

# Minutes of the Housing Retrofit Task and Finish Group

## Friday, 25 February 2022 at 11.00 am

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Louise Krupski (Chair), Tauseef Anwar and Stephen Penfold

ALSO JOINING THE MEETING VIRTUALLY: Councillor Aisling Gallagher

ALSO PRESENT: Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager) and Beate Hellawell (Scrutiny Manager)

NB: Those Councillors listed as joining virtually were not in attendance for the purposes of the meeting being quorate, any decisions taken or to satisfy the requirements of s85 Local Government Act 1972

### 1. Minutes of the last meeting

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2021 be agreed as an accurate record.

### 2. Declarations of interests

There were none.

### 3. Draft final report

3.1 Councillor Krupski introduced the report - inviting members to make comments on the evidence gathering and the report's contents. In the discussion the following key point was noted:

- Further to a late submission by a member of the public – additional reference would be made in the report to the role of retrofit in preventing overheating.

3.2 Committee members discussed the recommendations – the following key points were noted:

- Members would welcome further detail in the report about when the recommendations would be implemented.
- It would be the responsibility of the overview and scrutiny committee to follow up on the implementation of the recommendations.
- Members would welcome dedicated officers within the planning department specialising on the issue of housing retrofit.
- The Council should monitor the availability of funding for housing retrofit work on behalf of housing providers in the borough – in order to ensure that partners were in a position to bid for funding when it became available.
- Members would welcome further strengthening of the recommendation about works on void properties in Lewisham Homes.

- Scrutiny committees should be asked to consider how best they might collaborate and coordinate their approach to scrutiny of retrofit issues. A suggestion could also be made to hold all member briefing on retrofit.
- Consideration should be given to providing an update and/or training for new members of the Housing Select Committee on housing retrofit.
- Recommendations relating to partner organisations should specify the expectation that they should coordinate their retrofit activities.
- A further recommendation should be included relating to the cooling benefits of retrofit – and the benefits of coordinating retrofit work with tree planting.
- Members highlighted the importance of retrofitting non-housing stock.
- Councillor Krupksi thanked officers, members and all of those who had been involved in the process of evidence gathering for the review.

3.3 **Resolved:** That the report be agreed with recommendations (subject to the amendments agreed at the meeting) for submission to Mayor and Cabinet, as follows:

Leading the transformation

- The Task and Finish Group believes that it is time for a comprehensive retrofit strategy – which brings together all of the initiatives relating to housing retrofit across housing types and tenures. This should utilise the broad range of the Council’s powers, its influence and its partnerships. The strategy should set out clear measurable short, medium and long-term targets describing a path to carbon neutrality by 2030.
- Progress on the development of the strategy (and the Group’s other recommendations) should be reported to the relevant scrutiny committees by the end of the 2022-23 municipal year.

Mayor and Cabinet should:

- Consider how best to lead the step change needed to reach the Council’s ambition for net zero by 2030. The Task and Finish Group believes that the cabinet portfolios relating to the climate emergency, housing and planning are connected. It is recommended that discussions take place on how the cabinet portfolios might be formally linked.
- Hold discussions with leaders in neighbouring boroughs about their ambitions for net zero – and the potential to join resources, projects and ways of thinking together to meet some of the common challenges facing local authorities.
- Give careful consideration to the mechanisms available to have discussions with amenity societies, stakeholders and local groups about the values and principles guiding conservation and carbon reduction measures. It is important to find a common ground that recognises and emphasises the value of both.
- The Housing Select Committee should consider making retrofit a standing item on its agenda. This should include updates from social housing partners on their formal plans for net zero. In particular – the group recommends that the Committee invites Regenter to outline how it will work with the Council to improve the energy efficiency in the homes managed as part of the Brockley private finance initiative. We believe that there should be an expectation that all Council contracts with housing providers support Lewisham’s climate emergency declaration.

- Further opportunities should be considered for all councillors to attend training and briefings on the impact of the climate crisis (with a specific focus on the importance of retrofit). The Committee suggest that this take place as part of the induction programme of new and existing Councillors at the start of the next administration, 2022.
- The Task and Finish Group welcomes the work being carried out by the economy, jobs and partnerships team (as below) – and it recommends that a further update on this work should be provided to the Sustainable Development Select Committee.

#### Communicating with purpose

- The Council should adopt a ‘one stop shop’ approach for residents to learn about the measures they can take to respond to the climate emergency. Work on this should commence immediately and, if possible, an on-line site be completed by the end of the calendar year 2022. The Council’s ‘one stop shop’ of climate action advice, guidance and trusted links to reputable sources should draw on the best initiatives happening locally. The scale and purpose of this project should increase over time. It may start online with the intent to grow in ambition and reach, for example including exemplar retrofitted homes when available, and pop-up stalls/displays for assemblies and key Council events.
- The Council’s communications team should work up a programme of Housing Retrofit advice items using all the usual channels and help residents link to the ‘one stop shop’. Residents should be kept up-to-date with any key Council developments, funding news and innovations in this fast-changing area.
- Every effort should be made to work with our housing providers to ensure that tenants moving into retrofitted homes, fully understand the technology they are living with and how it differs from conventionally heated homes, to ensure the complete success of this step-change. This will become even more important when retrofitted homes change hands down the line.

#### Developing future fit advice on planning

##### The Planning Department should:

- Seek to grow officers’ knowledge and confidence in dealing with retrofit measures. This should include, if considered appropriate, employing a specialist climate change planning officer or as a minimum altering the functions of key roles to take on responsibility for developing specialist knowledge in this area (as is the case with conservation). Officers should utilise these skills to develop robust and evidence based Council policy to support sustainable, high quality retrofit – in line with the Council’s ambitions for net zero.
- Review the advice it provides to households on retrofit. There should be up to date information on the Council’s website for applicants considering retrofit measures including: internal and external solid wall insulation, heat pumps and energy efficient windows and doors.
- Consider how best (and when) the Council might proactively provide information and advice on retrofit measures during the planning application process.
- Review the existing extensions and alterations supplementary planning document – to include practical information and guidance on retrofit measures. It is recognised that this recommendation has resourcing implications (in terms of cost and officer time) and that this will require expert consideration and

consultation. Accordingly, Members would welcome an assessment of the potential options and opportunities to deliver this work. The Group recognises the quality of the recent small sites SPD as an example of good practice and it recommends that the revised alterations and extension should be up to the same standard.

#### Working with limited resources

- The Council should explore the feasibility of recruiting an in-house retrofit coordination specialist. Likely based in the housing team – this role would support the Council’s leadership in bringing together partners and stakeholders to work on this issue. The holder of this post could also develop the proposed retrofit strategy. Furthermore, the Task and Finish Group believes that there is the potential for this role to act commercially by providing paid for retrofit coordination, project management and quality assurance support to housing providers, landlords and homeowners. This could be initiated on a trial basis in coordination with Lewisham’s partner organisations and grown according to demand.
- The Group notes the Public Accounts Select Committee’s work on commercialisation – and it believes that this proposal would align with the goal set by the select committee for the Council to trial new commercial ventures. With the growth of this market and the obvious need for ‘trusted providers’ there may also be an opportunity in the future for a small in house team to provide homeowners with a (gradually increasing level of complexity) menu of retrofit measures which could grow organically, much as the commercially successful Waltham Forest Council Service Store model.
- The Council should continue to bid for pots of government funding to enable energy efficiency. The Executive Management Team should provide proactive and timely project management support in order to ensure that the council and our partners (where appropriate) are ready to bid and spend any funding in the limited timescales that it is most often available.
- The Council’s economy jobs and partnerships team should continue its proactive work in engaging with the local labour market of installers and builders to link up their needs with local education and skills providers. This should include efforts to engage with contractors and suppliers in Lewisham’s ‘anchor organisations’ and make the most of the partnership working encouraged by the signatories to Lewisham Deal. Consideration should also be given to updating the curriculums of skills providers as soon as possible.
- Further work should take place between the Council’s housing and enforcement teams to consider how best to robustly enforce the minimum energy efficiency standards.
- Every opportunity should be taken to dovetail retrofit work with our social housing providers, namely Lewisham Homes, Regenter, Phoenix, and any successors, with work already planned, or when new opportunities arise, so that improvements to homes will not have to be re-done a few years after completion, with great cost to the Council. Whenever a void appears in the register, the home should be raised to as high a level of EPC rating as possible including total retrofit and energy production such as the installation of photovoltaic panels or tiles.
- The housing revenue account maintenance plan should be used to ensure that any work tied to fire safety, which is currently the key priority, be seen as an opportunity to raise the EPC rating of the buildings being maintained, as has been done at the award winning Hatfield Close and Gerrard House

project, now that United Living (the contractor on this project) have a 10 year partnership with Lewisham Homes. Members believe that the boroughs other housing providers should be encouraged to take a similar approach.

- Members recognise the importance of green infrastructure in mitigating the effects of the climate crisis, particularly in terms of urban cooling, and they recommend that the Sustainable Development Select Committee should further explore the potential for targeted urban greening to enhance the effectiveness of retrofit measures.

The meeting ended at 11.30 am

Chair:

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Date:

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