

# MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 14 March 2018, 7.30pm

Present: Councillors Carl Handley (Chair), Olurotimi Ogunbadewa, Sophie McGeevor, Pat Raven, Jonathan Slater, Paul Bell, Amada De Ryk and Alan Hall.

Apologies: Councillors Peter Bernards (Vice Chair), David Britton, Bill Brown, John Coughlin.

Also present: Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing), Jeff Endean (Housing Strategy and Programmes Manager), Rachel Dunn (Housing Policy and Partnerships Manager), Lee Georgiou (Housing Needs and Refugee Services Manager), Nina Morris (Lettings and Support Services Manager), Gavin Plaskitt (Senior Programme Manager), and John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager).

## 1. Minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2017

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

## 2. Declarations of interest

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

Councillor Hall is a member of the board of Phoenix Community Housing

## 3. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet

There were no Mayor and Cabinet responses.

## 4. Housing strategy review

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

- 4.1 Officers set out some of the key areas of focus for housing strategy in the near future. This included:
  - The coming into force of the *Homelessness Reduction Act* in April 2018. This introduces significant changes to the council's responsibilities towards those threatened with homelessness
  - The continuation of the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer project. This project has begun compiling datasets from across the council to start the process of identifying households at risk of homelessness. The project is receiving £985,000 of funding over two years.
  - The new Private Sector Housing Agency's work to improve the standards of the private rented sector in Lewisham. This includes the new rogue landlords team and the introduction of landlord licensing schemes.
  - The draft new London Plan target for Lewisham of 21,170 homes over ten years. This is almost double the previous target.

- The funding ambiguity around supported housing, particularly short-term supporting housing.
- 4.2 Officers will soon be going out to consultation on the housing strategy for Lewisham and if there is a view that some of the priorities need to change then this will be taken on board.
  - 4.3 There are currently around 2,000 households in temporary accommodation, mostly families. This amounts to around 6,000 individuals.
  - 4.4 93% of homeless households are placed within 90 minutes of the borough. 70% of homeless families are placed within an hour of the borough.
  - 4.5 The No First Night Out (NFNO) initiative is a partnership between the boroughs of Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich and Lewisham to provide shared accommodation for single people at imminent risk of rough sleeping. It is due to start in April 2018. Officers will monitor the scheme to see if more accommodation is needed.
  - 4.6 The committee noted that thought needs to be given to how the voice of tenants in the social and private sector is represented and listened to, particularly with a number of social landlords merging to become significantly larger organisations. The committee noted that private and social tenants' forums could help.

*Resolved: the committee noted the report.*

## **5. Housing zones update**

Gavin Plaskitt (Senior Programme Manager) introduced the update. The following key points were noted:

- 5.1 There were two Greater London Authority (GLA) housing zones in Lewisham: New Bermondsey and Catford Town Centre.
- 5.2 Following a review of the delivery of all housing zones by the GLA, funding for both schemes is no longer available. The GLA set a revised deadline of 31 January for all due diligence to be completed and schemes to be in contract, but neither of the housing zones in Lewisham were able to meet this deadline.
- 5.3 The GLA continues, however, to support the ambitions for the development of Catford town centre and has awarded £10m to relocate the south circular. The GLA continues to see Catford as a key area for new affordable housing.
- 5.4 Lewisham Council itself is about to start the process to produce a new masterplan for Catford town centre.
- 5.5 The council will try to secure further support from the GLA, but this will be subject to the funds available at the time.
- 5.6 The committee noted that if the council enters into partnerships on any future development that they should refer developers to the GLA's target of 35% affordable housing.

*Resolved: the committee noted the report.*

## **6. Lewisham central opportunity site**

Gavin Plaskitt (Senior Programme Manager) introduced the report. The following points were noted:

- 6.1 The site of the old Ladywell Leisure Centre on Lewisham High Street and Longbridge way (Lewisham Opportunity Site) is a well-connected site which could make a significant contribution to the development of new homes and amenities in the borough.
- 6.2 Work to bring forward proposals for the extension of the Bakerloo Line has highlighted a likely need to relocate (either temporarily or permanently) some or all of the functions from the Wearside Depot. The Lewisham Opportunity Site may be part of the solution for the temporary relocation.
- 6.3 The review of the options for construction and infrastructure is due to be completed by June 2018.
- 6.4 Officers noted that there is scope to consider expanding the interim temporary accommodation (Ladywell/PLACE) currently in place at the Lewisham opportunity site.
- 6.5 The committee noted that the possibility of using the Lewisham Opportunity Site for some of the Wearside Depot functions during any Bakerloo Line construction work would mean that there would likely be no development of housing until 2028/29 at least. The committee noted that this might be too much to ask for local people.

*Resolved: the committee noted the report.*

## **7. Housing options process**

Lee Georgiou (Housing Needs and Refugee Services Manager) introduced the report. The following points were noted:

- 7.1 Officers explained that this item was in response to the Public Accounts Select Committee expressing concerns about the homesearch process and website.
- 7.2 Officers believe that a large number of the complaints about the homesearch process and website are a result of the decreasing number of available lets and the increasing number of households in temporary accommodation, which is affecting people's ability to successfully bid for a property.
- 7.3 The average number of bids per property is as high as 241 bids for each 3 bed that comes available
- 7.4 There are currently around 10,000 households on the housing register which are able to bid. All of which have been assessed to have a housing need. Urgent applications are processed quicker.
- 7.5 Homesearch is the way that all social housing in Lewisham is allocated. It is a partnership between the council and key housing providers in the borough, including Lewisham Homes.

- 7.6 Available properties are advertised weekly via Homesearch. Registered applicants can make one bid per week for a property they are eligible for.
- 7.7 The successful bidder will usually be the person who has been in the highest band for the longest period of time. However, this can vary depending on the 'preference' awarded to the advert to support the Annual Lettings Plan.
- 7.8 The committee queried how the homesearch process was explained to people and whether people genuinely understand how the scheme works.
- 7.9 Officers acknowledged that there are improvements that could be made to the homesearch service and website to make it easier to use.
- 7.10 Officers are looking into the possibility of procuring an integrated system as part of the council's homelessness trailblazer work. They are currently developing a specification. This will not be completed until the summer.

*Resolved: the committee noted the report.*

## **8. Out of hours repairs services**

Rachel Dunn (Housing Policy and Partnerships Manager) introduced the report. The following points were noted:

- 8.1 Officers explained that this item was in response to a service failure by the out-of-hours repairs service for Regenter B3 in Brockley, which is provided by Pinnacle.
- 8.2 Officers explained that the service received a far greater amount of calls than it was possible to manage due to the very cold weather and snow over the weekend in question.
- 8.3 The service usually receives around 1,600 calls over a weekend, but over this particular weekend it received more than 5,000 calls.
- 8.4 Financial reductions will still be applied to the contractor.
- 8.5 Officers are confident that there is not a wider issue with the service. They are, however, continuing to investigate.
- 8.6 The committee suggested that officers should write back to the residents who expressed concerns and report back to tenant and leaseholder groups.

*Resolved: the committee noted the report.*

## **9. Annual lettings plan**

Lee Georgiou (Housing Needs and Refugee Services Manager) introduced the report. The following points were noted:

- 9.1 The annual letting plan sets out how council intends to allocate the lettings that become available in 2018/19.
- 9.2 Officers have projected that 1,208 properties will become available for let in 2018/19.

- 9.3 The five identified priority areas of the plan are: homeless households in temporary accommodation; decants; under occupation; severe overcrowding; and move on from supported housing.

*Resolved: the committee noted the report.*

## **10. Select Committee work programme**

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

- 10.1 A number of potential issues for future scrutiny were discussed. This included:
- 10.2 How the voice of tenants is represented in the social and private rented sectors. The committee noted that this could be particularly relevant following the outcome of the Grenfell inquiry.
- 10.3 Ongoing updates on the council's new homes programme, including regular updates on the numbers being built and the consultation and engagement with residents.
- 10.4 The possibility of further licensing schemes for private landlords in the borough and updates on any business case the council puts forward for such schemes.

*Resolved: the committee noted the completed work programme.*

## **11. Referrals**

There were no referrals to Mayor & Cabinet.

The meeting ended at 21.37pm

Chair: -----

Date:

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