

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 1 May 2019, 7.30pm

Present: Councillors Peter Bernards (Chair), Stephen Penfold (Vice Chair), Aisling Gallagher, Leo Gibbons, Silvana Kelleher, Olurotimi Ogunbadewa and Sue Hordijkenko.

Apologies: Cllrs Tom Copley and Susan Wise.

Also present: Margaret Dodwell (Chief Executive, Lewisham Homes), Ainsley Forbes (Chair, Lewisham Homes), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services), and John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager).

1. Confirmation of the Chair and Vice-Chair

John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager) opened the meeting and asked Members to confirm the appointment of the Chair and Vice-Chair.

Resolved: that Councillor Peter Bernards be confirmed as the Chair and Councillor Stephen Penfold be confirmed as the Vice-Chair of the Select Committee.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2019

2.1 Cllr Kelleher noted that she had spent a day shadowing the housing allocations and lettings team and that she had produced a short summary report to share with the committee.

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

3. Declarations of interest

The following non-prejudicial interests were declared:

- Cllr Olurotimi Ogunbadewa is a board member of Phoenix Housing.
- Cllr Sue Hordijkenko is a board member of Phoenix Housing.
- Cllr Silvana Kelleher is a Lewisham Homes tenant.
- Cllrs Aisling Gallagher is a Lewisham Homes tenant.

4. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet

There were no responses from Mayor and Cabinet.

5. Lewisham homes annual business plan

Margaret Dodwell (Chief Executive, Lewisham Homes) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- 5.1 Lewisham Homes' three-year corporate plan was launched on 1st April. The plan sets out where Lewisham Homes, as the council's housing company, wants to get to over the next three years. The new vision is *to create thriving communities and places people are proud to call home*.
- 5.2 Lewisham Homes' annual business plan sets out the tasks that need to be completed for the year in order to achieve the ambitions of the corporate plan.
- 5.3 Lewisham Homes' core function is to meet housing need – through supporting the supply of new homes and managing council stock, both general needs and temporary accommodation.

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

- 5.4 The committee expressed concern about repairs and anti-social behaviour and said that there needs to be a focus on these in order for people to be able to take pride in where they live.
- 5.5 Lewisham Homes noted that repairs and anti-social behaviour were strong themes in resident consultation on the corporate plan. Residents were having problems with the process of getting repairs done and didn't feel that anti-social behaviour was taken seriously enough.
- 5.6 Lewisham Homes is planning to review its anti-social behaviour service by July 2019. It is also planning to carry out a benchmarking exercise to see how it compares in a number of areas with other social landlords in London.
- 5.7 The committee noted that there had not been a staff survey since 2017.
- 5.8 Lewisham Homes is making a lot of changes to its business and is planning to survey its staff quarterly in order to ensure that staff are engaged and to identify any necessary training.
- 5.9 Lewisham Homes recognises that it needs to modernise its services for leaseholders who want to be able to engage more online, and is working with a group of leaseholders to improve this service.
- 5.10 Lewisham Homes noted that it was delivering the remainder of the previous administration's new homes programme and was now working towards the new administration's programme for 2022. The target for new homes will be revised upwards once this programme has been set out.

- 5.11 Lewisham Homes noted that its staff turnover rate was healthy. Lewisham Homes wants to have as many permanent staff as possible, but noted that there are areas where specialist temporary staff are needed. The number of agency staff has previously been as high as 10%.
- 5.12 The committee queried the specific reasons behind the eviction statistics and asked if more detail on this could be set out in future reports.
- 5.13 It was noted that the majority of evictions are in relation to rent arrears or succession cases. There are not many in relation to anti-social behaviour. It was noted that the number of evictions for rent arrears has reduced in recent years as more has been invested in tenancy sustainment.
- 5.14 The committee asked about the latest government guidance on fire doors. Lewisham Homes agreed to provide a written response setting out the latest position.
- 5.15 The committee stressed that information on fire doors needs to be effectively communicated to residents.
- 5.16 One councillor noted that they had not yet received a response to a query relating to door security products used by Lewisham Homes and insurance. Officers agreed to provide a response.
- 5.17 One councillor, speaking under standing orders, asked Lewisham Homes about the recent change to their governance arrangements which allowed the council representative on the Lewisham Homes board to be a Lewisham Homes tenant.
- 5.18 Lewisham Homes noted that there was a request from the council to look at making the membership arrangement for councillors more flexible. Following discussion between the council and Lewisham Homes it was decided that introducing that changes to the board membership would provide the necessary flexibility. Lewisham Homes' governance arrangements will be reviewed again in the future. Officers agreed to provide the committee with more information on the governance change.

Resolved: the committee noted the report; requested to receive a more detailed breakdown in future reports of the reasons for evictions; agreed to receive a written briefing on the latest government guidance on fire doors; and agreed to receive further information on the recent changes to governance arrangements.

6. Information item: new homes programme update

Resolved: the committee noted the report.

7. Select Committee work programme

John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the draft work programme for 2019/20.

The committee discussed the work programme and potential topics for in-depth review. Suggestions included:

- 7.1 The extent of overcrowding in the public and private sector; how this affects the council's allocations scheme; related health issues, such as mould growth; and the support available for those who want to downsize. It was noted that the allocations scheme does not currently take into account statutory overcrowding.
- 7.2 There are around 4,000 households on the Lewisham housing register living in overcrowded conditions. Officers agreed to provide the committee with more information on overcrowding in the borough. It was noted, however, that data on overcrowding in the private sector is not held by the council.
- 7.3 The effects of housing people in temporary accommodation out of the borough. This should include speaking to residents who have been placed out of borough and exploring what flexibility there is in the policy. It was noted that other boroughs have criteria for when people should not be placed out of borough.
- 7.4 Resident engagement on estate redevelopment; how does the council engage with residents on housing developments and what lessons has it learned from previous engagement; what role could tenant and resident associations (TRAs) play and how are partners facilitating the creation of TRAs; and the role of councillors in community engagement. The committee noted that there was a growing hostility in the borough towards changing neighbourhoods.
- 7.5 The committee voted in favour of holding an in-depth review on resident engagement in housing development.

The committee also discussed other potential work programme items, including:

- 7.6 An update on the review of no recourse to public funds (NRPF).
- 7.7 Updates on the new homes programme.

Resolved: the Committee agreed the work programme for 2019/20; agreed to receive further information from officers on the extent of overcrowding in the borough; agreed to scope an in-depth review of resident engagement on housing development; agreed to receive an update on the NRPF review; and agreed to receive updates on the new homes programme at every other meeting

8. Referrals

There were no referrals.

The meeting ended at 21.30pm

Chair:

Date:
