



## Housing Select Committee

### Report title: Co-optee proposals

**Date:** 28 November 2023

**Key decision:** No.

**Class:** Part 1

**Ward(s) affected:** All

**Contributors:** Director of Law and Corporate Governance (Head of Scrutiny and Policy)

### Outline and recommendations

To note that the Committee has invited nominations for informal co-optees to attend its meetings in 2023/24, pending the potential adoption of a formal co-optee scheme.

### Timeline of engagement and decision-making

12 September 2023 - The Housing Select Committee considered a report on co-optees

28 November 2023 - The Housing Select Committee receives an update on activity since it made the decision, at its September meeting, to have informal co-optees.

2024 – If Members wish to have formal Housing co-optees in the 2024/25 municipal year, a formal co-option scheme will need to be developed and agreed in advance; a budget (if applicable) will need to be identified; and the agreement of the Constitution Working Party and Council sought.

#### 1. Summary

- 1.1. The Committee has expressed an interest in having resident co-optees. This report updates Members on progress made since the last meeting in terms of securing the participation of informal resident co-optees.

#### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to note that nominations for informal co-optees from Lewisham Council Housing (formerly Lewisham Homes) and Regenter B3 have been sought, with a view to having them attend the remaining formal meetings of the

Committee in the 2023-24 municipal year. Further thought is being given to how private renters might be represented at meetings.

### 3. Background

- 3.1. Having informal or formal co-optees on scrutiny committees, over and above the statutory co-optees required by law, is one way of increasing scrutiny's access to local insight and understanding of local people and their needs.
- 3.2. At the last meeting the Committee received a report on statutory and non-statutory co-optees and the considerations to be taken into account should the committee wish to have co-optees.
- 3.3. It was noted that formal co-option beyond the statutory requirement, was provided for in legislation but local authorities must establish a co-option scheme to determine how individuals will be co-opted onto committees if they wish to have formal co-optees. In Lewisham, the scheme would need to be agreed by the Constitution Working Party, followed by Council. A decision would need to be taken on whether or not the co-optee(s) could vote. Their attendance would not count towards quorum and it is assumed they would be disregarded for the purposes of political proportionality. Consideration would also need to be given to how they would be chosen and if, and how, they would be paid.

### 4. Informal co-optees

- 4.1. At the September 2023 Housing Select Committee meeting, it was agreed that the Committee would initially have informal co-optees and use the learning from that experience to inform a potential formal scheme. Following the meeting, invitations were sent to resident organisations at both Lewisham Council Housing and Regenter B3, on behalf of the Chair and the Committee, inviting them to each nominate an individual to attend future Housing Select Committee meetings to represent the resident voice. The Chair wrote to the following organisations/people:
  - All TRA Chairs and Vice-Chairs - Lewisham Council Tenants (Formerly Lewisham Homes)  
*the TRAs have been asked to collectively suggest a single co-optee*
  - The Tenants' Panel – Regenter B3

An update on nominations will be provided at the meeting.

- 4.3 Having informal co-optees from these organisations will:
  - **Amplify Resident Voices** – the co-optees will serve as a direct link between the Housing Select Committee and residents, ensuring that resident opinions and concerns are heard and considered during discussions.
  - **Enhance Engagement** – having co-optees will foster greater resident participation in the scrutiny process, making it more inclusive and reflective of the community's needs and preferences.
  - **Ensure Effective Collaboration** – Members and residents will be able to work together on matters that directly impact local communities, leading to better-informed and more community-driven outcomes.

### 5. Private Renters

- 5.1 There is no clear Lewisham-based private renters organisation. The Committee will need to work with the Private Rented Sector in Lewisham Task and Finish Group (PRS TFG) to identify a suitable organisation, with a plan to inviting an informal PRS co-

optee to attend the Housing Select Committee meetings scheduled for January and March 2024. If a suitable organisation cannot be found, the Committee could consider advertising the position on the -council website/via social media. The opportunity could be specifically highlighted to the individual private renters who engage with the PRS TFG. However, thought will need to be given to the selection process to make it fair, and it should be recognised that they will not have an obvious mandate, as they will not be representing a specific renters organisation. This means it is more likely that they will just be expressing their own, individual views, rather than the views of private renters more broadly, as gathered through membership of a renters organisation.

## **6. Next Steps**

- 6.1 The Committee will liaise with the PRS TFG to see if there is a suitable Lewisham renters organisation to approach, or agree an alternative way of securing the views of private renters.
- 6.2 Following the Committee's January 2024 meeting, Members and officers can consider how the informal approach has worked and decide whether a formal co-option scheme should be developed and agreed for implementation in the 24/25 municipal year.

## **7 Financial implications**

- 7.1 There are costs associated with having formal co-optees on scrutiny select committees, should a formal scheme be pursued in the future. Depending on the method of selection, a cost may be incurred. For example, if an election is required. Formal co-optees are normally provided with an allowance. A budget would need to be identified to cover this.

## **8 Legal implications**

- 8.1 There is currently constitutional provision for the mandatory statutory education co-optees, and co-optees to the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee. Whilst there is a statutory requirement to make provision for co-optees to SSCSC, there is no requirement to appoint. At present, Lewisham does not appoint co-optees to SSCSC.
- 8.2 Sections 15 and 16 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, which relate to political balance, apply to the Housing Select Committee. There would need to be a decision on whether formal co-optees count towards political balance, should a formal scheme be pursued in the future. The assumption is that they would not, as is the case for statutory co-optees to CYP Select Committee.

## **9 Equalities implications**

- 9.1 Equality Act 2010 brought together all previous equality legislation in England, Scotland and Wales. The Act included a new public sector equality duty, replacing the separate duties relating to race, disability and gender equality. The duty came into force on 6 April 2011. It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 9.2 The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
  - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
  - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
  - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 9.3 There may be equalities implications arising from creating housing co-optees and these

would need to be taken into consideration should a formal co-option scheme be established.

## **10 Climate change and environmental implications**

10.1 There are no direct climate change or environmental implications arising from the implementation of the recommendation in this report.

## **11 Crime and disorder implications**

11.1 There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from the implementation of the recommendation in this report.

## **12 Health and wellbeing implications**

12.1 There are no direct health and wellbeing implications arising from the implementation of the recommendation in this report.

## **13 Report author and contact**

13.1 If you have any questions about this report please contact:

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