

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Thursday, 12 March 2020 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Peter Bernards (Chair), Stephen Penfold (Vice-Chair), Aisling Gallagher, Leo Gibbons, Sue Hordijkenko, Silvana Kelleher, Susan Wise and the following members of the Children and Young People Select Committee: Councillors Liz Johnston-Franklin, Hilary Moore and Luke Sorba.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Tom Copley, Olurotimi Ogunbadewa, Paul Bell and Octavia Holland.

ALSO PRESENT: John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager), Margaret Dodwell (Chief Executive, Lewisham Homes), Rachel Dunn (SGM Housing Partnership and Service Improvement Manager, LBL), Ainsley Forbes (Chair of the Board, Lewisham Homes), Lee Georgiou (SGM Housing Needs and Refugee Services, LBL), Madeleine Jeffery (Director of Housing, LBL), Nina Morris (Lettings and Support Services Manager, LBL), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Housing, Regeneration & Environment, LBL) and Alex Clarke (Housing Prevention & Support Team Manager, LBL)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2020

Resolved: the minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

2. Declarations of interest

The following interests were declared:

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

3. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet

There were none.

4. Lewisham Homes Annual Business Plan 2020/21

Margaret Dodwell (Chief Executive, Lewisham Homes) introduced the report. There was a discussion and the following key points were noted:

- 4.1 The Lewisham Homes annual business plan is focused on: building safety; achieving development targets; modernising the repairs service; improving resident experience and satisfaction; supporting the Council's sustainability agenda; and improving technology for residents and staff.
- 4.2 The key performance indicators are included in the officer report.
- 4.3 Lewisham Homes are carrying out resident profiling in order to better understand its residents and their needs and to tailor its services to provide a

better service. This is particularly important for vulnerable residents in order to be able to provide additional services or signposting to other agencies.

- 4.4 Lewisham Homes' repairs modernisation programme is looking at how repairs could be done more efficiently. This includes moving Repairs Operatives which are currently paid on a schedule of rates over to a salary. A small communal repairs team has recently been established on salaries and has already started to have a positive impact of resident satisfaction in this area. Lewisham Homes also want to be able to carry out repairs and turn around void properties more quickly so that people can be housed quicker and as little rent lost as possible.
- 4.5 Lewisham Homes are also carrying out a stock condition survey in order to be able to publish a 5-year repairs and maintenance plan so that residents will be able to plan. Lewisham Homes will publish this information for leaseholders too.
- 4.6 One member of the committee expressed the view that Lewisham Homes' plan for maintenance and repairs modernisation presented an opportunity to expand the service to private residents, renters and home owners, particularly on new development sites.
- 4.7 Lewisham Homes said that the priority of the repairs modernisation programme is to provide the best services for residents. There may be an opportunity to expand the service, particularly for leaseholders, but also other parts of the council and private landlords.
- 4.8 In regards to Community Centres being transferred to Lewisham Homes from the Council, one member of the committee noted that they were keen for Lewisham Homes to allow residents to use the centres for community events and family parties.
- 4.9 Lewisham Homes confirmed that they will be working with the council to provide different activities at community centres at a proportionate cost.
- 4.10 One member of the committee ask for further information on the "Net Promotor" score of resident satisfaction. Lewisham Homes agreed to send a briefing.

Resolved: the committee noted the report.

5. Annual Lettings Plan 2020/21

Lee Georgiou (SGM Housing Needs and Refugee Services Manager) introduced the report. There was a discussion and the following key points were noted:

- 5.1 The Annual Letting Plan for 2020/21 doesn't contain any policy changes or substantive changes to the approach taken in previous years. Properties will be allocated as per previous methodology taking into account the change in number of lets becoming available.
- 5.2 It was noted that there were 860 lettings projected to become available for 2020/21, which represents a continuation of the recent trend of reducing number of lets. There were 1,150 available lets in the previous year.
- 5.3 The Council is committed to reviewing the allocations policy in the next financial year so there may be some substantial changes in the following year.

- 5.4 The committee noted some concern about the closing of historic cases on the housing register, where no bid has been made in the last three years, given the issues with Lewisham Homeseach noted in previous meetings.
- 5.5 The council contacted all historic cases on the housing register to find out if they wanted to remain on the register and if they were still eligible. The council decided to review everyone on the register within the under-occupation priority band. Households in this band were contacted in writing and given a month to inform the council if they wanted to remain on the register. It was noted that Lewisham used to carry out this process annually.

Resolved: the committee noted the report.

6. Homelessness in Lewisham and the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

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

- 6.1 The implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act has led to a more personalised and person-centred approach but the structural challenges causing homelessness and the difficulties accessing alternative accommodation are still present.
- 6.2 Lewisham has 2,400 households in temporary accommodation. 739 of these were in nightly-paid accommodation as measured at the end of January 2020.
- 6.3 Frontline homelessness services have been completely changed since the Act came into force. The council established a programme of culture change, embedding coaching and motivational interview techniques across the service and made improvements to partnership working.
- 6.4 The outcome of this has been that the service has prevented more homelessness than ever before. 850 cases of homelessness were prevented this year. This is 690 more than last year.
- 6.5 At the same time, the number of people approaching the service has increased by 50%. The vast majority of the increase is single homeless households.
- 6.6 Despite the increasing number of preventions, the number of households accepted under the main homelessness duty has increased by 20%.
- 6.7 The service is committed to reviewing the council allocations policy in the next year. The review will focus on priority banding including overcrowding and victims of domestic abuse.
- 6.8 The service is also committed to reviewing the locational priority checklist.
- 6.9 The service is also rolling out a new integrated IT system to streamline the whole of the housing needs service and reduce the amount of time spent on paperwork.
- 6.10 The committee asked a number of questions. There was a discussion with officers and the following key points were noted:

- 6.11 A recent initiative intended to reduce and prevent homelessness is weekly workshops for people who find it difficult liaising with landlords and looking online for alternative accommodation. The workshops allow officers to help people build confidence and IT skills. There are vulnerable people who are struggling with these processes.
- 6.12 The increase in demand with the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act has been a significant challenge for the service and its staff, particularly for the single homeless service.
- 6.13 The service has introduced reflective practice sessions for staff to provide a safe space to talk about difficult situations they have dealt with and to share best practice.
- Councillor Luke Sorba, Chair of the CYP select committee, addressed the committee under standing orders.
- 6.14 It was noted that the Children and Young People Select Committee has recently carried out a short review of the impact on children and young people of living in temporary accommodation.
- 6.15 The review found that there was a desire from the children social care team for a closer working relationship that could help to anticipate when a homelessness case might lead to a child needing a social care intervention. The review also found that there was an inconsistent pattern of communications between the service and schools.
- 6.16 Officers acknowledged that there is further work to do to improve joint working with children's social care. There is ongoing joint work in regards to data and identifying families at risk of homelessness. There is also a new joint post to update the joint working protocol between children's social care and housing.
- 6.17 There is a programme in place for schools, and the service has previously engaged with headteachers, but there is more work to do.
- 6.18 A priority for the service in the coming year is to work out what its partnership programme looks like in the longer term with the resources available. Partnerships should be ongoing dialogues rather than one off visits.
- 6.19 The Housing Needs service is trialling a new triage process whereby applicants receive a full assessment and personal housing plan when they first come into the service rather than having to wait another 2-3 weeks.
- 6.20 Officers in the Housing Needs service are all very clear victims of domestic violence from any borough can approach the council.
- 6.21 Officers agreed to return to the committee with further information on: the numbers and financial impact of additional households housed as a result of the Homelessness Reduction Act; the provision for free transport for children under the Education Act; the number of homeless households housed in the private rented sector (PRS) that re-present as homeless.

Resolved: the committee noted the report.

7. Select Committee work programme

The Scrutiny Manager introduced the report and invited the committee to comment on the completed work programme and make suggestions for the next municipal year. A number of suggestions were noted, including:

7.1 Repairs. What repairs are we doing? How are we doing them? How do tenants feel? How long are they waiting?

7.2 Medical assessment for banding when it comes to allocations. How does this work? How do we communicate our decisions?

7.3 Homesearch – or its replacement. Including information on the outcomes. Number of applications etc.

Resolved: the committee noted the completed work programme.

8. Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet

There were none.

The meeting ended at 9.25 pm

Chair:

Date:
