

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 25 October 2016, 7.00pm

Present: Councillors Carl Handley (Chair), Peter Bernards (Vice Chair), John Coughlin, Maja Hilton, Simon Hooks, Liz Johnston-Franklin, Olurotimi Ogunbadewa, Joan Reid, and Jonathan Slater.

Apologies: Councillor John Paschoud

Also present: Cllrs Bill Brown, James-J Walsh, Eva Stamirowski, Paul Upex, and Liam Curran (Chair of Sustainable Development Select Committee), Kplom Lotsu (SGM Capital Programmes), Emma Talbot (Head of Planning), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services), Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing), Michael Westbrook (Housing Policy and Partnerships Manager), Cllr Alan Hall (Chair of Overview & Scrutiny), Petra Der Man (Principle Lawyer), John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager), Sonia Bernard (Assistant Director Partnership and Support, L&Q), Moira Griffiths (Group Care and Support Director, Family Mosaic), Martin Pearce (Housing Projects Manager, Family Mosaic), Phil James (Gateway local housing manager, Phoenix Community Housing), Annabel Davidson (Gateway local housing manager, Phoenix Community Housing).

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2016

Resolved: the Committee agreed the minutes of the last meeting as a true record.

2. Declarations of interest

The following non-prejudicial interests were declared:

- Councillor Slater is a member of the board of Phoenix Community Housing.

3. Housing action zones

Kplom Lotsu (SGM Capital Programmes) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- The officers' report is intended to provide an update on the two housing zones in Lewisham (New Bermondsey and Catford) as well as a broad overview of what housing zones are.
- Housing zones are intended to boost housing supply in London by unlocking and accelerating housing delivery through a range of planning and financial measures. The Government and GLA made £400m available for an initial twenty zones. Half of this money was for loans to private sector organisations only. The other half was available in different funding forms, including grants.
- Prospective housing zones must demonstrate how they meet a number of eligibility criteria. This includes that it must have a minimum of 750 housing units;

the majority must be on brownfield land; it must refer to how good design will be achieved; and it must demonstrate an expeditious delivery of housing.

- The New Bermondsey housing zone has been allocated in principle funding of £20m. The GLA has also agreed to make a grant of £12m to fund a new overground station at Surrey Canal Road. The idea is that this would allow any money that was previously going to be spent on the station to be spent on more affordable housing within the scheme. The exact levels of affordable housing are currently being negotiated as part of a revised s106 agreement for the scheme
- The Catford housing zone has been allocated £30m – £27.2m for affordable housing, £1.3m to improve rail station arrival space, and £1.5m for flood alleviation work.
- The next stage for Catford is for the council to enter into an Overarching Borough Agreement with the GLA. This is a formal acceptance of the general principles of the housing zone grant. It does not, however, set out anything on the levels of affordable housing. The stage after that will be for the council and GLA to enter into individual Borough Intervention Agreements on each part of the scheme. These will set out levels of affordable housing, but this could take a while as they are dependent on planning applications going through first.
- In the meantime, the GLA and the council have identified a number of projects that can be carried out as soon as possible. This includes work to improve the arrival spaces of the Catford stations and work to reduce the risk of flooding in Catford town centre.

Kplom Lotsu (SGM Capital Programmes) and Emma Talbot (Head of Planning) answered questions from the Committee. The following key points were noted:

- The council owns most of the land that makes up the Catford housing zone. But as some housing will be built on land that isn't council-owned, officers are not yet certain of the total build cost of the proposed 2,500 houses. Officers stated, however, that the council is not bound to providing this number of homes. This was an indicative number used when applying for funding. More certain numbers will emerge as the scheme progresses to the planning stages.
- In terms of housing density and height the Council are looking at the higher end of the land planning density threshold – and looking at buildings of medium height, around 10 stories on average. Officers noted, however, that there is still room for negotiation with the GLA. The council is not yet committed to any specific plans – they are just coming to an agreement on the principles of the housing zone.

- As the GLA are currently oversubscribed for housing zones, they are reviewing grants and, where schemes are not progressing quickly enough, there is a risk of some grant money being taken back.
- The GLA expects around 35% of housing in housing zones to be affordable – according to various definitions. Lewisham are aiming for “genuinely affordable”, although officers stated that the overall number of homes will go down the more affordable housing there is. The council is looking at a range of possible partners for the Catford scheme.
- In New Bermondsey, the agreements on housing will apply whoever delivers the scheme – including, for example, if the developer contract was to be sold on to someone else. If a new developer was to want to renegotiate any part of the agreement there would need to be a new planning application.
- Any renegotiated s106 agreement could be delegated to the Head of Planning, with the potential of being called in and going to the Strategic Planning Committee.
- The money freed up by the GLA’s decision to provide £12m grant funding for station work in New Bermondsey will go into additional affordable housing. The council would expect a range of home sizes, including family homes, to be part of the scheme. A condition of the housing zone is to get the station and other infrastructure in place before housing.

The Committee made a number of comments. The following key points were noted:

- The Committee noted the possibility of station work being completed as a “quick win”, but queried whether we can be sure that this will fit in with what we are going to want and need in the long-run, once the housing parts are also complete.
- The Committee noted the interest rates being applied to developer loans and queried whether any future change in these could affect the scheme and amount of housing possible.
- The Committee expressed concern that there are many things being agreed before there is sufficient detail on the scale and design of the scheme. The committee said there are still unanswered questions on the south circular, the theatre, and the Bakerloo line extension, and expressed concern that the council will end up committed to a number of homes, of a certain height, with little room for negotiation.
- The Committee expressed concern about the possibility of the developer contract in New Bermondsey being sold on. The Committee was concerned that any new

developer would likely want to renegotiate parts of the agreement meaning that there would have to be a new, lengthy planning application process.

- The Committee recommended that both housing zones should reflect the housing need of the borough and that residents should be involved in meaningful consultation.
- The Committee also recommended that the Strategic Planning Committee should have oversight of the new s106 agreement for the New Bermondsey housing zone.

Resolved: the Committee noted the report and agreed to make the following referral to Mayor and Cabinet:

The committees recommend that Mayor and Cabinet seeks assurances from officers about key parts of the housing zones programme before proceeding with any further decision making. This should include:

- *The maximum height of any towers proposed in the Catford development as well as further details about the anticipated massing of the development.*
- *A commitment that the level of affordable housing in both housing zones will reflect housing need in the borough. The committees believe that guarantees should be sought on the minimum amount of social housing that will be provided as part of the Catford development.*
- *Reassurance from TfL that a decision will be taken to realign the south circular in Catford in order to enable the redevelopment of the town centre.*
- *Assessment of the implications for public services in Catford, including likely pressures on transport, health services and schools.*
- *Timings of planned key decisions for the development of the programme.*
- *A commitment to clear and meaningful consultation with local councillors and residents – which aligns with the anticipated programme of key decisions.*

The committee's also requested details of the proposed governance arrangements for future development of Catford, including the plans for non-executive oversight and the meaningful engagement of the public in the future of the scheme.

In relation to the New Bermondsey housing zone, the committees recommend that:

- *Oversight of the section 106 agreement should be returned to strategic planning committee.*
- *An explanation should be sought from Renewal about its reasons for not making the New Bermondsey housing zone bid public.*
- *That further information should be made publicly available about the management structure and ownership of the developer.*

The Chairs of the two committees also intend to write to the Mayor of London expressing concern about housing zones and the amount of affordable housing being provided. They will also request further assurances from the GLA that the necessary due diligence is being carried out on the use of housing zone funding by developers.

4. Housing and mental health – evidence session

Sonia Bernard (L&Q), Moira Griffiths (Family Mosaic), Martin Pearce (Family Mosaic), Phil James (Phoenix Community Housing) and Annabel Davidson (Phoenix Community Housing) introduced themselves and spoke about their work. The following key points were noted:

- L&Q provide a range of services for residents struggling with a range of issues. This includes a tenancy sustainment service, which provides up to six months of support to people whose tenancies are at risk. L&Q also offer services to help tenants manage their money better.
- L&Q said that mental health problems are often one of the reasons someone might be struggling to maintain their tenancy. Issues with anti-social behaviour are also often found to relate to mental ill health.
- Family Mosaic said low-level mental health issues are becoming increasingly common. There's plenty of anecdotal evidence of increasing numbers of vulnerable people in general needs housing – people with multiple needs, who don't quite reach the level for statutory intervention but are struggling to maintain their tenancies.
- With welfare reform, Family Mosaic recognise that they have a role in their tenants' health and wellbeing. It's now part of their mission statement and they're trying to shape their interventions so that they're targeted at people they recognise as vulnerable.
- Family Mosaic are paying increasingly close attention to the first year of a tenancy. As well as assessing affordability, they're trying to better understand people's wider needs and provide more targeted interventions. They said, however, that much of this relies on further income.
- Family Mosaic noted that while low-level mental health issues are affecting all housing providers, at the moment, it is too often allowed to escalate to crisis point. They agreed that more prevention and early intervention work is needed.
- Phoenix Community Housing are also seeing high numbers of vulnerable tenants with mental health issues of various levels. They find it particularly difficult to get the right support for those with low-level mental health needs.

Witnesses answered questions from the Committee. The following key points were noted:

- Family Mosaic provide all frontline housing managers with mental health training – looking at pathways, possible trigger points, signs and symptoms, and making the right referrals.
- L&Q frontline housing officers receive introductory mental health training. Tenancy sustainment officers receive more intensive training. Organisations such as Mind have also come to team meetings in the past.
- Phoenix staff are trained on a range of issues from hoarding to domestic violence – sometimes by external people and sometimes by e-learning. Staff also get training on having challenging conversations, to give them the skills to deal with a variety of difficult and sensitive situations.
- Phoenix Community Housing carry out a vulnerability assessment at the start of a tenancy, consisting of a number of questions about physical and mental health, including whether they have a support or social worker. There are then at least three home visits during first year – one at six weeks to make sure the tenant's settled in, and again at three and eight months to make sure the tenant's accessing appropriate services on offer. These visits also provide an opportunity to pick up any signs of mental ill health.
- L&Q said that they've had to get to know their residents and understand their vulnerabilities better since welfare reform. During a recent pilot, for example, they found that around 50% of residents in general needs housing had some sort of vulnerability.
- L&Q explained that it's in their interests to understand their tenants and that if they can support a resident to stay in their home they will. The eviction process is expensive and they will explore all other options before going down this route. The earlier problems are picked up, the more likely – and sometimes more able – people are to engage with the support on offer.
- L&Q said that information sharing can be complex and that getting information about tenants' needs is a problem. It is often difficult to get consent – some people are reluctant to provide information that they think might affect their tenancy.
- Family Mosaic have also found information sharing difficult – and that the law around data protection is frequently misunderstood and allowed to get in the way.
- Family Mosaic have a confidential helpline people can call if they're particularly worried about someone. Repairs teams, for example, will often see things that others won't and this confidential helpline allows them share this information.

- Phoenix have signed up to several information sharing protocols, but they also rely on good stakeholder relationships and building trust with tenants.
- Phoenix have had problems trying to establish how many people in their properties have mental health issues – often people won't admit, or perhaps realise, they have a problem.
- Family Mosaic explained how familiar their more experience staff are with local sources of help and support, and noted how this can help to get the right help and support as early as possible. They said it is something they can still get better at though. They also said it's important to try to work with local GPs and pharmacies.
- Phoenix said they often have problems with making referrals and not hearing back. They said that they've made referrals in the past, expecting that service to make contact with the individual, only to later find out that the case has been closed. Phoenix said this makes it very hard to keep track of what's going on with their tenants.
- Phoenix said that hoarding is still a significant challenge. They noted that Lewisham had a hoarding protocol and panel in place some time ago, and said it would be good if it could be refreshed.
- The council's Head of Strategic Housing said that the hoarding protocol still exists. The council are also currently setting up a multi-agency safeguarding hub, which will include a dedicated person from housing – so there should be a vast improvement in the way referrals are handled.
- Family Mosaic said many people with low-level mental health needs, like anxiety and depression, or where they are out of work, have problems with motivation, and suggested that housing providers need to find ways of “nudging” people into higher levels of personal motivation.
- Family Mosaic are looking into conditional tenancies and whether rather than just offering people support, they can say that a tenancy comes with the requirement for you attend certain support programmes – employment coaching, for example. They acknowledge that it's a tricky approach to take.
- Family Mosaic mentioned the PAM (Patient Activation Measure), which is about encouraging resilience and self-management. They also spoke about research on how creating communities with more befriending and volunteering opportunities can help with personal motivation.
- Family Mosaic are developing a way of categorising people and tailoring interventions as they're housing more people who may struggle to manage their

tenancy. L&Q are also looking at adding conditions to tenancies and categorising people according to vulnerability to tailor interventions.

- Phoenix would be very interested in finding ways for local housing providers to share more information and best practice. Something like a workshop would help, but questioned who would be responsible for setting it up and running it.
- L&Q expressed support for a workshop of some sort – noting that housing providers are all facing the same challenges. It would be a good way to come to some sort of common understanding about how best to handle things, rather than trying to work it out individually.
- Family Mosaic were also supportive of a workshop. They felt it could help to build an evidence base about what works. It may also be helpful to involve partners from across the whole mental health pathway – from prevention to statutory intervention.
- Family Mosaic said there would likely be some challenge from housing providers if they were told that they had to do provide extra support or services. Where responsibilities fall between housing providers and other services, such as social care, needs to be carefully looked into.
- The Executive Director for Customer Services said that the council should be agile enough to pick up and support people with mental health problems in the private rented sector too.

The Committee made a number of comments. The following key points were noted:

- The Committee suggested that there's a need for a more formal working protocol on how to handle tenants with low-level mental health issues – noting that it feeds into other work the council are doing to prevent homelessness.
- The Committee noted Phoenix's approach of assessing vulnerability at the start of a tenancy and following up at regular intervals during first year.
- The Committee suggested that low-level mental health problems are likely to increase as an increasing number of people face housing and other money-related problems.
- The Committee noted that many people in the private rented sector will also be coping with low-level mental health problems and facing similar housing-related issues.
- The Committee pointed out that in some cases it may not be until after eviction that mental health problems are triggered, and queried what housing providers can do identify and help these people.

- After meeting with the housing manager at Southwark council, one member spoke about the hoarding and anti-social behaviour panels and homeless forum in place there – explaining how these allow people from different organisations to come together and address situations and people’s needs holistically.
- The member also mentioned that Southwark have found becoming a “Mindful Employer” to be a very helpful influence on services – which has also given them access to a number of good practice guides covering a range of topics as well as online training for staff.

Resolved: the Committee noted the witnesses’ evidence.

5. Monitoring homelessness and temporary accommodation pressures

Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing) introduced the report and the Committee made a number of comments. The following key points were noted:

- The Chair explained that officers have agreed to present this item in full at the next committee meeting so that there is enough time to cover such an important issue in enough depth. In the meantime, at this meeting, officers have agreed to provide an update on homeless numbers.
- Across London, there are 52,000 people in temporary accommodation (8% more than last year) and 19,000 in nightly-paid accommodation (an 18% increase). Councils are increasingly using nightly paid accommodation as temporary accommodation. It’s becoming increasingly difficult to find temporary accommodation in the private sector at local housing allowance rates.
- In Lewisham, there were 1,768 people in temporary accommodation in September 2016 – this compares to 1,750 in March 2016. There were also 509 people in nightly-paid accommodation – which is down from 608 in March 2015. A number of projects have helped stabilise numbers in Lewisham, including: the creation of pop-up housing units in Ladywell, the conversion of Hamilton Lodge to extra hostel units, and the property acquisition programme with Lewisham Homes.

Resolved: the Committee noted the update and agreed to hear the full update at its next meeting.

6. Additional licensing for HMOs

Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing) introduced the report and the Committee made a number of comments. The following key points were noted:

- The committee has seen the additional licensing scheme before, but it is having to go back to Mayor and Cabinet as there was a small mistake in the wording of the previous report. The previous report to Mayor and Cabinet stated that the

licensing scheme would apply to HMOs above and below commercial premises, but it should have only said above.

- Officers mentioned that the government is consulting on the introduction of a statutory licence for all flats above shops and changing the definition of HMO.

Resolved: the Committee noted the report.

7. Select Committee work programme

John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the report.

Resolved: the Committee agreed the work programme.

8. Referrals

Resolved: to refer the Committee's views on housing action zones.

The meeting ended at 9.30pm

Chair:

Date:
