

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 10 July 2019 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Peter Bernards (Chair), Stephen Penfold (Vice-Chair), Tom Copley, Aisling Gallagher, Leo Gibbons, Silvana Kelleher and Olurotimi Ogunbadewa

ALSO PRESENT: John Bardens, Madeleine Jeffery, James Masini, Freddie Murray, Nicholas Stabeler, Lis Rodrigues (Lewisham Homes), Councillor Paul Bell and Osama Shoush (London Borough of Lewisham)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sue Hordijkeno and Councillor Susan Wise

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 4 June 2019

- 1.1 The committee noted that it had not yet received the clarification it requested on the arrangements in relation to arrears for people in temporary accommodation who are offered permanent accommodation.

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

3. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet

There were no responses from Mayor and Cabinet.

4. New homes programme update

Freddie Murray (Director of Regeneration and Place) and Lis Rodrigues (Director of Development, Lewisham Homes) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- 4.1 Lewisham Homes is in the process of building a team to lead on the delivery of the Council's development programme.
- 4.2 Two schemes have been completed in the last month: Longfield Crescent (27 new homes) and Dacre Park South (25 new homes).

- 4.3 Of the remainder of the New Homes Better Places Programme, 102 new homes are expected to start on site before Christmas, subject to due diligence.
- 4.4 Architects are about to be appointed in relation to the first package of the 1,000 new social homes to be delivered.
- 4.5 The committee asked what the Council intends to prioritise with the money it will receive for staffing as part of the Mayor of London's Homebuilding Capacity Fund and whether it will be able to rely less on external agencies.
- 4.6 Some of the funding is for planning for specific projects, but the majority is revenue for staff resources. The additional staff resource will allow the council to look into more sites and identify opportunities more quickly. It will also allow the council to start building up more internal expertise.
- 4.7 The committee asked about the cost implications of a development overrunning, such as it did at Longfield Crescent, and what mitigations are in place.
- 4.8 Lewisham Homes is currently assessing the impact of the delay at Longfield Crescent. The lessons learned will be applied to future projects. One of the lessons already learned is the importance of carrying out detailed legal and technical due diligence early on in the process.
- 4.9 Officers agreed to report back to the committee on the cost implications of overrunning at Longfield Crescent.

Resolved: the committee noted the report.

5. Resident engagement in housing development

James Masini (Regeneration & New Supply Manager) introduced a report setting out the current approach to resident engagement on housing development in Lewisham. The following key points were noted:

- 5.1 The engagement process begins at a very early stage. This might include an "ideas event" with residents or local door knocking. There will be an initial consultation event and sometimes a second event depending on the scale of the project. There will also be engagement throughout the construction phase and after completion.
- 5.2 It was noted that this engagement is separate to consultation during the formal planning process.
- 5.3 Engagement exercises attract varying numbers of people. An event around the PLACE/Ladywell development, for example, involved 600 people over six days. Smaller developments tend to attract less interest.

- 5.4 It was noted that engaging with residents often leads to better quality development. The council wants to engage as many people as possible, but it was noted that ensuring good attendance at consultation events is a significant challenge. This is particularly the case with hard to reach groups.
- 5.5 Examples of innovative responses to this challenge were discussed, including engaging people through the Evelyn Community Store and the Achilles Street “Bring it to the table” events.
- 5.6 Lewisham Homes has a programme of support in place to help residents engage effectively, including free housing courses for residents and help with setting up Tenant and Resident Associations.
- 5.7 Other creative methods the council is considering include fun days, soft play and mobile cinema. Online engagement, although being used more, is still underused as a consultation tool. The online consultation platform, Commonplace, for example, has been used successfully by Team Catford.

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

- 5.8 The committee expressed concern about the differences in resident engagement carried out before the planning process and consultation during the formal planning process.
- 5.9 It was noted that consultation by the local planning authority during the formal planning process involves making comments on specific planning grounds. This is separate and different to the broader discussions about an area and/or development that take place as part of resident engagement carried out by the Council and Lewisham Homes before a development goes to planning.
- 5.10 The Achilles Street “Bring it to the table” events have been running every Wednesday since June. There are 87 properties on the estate and attendance has been about 10 households per night, half of which have been returning households.
- 5.11 The committee stressed the importance of door knocking in terms of engaging hard-to-reach groups and those who might find public meetings intimidating.
- 5.12 One member noted that they had been approached by a resident at a recent public consultation event who said that they were desperate for the development to go ahead as they were living in overcrowded conditions, but that they felt like they couldn’t speak up at the meeting.
- 5.13 The committee noted that door knocking on infill developments is particularly important because, unlike estate regeneration, the council is not making an offer to all residents and some local residents may be wondering what’s in it for them.

- 5.14 The committee noted the importance of face-to-face conversations and that they can be a better way of addressing people's concerns, listening to feedback and explaining the borough's housing need.
- 5.15 The committee noted while there is a growing number of people who support development, there is also a growing number of people who oppose development.
- 5.16 The committee stressed the importance of getting early engagement right in order to prevent misinformation from spreading.
- 5.17 Lewisham Homes carry out door knocking on their infill developments, at various times of the day, to make sure that a wide range of people are heard.
- 5.18 Engagement exercises like the Bring it to the table events at Achilles Street are an important part of early engagement. Engagement like this is more about finding out what residents think about where they live, rather than talking about the plans for a particular development.
- 5.19 It was noted that the best way of measuring the effectiveness of engagement is the quality of the schemes. Developments with a high degree of resident involvement tend to be higher quality.
- 5.20 The proposed residents' charter is a response to new rules on estate ballots from the Mayor of London.
- 5.21 The residents' charter will apply to every estate regeneration where a ballot is required. The ballot requirement applies to projects that involve GLA funding, the demolition of any social homes and the construction of 150 or more homes.
- 5.22 Achilles Street is the only development in the new social homes programme that requires a ballot.
- 5.23 Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs) are involved throughout the engagement process. TRAs often better understand the local area and the views of local people. TRAs are not always representative of a local area, but it is useful to engage with them from an early stage.

Resolved: the committee noted the report.

6. Private rented sector licensing: consultation update

Nick Stabeler (Private Sector Housing Agency Manager) delivered an update on the Council's consultation on private rented sector licensing. The following key points were noted:

- 6.1 There have been 448 responses so far. The consultation is due to end on 21 August.

- 6.2 The consultation has included online and social media engagement, event and visits, and working with charities to reach out to disabled and ethnic minorities. There has been clear support from tenants so far.

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

- 6.3 The council is required to show that it is implementing a scheme that reflects the problems in the area. A good level of consultation responses will help with this.
- 6.4 The council is working with a number of groups and charities and officers welcomed any information about any other relevant groups members were aware of.
- 6.5 The consultation relates to two licensing schemes: one for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) and one for single occupancy. Only the single occupancy scheme requires approval by the Secretary of State. The HMO scheme covers 6,000 properties. The single occupancy scheme would cover 26,000 properties. The council currently licenses around 600 properties.
- 6.6 The consultation work will be funded through the proposed licensing fee.

Resolved: the committee noted the report.

7. Select Committee work programme

The Scrutiny Manager introduced the work programme. The following points were noted:

- 7.1 The committee had a discussion around a future item on its work programme on overcrowding. One councillor had prepared a briefing for members to consider. It was noted that one of the main considerations is the impact on other people of any changes to lettings priorities.
- 7.2 Officers noted that they intend to return to the committee later in the year with an analysis of lettings activity over the year in order to appreciate what the impact would be of any changes to the lettings plan.

Resolved: the committee agreed the work programme.

8. Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet

There were no referrals to Mayor and Cabinet.