/17 was 13.
- Between April 2016 and December 2016, 797 properties were advertised to let, almost 100 fewer than the same period in 2015.

Resolved: the Committee noted the report.

9. Key housing issues

Jeff Endean (Housing Strategy and Programmes Manager) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- With 18-21-year-olds no longer eligible for housing benefit from April this year, the Council will be monitoring the impact. The policy applies to new applicants only, so it will take time to understand the effect.
- When asked about extending the use of temporary housing like that at PLACE/Ladywell, officers confirmed that right to buy does not apply and that they come with two year tenancies because this is the average time it takes to find a permanent placement.

Resolved: the Committee noted the report.

Select Committee work programme

John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the report. The following was noted:

- The Scrutiny Manager introduced a draft work programme for the 2017/18 municipal year and asked the Committee to consider and suggest the priority issues it would recommend to the Committee next year.

The Committee made a number of comments. The following was suggested:

- The Committee should consider a follow-up mental health and housing review focused on the private rented sector – given that increasing numbers of families are living in the PRS.
- The Committee should look closely at how the Council can make more use of temporary housing solutions like that at PLACE/Ladywell.
- The Committee should also receive an update on the Lewisham Poverty Commission.

Resolved: the Committee noted the completed work programme for 2016/17 and the draft work programme for 2017/18, and considered priority areas for scrutiny next year.

10. Referrals

There were no referrals at this meeting

The meeting ended at 21.55pm

Chair:

Date:
