

# MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 6 March 2019, 7.30pm

Present: Councillors Susan Wise (Chair), Tom Copley, Aisling Gallagher, Leo Gibbons, Silvana Kelleher, Olurotimi Ogunbadewa and Stephen Penfold.

Apologies: Councillor Peter Bernards (Vice Chair)

Also Present: Nicholas Stabeler (Private Sector Housing Agency Manager), Karen Kemsley (Data Analyst, Strategic Housing), Nina Morris (Allocations & Lettings Manager), Rachel Dunn (Housing Policy and Partnerships Manager), Madeleine Jeffery (Assistant Director of Housing), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services), and John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager).

## 1. Minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2019

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

## 2. Declarations of interest

The following non-prejudicial interests were declared:

- Cllr Silvana Kelleher is a Lewisham Homes tenant.
- Cllr Aisling Gallagher is a Lewisham Homes tenant.

## 3. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet

There were no responses.

## 4. Private rented sector licensing

Nicholas Stabeler (Private Sector Housing Agency Manager) introduced the report.

The following key points were noted:

- 4.1 Officers delivered a presentation on proposals for a borough-wide selective licensing scheme. The proposals will go to Mayor & Cabinet in April 2019 for authorisation to go to consultation between May and August 2019.
- 4.2 If the scheme is approved, there will be a £400k upfront budget commitment. This would be fully recovered from the scheme's licensing fee.
- 4.3 No borough-wide licencing schemes have been implemented following the requirement to get approval from the Secretary of State. Some schemes have been renewed to cover selected areas.
- 4.4 Mayor and Cabinet will also be asked to consider the case for implementing an *additional* licensing scheme to cover all HMO (houses of multiple occupation) properties across the borough. An *additional* licensing scheme would not require Secretary of State approval.
- 4.5 An additional licensing scheme would allow the council to license HMOs that aren't covered by the mandatory licensing scheme, which only applies to PRS properties with five people over two households sharing facilities. This additional scheme would allow the council to license any PRS property with three people over two households sharing facilities, whether or not it is above

commercial premises. The administrative cost of licensing HMOs is significantly greater than other PRS properties because of the number of inspections and potential risks.

- 4.6 The intention of a borough-wide licensing scheme is: to improve standards in the private rented sector (PRS); tackle rogue landlords; improve security, stability and decency for residents in the PRS; help tenants feel safe in their homes through advice, support and effective enforcement; support local landlords during and after the 5 year scheme. The intention is to inspect 100% of all licenced properties over the term of the scheme.
- 4.7 Officers have carried out extensive data analysis of the private rented sector and the relationship with issues such as deprivation, crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB).
- 4.8 Analysis estimates that there are around 31,000 PRS properties in the borough – an increase of around 4,000 since the 2011 census. All wards (except Downham, 16%) have 19% or more PRS housing. 19% is the national average.
- 4.9 All wards in Lewisham are within the most deprived 40% of the country.
- 4.10 Lewisham Central, New Cross, Rushey Green, Bellingham, and Brockley, have shown persistently high levels of ASB from 2016 to 2018.
- 4.11 There is a very strong relationship between the amount of PRS in a ward and the amount of ASB. 15% of PRS properties have had an ASB incident recorded within 10 metres. 28% of PR properties have had an ASB incident recorded within 25 m. Both figures are higher than other tenures.
- 4.12 Lewisham Central, Rushey Green, New Cross, Brockley, Blackheath, and Evelyn wards have crime rates higher than the national average. The wards with the highest crime rates also have the highest number of PRS properties.
- 4.13 Proposed licensing fees for the borough-wide selective licencing scheme would be based on council tax banding, ranging from £575 for a Band A property to £750 for a Band H property. There would be an early-bird discount rate to encourage landlords to sign up early.
- 4.14 If approved, a selective licencing scheme can only be applied for a maximum of five years. The scheme will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that it is achieving its intended aims.
- 4.15 The committee noted the link between PRS properties, ASB and crime and asked if this had been looked into.
- 4.16 One theory, noted by officers, is that the PRS properties have a higher turnover which leads to more ASB environmental incidents such as fly tipping (mattresses etc.) as people move in and out of properties.
- 4.17 The committee noted the importance of getting a fair balance between tenants and landlord input into the consultation on the proposed scheme.

***Resolved:*** *the committee noted the report and agreed to refer its views to Mayor & Cabinet in the following terms:*

*Having considered a comprehensive officer report and presentation on the development of an evidence base to support an application for a borough-wide selective licensing scheme, the Housing Select Committee expresses its strong*

*support for the submission to the Secretary of State for approval to implement such a scheme. The committee notes the increasing number of families and individuals relying on the private rented sector to provide a home, and the evidence showing the links between the private rented sector and crime and anti-social behaviour, and expresses its support for the scheme's aims of tackling rogue landlords, improving standards in the sector, and improving security, stability and decency for residents in private rented accommodation. The committee also notes and praises officers for the extensive data analysis carried out to develop an informed evidence base to support the application to the Secretary of State.*

## **5. Annual Lettings Plan**

Nina Morris (Allocations & Lettings Manager) introduced the item. The following key points were noted:

- 5.1 The annual lettings plan report sets out how the council intends to allocate the lettings that become available in 2019/20 between the different priority groups. It also presents the lettings outcomes for the previous two years.
- 5.2 There are around 9,600 households on the housing register – up 9% from March 2018.
- 5.3 There are around 2,100 households in temporary accommodation - up 25% since March 2018. This significant increase is largely due to long-term voids awaiting allocation, an acute decant pressure at one of the regeneration schemes and the continued volume of homeless acceptances.
- 5.4 It was noted that temporary accommodation, particularly nightly-paid and bed & breakfast accommodation is among the worst form of housing.
- 5.5 A key priority area of the annual lettings plan is to support homeless households to secure accommodation so that they can get on with rebuilding their lives.
- 5.6 The annual lettings plan projects that 950 properties will become available for letting in 2019/20 – down 8.5% on last year. The projected outturn for 2018/19 is now 1,039 – 4% down on the 2017/18. These figures represent a continuation of a downward trend since 2010.
- 5.7 The average time on the housing register for successful applicants has continued to increase. In 2017/18 it was 100 weeks. In 2018/19 it was 112 weeks.
- 5.8 There are around 4,500 households living in overcrowded conditions in the borough. The lettings plan for 2019/20 allocates 26 lettings for households living in severely overcrowded conditions.
- 5.9 The committee noted that when an overcrowded family moves it frees up a property for other people to move in to and queried how this is being prioritised against moving people off the housing waiting list.
- 5.10 The council is often able to release large family accommodation by supporting people who are under occupying to find a new home. These properties are then advertised as preference to overcrowded households. The property vacated by the overcrowded tenant is then usually advertised to a homeless household.

- 5.11 *Housing Moves* is a housing mobility scheme run by the GLA which allows existing transferring tenants to move to another London borough. Priority is normally given for employment reasons or under-occupation. The number of households who move out of the borough will be the same as the number of households who move into the borough.
- 5.12 As well as Housing Moves, the council also runs a housing mobility scheme called *Trading Places* to support people to move into a smaller home if they are under-occupying.
- 5.13 The council also promotes a number of other [housing mobility schemes](#), including: *Homefinder UK*, which advertises social housing general needs properties across the UK and aims to help homeless households and social housing tenants find a home anywhere across social housing; *Seaside and Country Homes*, which helps older tenants of London councils and housing associations to move to seaside and countryside locations; [mutual exchanges](#), which allow council or housing association tenants to arrange to swap their house or flat with another tenant.
- 5.14 Lewisham Homes, Regenter B3, and Phoenix Community Housing tenants get financial assistance with moves. Under-occupiers get priority and may also receive bedroom release payments.
- 5.15 The committee noted that the report only deals with social housing allocations and that a lot of homeless people are now being housed in private accommodation. The committee asked if this could be covered in a separate report, including out-of-borough placements.
- 5.16 The annual lettings plan works in tandem with the council's allocations policy. The allocations policy sets out priority Bands for available housing and the criteria for each of these. The annual lettings plan looks at current pressures and sets out how the council intends to allocate the lettings that become available in that year. Properties are then advertised with specific criteria identified by the annual lettings plan and priority given to applicants meeting the relevant criteria even if they have a lower Band than applicants who do not meet the criteria. Officers are looking into both the allocations policy and annual lettings plan to see if the process can be made clearer.

*Resolved: the committee noted the report and agreed in the future to receive data on the numbers of households being housed in private accommodation.*

## **6. Housing strategy update**

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

- 6.1 The proposed approach to developing a new housing strategy for 2020-2025 will start in spring with workshops with internal and external stakeholders on the key principles of the strategy.
- 6.2 There will be public consultation on a draft strategy in the autumn.

*Resolved: the committee noted the updates and agreed to participate in the housing strategy workshops.*

## 7. New Homes Programme

James Masini (Regeneration and New Supply Manager) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- 7.1 The council is working on the creation of a delivery and planning strategy for the redevelopment of the site of the former Ladywell Leisure Centre.
- 7.2 The site could deliver around 200 new homes. The ambition is to deliver 50% genuinely affordable homes.
- 7.3 The council intends to deliver this development itself.

*Resolved: the committee noted the report.*

## 8. Select Committee work programme

John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the work programme.

- 8.1 The committee discussed a number of topics that could be considered by the incoming committee in the next municipal year, including:

- *Resident engagement, particularly around redevelopment*
- *The impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act*
- *The effect of housing people out of the borough*
- *Fire safety, fire doors and communications on this*
- *Overcrowding, under-occupying and housing mobility schemes*
- *Lewisham's capacity (staff and land) to deliver new council homes*
- *Major works and repairs*
- *Welfare reform*

- 8.2 Members agreed to email the scrutiny manager with further details and any other suggestions.

*Resolved: the committee noted the completed work programme for 2018/19.*

## 8. Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet

*Resolved: the committee agreed to refer its views on item 4, Private rented sector licensing, to Mayor and Cabinet.*

The meeting ended at 21.30pm

Chair:

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Date:

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