

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 9 March 2021 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Peter Bernards (Chair), Stephen Penfold (Vice-Chair), Aisling Gallagher, Silvana Kelleher and Susan Wise and

APOLOGIES: Councillors Olurotimi Ogunbadewa

ALSO PRESENT: Fenella Beckman (Director of Housing), Margaret Dodwell (Chief Executive) (Lewisham Homes), Ainsley Forbes (Chair of the Board) (Lewisham Homes), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Housing, Regeneration & Public Realm), Ellie Eghtedar (Interim SMG Housing Needs and Refugee Services), Sukhi Nijjar (Hostel Manager) and Petra Der Man (Principal Lawyer)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2021

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.
- Cllr Susan Wise is a Lewisham Homes director.

3. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet

There were none.

4. Lewisham Homes Annual Business Plan

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

4.1 This is the third year of Lewisham Homes' four year corporate plan. There is currently a complex legislative background in social housing with a new white paper, a new charter to give more weight to tenants' voices, enhanced consumer regulations and inspections by the social housing regulator, and new building safety regulations. A new regime around building safety is expected to be in place by April 2022. The Fire Safety Act is also coming into force with new standards around fire risk assessment and cladding.

4.2 The committee has previously been briefed on Lewisham Homes' plan for a new, more customer-focused and accessible ICT system. The council has now agreed to invest in a new system to be shared with the council and Regenter. The focus of the new system will be on inclusivity to allow everyone to access Lewisham Homes services.

- 4.3 Lewisham Homes needs to make sure there is a clearer focus on complaints as this is an important form of resident feedback.
- 4.4 The delivery of new homes is a major priority and there are currently 284 on site, most of which started during the lockdown. Resident engagement on these sites continues.
- 4.5 There has been a recent significant stock condition survey which found that the level of decent homes is not where it should be. The fire doors programme, for example, is on target to deliver by September 2021. The majority of the decent home programme will be complete by the end of 2022. The funding has been identified and contracts are in place to deliver.
- 4.6 The committee queried whether we could encourage more residents to join Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs) and use TRAs as way to consult with and keep residents up to date.
- 4.7 It was noted that Lewisham is fortunate to have a healthy TRA population but that not all TRAs allow Lewisham Homes to reach all residents. Lewisham Homes are fully committed to engaging with TRAs but not to the exclusion of other resident engagement activity.
- 4.8 The committee asked how the pandemic has impacted the council's ability to deliver on its house-building target and whether the upcoming legislative changes will impact on this as well?
- 4.9 The delivery of the New Homes Programme has been slower due to the pandemic but a lot of homes have still started on site during this period.
- 4.10 The Cabinet Member for Housing confirmed that based on current forecasting the council is on target to deliver on its house building target.
- 4.11 The committee also noted that the council's house building programme is also creating employment for young people in the borough.
- 4.12 It was also noted that Lewisham Homes' staff training programme looks to the ombudsman code of conduct and other good practice and all staff are being asked to complete. It'll be tailored for front-line staff as Lewisham Homes wants to give them a way to share what they see. There will also be a leadership programme based on modern ways of working and a focus on outcomes.
- 4.13 The committee queried whether Lewisham Homes is being strategic about complaints handling and identifying when they are a symptom of wider problems, noting the procedure for repeated lift breakdowns for example.
- 4.14 It was noted that the first step with a complaint is to put the situation right for the resident but trends and learning points will also be identified but there is more that can be done. It was also noted that the Lewisham Homes board will now be receiving a six month synopsis of complaints. The committee asked if it could see a version of this too.
- 4.15 It was also noted that Lewisham Homes will be producing an annual report to residents in which Lewisham Homes will be able to focus on what it's learned from complaints.
- 4.16 The committee queried what percentage of Lewisham Homes residents are involved in TRAs?

4.17 It was noted that there are at least 25 active TRAs in Lewisham Homes properties. The Lewisham Tenants' Fund would be able to provide more detailed figures.

4.18 It was noted that with the new social housing white paper there is an increased focus on standards of homes and that modernising the repairs service will put Lewisham Homes in a better place to deal with this.

Resolved: the committee noted the report and recommended it for Mayor and Cabinet's consideration.

5. Select Committee work programme

5.1 The committee discussed a number of possible issues to cover in the committee's work programme for next year and agreed to suggest an item on shared ownership housing.

Resolved: the committee noted the completed work programme and the suggestion for next year's work programme.

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

Chair:

Date:
