

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 30 October 2019 at 7.30 pm

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

APOLOGIES: Councillors Leo Gibbons and Susan Wise

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Paul Bell (Cabinet Member for Housing), Councillor Kevin Bonavia (Cabinet Member for Democracy, Refugees & Accountability), Fergus Downie (No Recourse to Public Funds Team Manager), Lee Georgiou (Housing Options and Advice Manager) (LBL), Madeleine Jeffery (Private Sector Housing Agency Manager), James Masini (Regeneration and new supply manager), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Housing, Regeneration & Environment), Tony Riordan (Principle accountant) (London Borough of Lewisham) and Kevin Farrell (Senior Associate) (TPAS)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2019

2. Declarations of interest

The following interests were declared:

- Cllr Stephen Penfold is employed by the Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network (in relation to item 5)
- Cllr Olurotimi Ogunbadewa is a board member of Phoenix Housing
- Cllr Sue Hordijkeno is a board member of Phoenix Housing
- Cllr Silvana Kelleher is a Lewisham Homes tenant.
- Cllr Aisling Gallagher is a Lewisham Homes tenant.

3. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet

4. Resident engagement in housing development

Kevin Farrell (Senior Associate, TPAS) delivered a presentation on resident engagement in housing development.

The presentation covered TPAS's National Engagement Standards, good practice for Independent Tenant Advisors (ITAs), how to engage with "need-to-reach" communities, engagement on infill development, and aspects of the social housing green paper.

The work being carried out by the council and Lewisham Homes was acknowledged by the TPAS representative, as was the research carried out for the review.

Some of the key points of the presentation included:

- 1.1 Engagement should be planned to, among other things, achieve accountability and transparency. This is one of the first issues that will concern residents. Developers should be available to residents, have dialogue, provide answers, and be open and transparent about decision making and funding.
- 1.2 Engagement should be allocated sufficient resources. It is important to have the right people and resources to support communities through an often stressful and anxious period of change.
- 1.3 Tenants, leaseholders and community members should be provided with the appropriate levels of support to be effectively engaged. This includes capacity building to help residents understand and take a meaningful and active part in the process. It is important to understand the existing level of knowledge among residents as this varies from community to community.
- 1.4 Volunteers should be recruited, supported and trained so that they can influence, co-design and scrutinise. There should be mechanisms in place to enable residents to influence thinking and decisions.
- 1.5 Communities have a huge amount of knowledge and experience about where they live and engagement should start with a “blank piece of paper” and build up. Enabling residents to scrutinise plans, funding, designs etc is an important step in building confidence and trust.
- 1.6 Communities affected by housing development often want expert advice. Independent Tenant Advisors (ITA) can provide advice to residents independent from the council.
- 1.7 TPAS, which provides an ITA service, believes ITAs are essential to regeneration projects and that communities should be given the opportunity to choose their own ITA.
- 1.8 In order to engage with “need-to-reach” (also referred to as “hard-to-reach”) groups, there are some important initial steps, such as having a customer relationship management system in place and carrying out analysis of the community in relation to equalities.
- 1.9 Engagement should be planned, monitored and measured so its impact can be assessed, and regularly reviewed with the community you’re engaging with.
- 1.10 It is important to understand residents’ preferred channels of engagement and engagement activity should be used to gain further insight into communication preferences.
- 1.11 Engagement on infill development should acknowledge the impact it will have on neighbours but also promote its benefits. There should be boundaries for different levels of engagement. Developers should take an inclusive approach and be prepared to talk to anybody. There should be excellent resident liaison.

The committee asked a number of questions and a discussion followed. The key points noted were:

- 1.12 The first challenge with engagement is to connect and relate to the communities you're working with and to build their trust.
- 1.13 The biggest challenge is speaking the right language and translating between the developer and the community. Key to this is having well-trained staff to speak to communities and translate back to council officers in a way they can understand.
- 1.14 Speaking the right language can help build the trust and respect necessary to work together positively and constructively. It can take time, however, where communities have a long history of bad experiences. It helps to focus on the solutions to problems.
- 1.15 On the Carpenters Estate, Newham, TPAS worked with the community to co-design a residents' charter. The community produced the charter and presented it to the council. This process created a dialogue, provided the community with an opportunity to highlight its priorities, and built trust.
- 1.16 In order to assert their independence, some ITAs ask residents to monitor and agree to their activity. Residents should accompany ITAs at project meetings and be copied in to correspondence. ITAs should constantly demonstrate they are there to represent the views of the community.
- 1.17 When recruiting volunteers to be involved in the engagement process it's important to recognise that the majority of people do not have lots of spare time. Engagement activity that involves significant time commitment can be off-putting. Engagement is increasingly about short burst of work, such as task and finish groups, over a few days.
- 1.18 It's also important to ask residents how they would like to organise themselves to be engaged on a project, if they do at all. Developers should avoid imposing engagement models on residents.

Resolved: the committee noted the report and thanked the witness for their presentation.

5. No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) review

Kevin Bonavia (Cabinet Member for Refugees) introduced the report:

- 1.1 The independent review of the council's No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) service analysed case studies provided by officers, advocacy groups (including Project 17) and a survey of service users. The council has responded to the recommendations and produced an action plan.
- 1.2 There has been positive improvement in recent months. There have been fewer disputes and the removal of the embedded Home Office caseworker has

enabled the council to pay for advocacy support at the Southwark Law Centre. The council is focused on culture change within the NRPF service and is planning to commission external training.

There was a discussion and the following key points were noted:

- 1.3 Officers are working with Project 17 in response to the review's recommendation to carry out training on language and attitudes. The committee asked for this to be made clearer in the action plan.
- 1.4 Every assessment carried out under s17 of the *Childrens Act 1989* is a Child in Need assessment. Assessments are more comprehensive where there are safeguarding considerations. This is in line with how social services operate.
- 1.5 The independent review sampled 100 random cases and did not find any examples of illegal or indefensible decision making. The committee asked for the total number of legal reviews brought against the council and the number of these that were successful.
- 1.6 The Terms of Reference for the review were agreed by the Executive Director following meetings with advocacy groups and senior officers.
- 1.7 The committee expressed concern that 40% of respondents to the review's survey of service users did not feel that they had been shown respect. Officers said that everyone should be treated with respect and they will address these concerns.
- 1.8 The committee asked how it was being communicated to residents that there was no longer an embedded Home Officer caseworker in the NRPF service. The Cabinet Member said the council has communicated its pledge to becoming a sanctuary borough.
- 1.9 The NRPF service aims to communicate decisions to service users in writing within 24hrs. Changes are being made to letter templates to include information on rights to review.
- 1.10 The committee agreed to receive an update on progress with the recommendations of the review in six months. This should include hearing from stakeholders the council is engaging with.

Resolved: the committee noted the report and agreed to receive and update on the recommendations of the independent review in 6 months.

6. New Homes Programme update

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

- 1.1 The council is currently assessing the impact of the Government’s decision to increase the interest rate for borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB). It is expected that there will be an impact on some future schemes.
- 1.2 If Achilles Street Estate residents decide that estate regeneration should take place, the council has committed within its offer that residents will only need to move once.
- 1.3 Resident leaseholders of Achilles Steet will be offered the independently assessed market value of their home and a statutory Home Loss compensation payment of 10% of the agreed value of their home.
- 1.4 Precision Manufactured Homes, such as those being developed at Edward Street, Mayfield, and Home Park, are more energy efficient, quicker to develop, and provide the council with a better idea of costs.

Resolved: the committee noted the report.

7. Select Committee work programme

John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager) introduce the report:

- 1.1 The committee agreed to receive a progress update in six months on the outcomes and recommendations of the independent review of the council’s No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) service. This should include hearing from stakeholders that the council is engaging with.

Resolved: the committee agreed the work programme.

8. Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet

The meeting ended at 9.32 pm

Chair:

Date:
