

# MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

**Wednesday 6 September 2017, 7.30pm**

Present: Councillors Carl Handley (Chair), Peter Bernards (Vice Chair), Olurotimi Ogunbadewa, Jonathan Slater, Bill Brown and Sophie McGeevor.

Apologies: Councillors Britton and Coughlin.

Also present: Jeff Endean (Housing Strategy and Programmes Manager), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services), Rachel Dunn (Housing Policy and Partnerships Manager), Tom Chance (National Community Land Trust Network), Tony Rich (RUSS), Calum Green (London Community Land Trust), Steve Bonvini (RB3), Louise Wallace (Pinnacle), Hugo Marrias (Rydon), Andrew Potter (Chief Executive, Lewisham Homes), and John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager).

## **1. Minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2017**

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

## **2. Declarations of interest**

The following non-prejudicial interest was declared:

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

## **3. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet**

The committee received the Mayor and Cabinet response to the committee's housing and mental health review. The following was noted:

- 3.1 The committee thanked the Mayor for the positive response.
- 3.2 The committee stressed the importance of devising a new protocol, noting that without something new like this the situation will not improve.
- 3.3 The committee also stressed the importance of arranging for an independent organisation, such as Shelter, to carry out a review after six months.

*Resolved: the committee noted the response from Mayor and Cabinet.*

## **4. Models of delivering new housing – evidence session**

Jeff Endean (Housing Strategy and Programmes Manager) briefly outlined the council's position on community-led housing. The following key points were noted:

- 4.1 The Lewisham Housing Strategy supports community-led housing development and it has been included in the strategy for a number of years.
- 4.2 There are two active developments in the borough, one in Ladywell with RUSS and one in Sydenham with the London CLT.

4.3 As far as officers are aware, Lewisham is the only borough in the country with two active CLTs. The council will look at the success of these and see where it goes.

**Tom Chance (National CLT network)** provided evidence to the committee. The following key points were noted:

4.4 The National Community Land Trust Network (NCLT) is a network of 225 Community Land Trusts (CLTs) across England and Wales.

4.5 The organisation has been around for 7 years and in that time the community land trust movement has built 800 homes around England and Wales, with around 4000 more in the pipeline.

4.6 Community-led housing (such as CLTs) is where the community initiates and controls the housing-delivery process, as opposed to being consultees, and are ultimately the owners or stewards of those homes in the long term.

4.7 The NCLT noted that there are already a number of community-led housing approaches active in Lewisham.

4.8 Last year the NCLT was involved in a review of new models of housing supply by the All Party Parliamentary Group on housing and planning.

4.9 The review found that there are benefits to the community-led housing approach in terms of delivering genuinely affordable housing, but also in terms of community engagement and support.

4.10 The review also found that the community-led approach tends to lead to higher quality housing.

4.11 The main barrier for community-led housing groups is accessing land, particularly in London and cities, where it's a very competitive land market.

4.12 There has been very fast growth of CLTs in rural areas, where Rural Exception Sites provide groups access to land.

4.12 Initiatives like Lewisham's programme of looking at infill sites and the GLA and TFL small sites programme are a good opportunity for public authorities to think about how to make more sites available for community-led approaches.

4.12 Community-led housing groups also face difficulties accessing start-up advice and support.

4.13 In some parts of the country there are well-established organisations that can support groups from having the initial idea through to getting on site.

4.14 The NCLT is working with the GLA to set up a community-led housing hub for London, which would provide support for community-led housing groups.

4.15 It is also important that community groups do not have to go through costly competitive procurement processes. Groups can often be put off schemes if they have to through a procurement process.

- 4.16 Councils could help improve the community-led process by aligning their relevant departments in a way that helps the process of providing land to community-led groups work as smoothly as possible.
- 4.17 The NCLT said that if the council is able to dispose of land at a price that's going to enable genuinely affordable development, then community-led housing is able to deliver high-quality, affordable housing, with high levels of community support, while building assets and skills in the local community.

**Tony Rich (RUSS)** provided evidence to the committee. The following key points were noted:

- 4.18 RUSS (Rural Urban Synthesis Society) is a CLT based in Lewisham. Established in 2009, it has 700 members, who pay £1 each for life membership.
- 4.19 Its main focus is the provision of affordable homes in perpetuity for Lewisham residents. It's also interested in reducing environmental impact.
- 4.20 RUSS's first development, in Church Grove, Ladywell, will provide 33 homes of a range of tenures, including affordable sale, affordable rent, and social homes.
- 4.21 The sale price will be linked to average earnings in the area. RUSS will retain a 20% stake in each property to ensure that they are affordable in perpetuity.
- 4.22 There is a mixture of people moving into RUSS's Church Grove development, including older people downsizing. This is important because CLTs also need people who have money to invest in projects like this.
- 4.23 RUSS noted that their project has been quite complicated – it's self-build, it's cohousing, and it is being run as a co-design process with residents.
- 4.24 One of the main benefits of self-build is the opportunity to provide training. RUSS is intending to offer accredited training to develop local skills.
- 4.25 The other incentive with self-build is that people can get a significant discount if they do the full amount of custom building.
- 4.26 RUSS acknowledged that there are other models, including those highlighted in the background paper, such as partnering, for example. RUSS noted that in Bristol there is a CLT which partners with a housing association.
- 4.27 RUSS would be in favour of trying a range of different approaches, including partnering with private developers or housing associations.
- 4.28 RUSS accepts that community groups will often have to settle for more difficult sites, as they are unable to compete for land with the big developers.
- 4.29 In terms of what makes a CLT successful, RUSS said that building a broad membership in an affordable way has been important to them.
- 4.30 RUSS also stressed the importance of talking to the local community about the development.

- 4.31 RUSS said that access to affordable land is also a barrier and that a pipeline of low cost land (including difficult sites) would help significantly.
- 4.32 RUSS have also struggled without paid staff. They said, as a group of volunteers, funding the employ someone to help run the organisation would make a significant difference.
- 4.33 RUSS has had a positive experience working with Lewisham, both officers and members. They are grateful for the support they have received and are keen to get more houses on the ground.

**Callum Green (London CLT)** provided evidence to the committee. The following key points were noted:

- 4.34 The London CLT helps communities provide permanently affordable homes in their local neighbourhoods.
- 4.35 In Lewisham they're partnering with Lewisham Citizens on a community land trust site in Brasted Close in Sydenham.
- 4.36 The project is on an infill garage site and is hoping to provide 10-12 homes, which will be genuinely affordable (linked to local median incomes).
- 4.37 A one-bed property will be around £166-180K, a two-bed will be about £215-231K, and a three-bed around £264-282K – roughly half the market price.
- 4.38 The homes will be permanently affordable – when residents come to sell they will have to sell it on according to local median incomes again.
- 4.39 This continues for as long as the lease exists, often 125 to 250 years.
- 4.40 The Brasted Close site should go to planning at the beginning of 2018.
- 4.41 The way homes will be allocated has not yet been decided.
- 4.42 The London CLT's first site, in Mile End East London development, St Clements, is a private development, built by Linden Homes, in partnership with the Greater London Authority (GLA) and Peabody.
- 4.43 It will provide 252 new homes, 35% of which will be genuinely affordable, including 58 for 'social rent' and 23 community land trust homes. There will be CLT homes in all the blocks.
- 4.44 The benefit of being involved in a private development is that it's less risky. You don't need to borrow money to finance the procurement risk, for example. The downside is that you don't get the self-build opportunities.
- 4.45 In terms of increasing scale for CLTs, London CLT suggested setting a long-term target for the number of community-led homes.
- 4.46 Being able to show that there's a programme in place over a number of years would make securing investment much easier for community groups.

- 4.47 The London CLT expressed support for the idea of giving community-led housing groups first refusal on certain pockets of land.
- 4.48 Further sites for CLT homes in London have been identified in Redbridge, Croydon, Lambeth, Southwark.
- 4.49 The London CLT said that working with Lewisham has been a genuine pleasure.

**The committee asked the witnesses a number of questions. The following key points were noted:**

- 4.50 NCLT pointed out that the approaches RUSS and London CLT have taken are not the only approaches you can take to CLTs.
- 4.51 They noted the programme in Wales, involving the Welsh Assembly Government, in which schemes that were going to be done by housing associations or councils are being turned into community-led schemes.
- 4.52 They said that community-led projects do not always have to settle for the awkward sites.
- 4.53 They noted that a number of local authorities in the UK with bigger development sites are now aiming to have a percentage of those delivered by a community-led organisation. This is how the London CLT developed their homes in their scheme in Mile End.
- 4.54 NCLT said that Lewisham could aim to get community-led organisations involved in some of the big regeneration projects in the borough.
- 4.55 With councils introducing self-build and custom-build registers, and allocating a percentage of homes in local plans to these approaches, the NCLT suggested that the same could be done with community-build approaches.
- 4.56 Members of the NCLT network have a range of allocation policies.
- 4.57 Those that work with a housing association or the council, for example, will often take a proportion from the council list. Those in rural towns and villages will often require people to demonstrate a strong connection to that area.
- 4.58 Applications for the London CLT's Mile End development were scored according to a criteria agreed with the local authority. The London CLT would support a similar policy in Lewisham.
- 4.59 RUSS had a ballot to allocate their homes. Applicants also had to demonstrate a link with Lewisham for two out of the last five years and not be able to afford market prices.
- 4.60 Officers noted that it's important to recognise that the council does not have a lot of land anymore. While there are some pockets of land that may be suitable for community-led housing like CLTs, the council has to carefully consider the consequences of whatever it does with its land.

- 4.61 Officers noted that the council would need to think very carefully about the possibility of a first-refusal policy on certain pockets of land for CLTs. With a blanket policy like this, the danger is that the council becomes inflexible in what it can do with its land.
- 4.62 Officers noted that it's important to consider the council's priorities when drawing up an allocations process. The council has more than 9000 people on the housing list and any time we consider developments in the borough, we have to consider social housing.
- 4.63 Officers noted that there is commercial property available, which CLTs could look into as well.

**The Committee made a number of comments. The following were noted:**

- 4.64 The committee discussed the possibility of giving community-led housing groups first refusal on small pockets of land – pockets of land that are exempt from the requirement to provide affordable housing (sites of 10 homes or fewer).
- 4.65 The committee recognised the benefits of cohousing, particularly for older people, in terms of health and social life. The committee queried how the council could reach out to older people and make it easier for them.
- 4.66 The committee also queried how to get a broader range of people into cohousing given it has so many benefits.
- 4.67 The committee discussed using wards' Neighbourhood Plans as a way for community groups to identify possible sites for CLTs – as it is often those in the local community that know the area best.
- 4.68 The committee queried with officers whether there is a publically available and accessible register of pockets of land in the borough.
- 4.69 The committee recognised the importance of the council having a streamlined process to make community projects like CLTs as straightforward as possible.

*Resolved: the Committee noted the evidence provided by the witnesses.*

## **5. Lewisham Homes annual report**

**Andrew Potter (Chief Executive, Lewisham Homes)** introduced the annual report. The following was noted:

- 5.1 Over the last year Lewisham Homes has brought more homes up to the decent homes standard and all homes will be up to standard this year.
- 5.2 Resident satisfaction has increased and complaints have decreased. More is being invested in grounds maintenance work.
- 5.3 More services are being made available to residents online.

- 5.4 100 homes have been acquired for temporary housing and there is going to be further investment in sheltered housing.
- 5.5 Lewisham Homes achieved leaseholder satisfaction rates of around 60% (600 people surveyed).
- 5.6 Lewisham Homes also achieved high levels of staff satisfaction and attained the *Investors In People* Gold accreditation.
- 5.7 Lewisham Homes has a leaseholder forum and two leaseholder board members, but also goes out door knocking to find out more about the issues people are facing.
- 5.8 While Lewisham Homes is making an increasing number of services available online, it is not removing other ways of accessing them – there will still be a reception and a phone service.
- 5.9 Lewisham Homes also runs drop-in sessions on digital skills for residents.
- 5.10 In terms of leaseholder satisfaction, the committee noted that Phoenix Housing had improved satisfaction rates through increased engagement.
- 5.11 The committee queried what Lewisham Homes is doing to help those residents who are unable to access services online.

*Resolved: the committee noted the report.*

## **6. Brockley PFI annual report**

Steve Bonvini (Operations Director, RB3) introduced the annual report. The following was noted:

- 6.1 This year customer satisfaction increased to 95%. There was, however, a 1% increase in complaints.
- 6.2 Planned works will continue each year until the end of the PFI contract.
- 6.3 RB3 confirmed that residents had been asked to remove flower pots from the balconies. RB3 acted on the advice of independent fire assessors, who pointed out that they could be a trip hazard in a fire.
- 6.4 RB3 agreed to provide the committee with the number of people who completed the customer satisfaction survey.
- 6.5 RB3 agreed to provide the committee with the details of local residents' associations.
- 6.6 RB3 agreed to provide the committee with a programme of planned works to help councillors if residents contact them.

6.7 The committee queried how RB3 define a complaint.

*Resolved: the committee noted the report.*

## **7. Key housing issues**

7.1 The council continues to work closely on fire safety with Lewisham Homes and other housing partners in the borough.

7.2 By May 2018, around 100 new council homes will have been built since 2014. By 2020, the council will have built around 500 new council homes.

7.3 Officers noted that it has taken longer than expected to build the target of 500 new council homes, but said that they are now set up to deliver more homes in the next administration.

*Resolved: the committee noted the report.*

## **8. Select Committee work programme**

*Resolved: the Committee noted the work programme.*

## **9. Referrals**

7.1 There were no referrals at this meeting

The meeting ended at 21.55pm

Chair:

-----

Date:

-----