

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 10 January 2017, 7.30pm

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

Also present: Rupert Bateson (Senior Business Development Manager, Shelter), Emily Bird (Policy Leader, National Housing Federation), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services), Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing), Jeff Endean (Housing Strategy and Programmes Manager), Michael Westbrook (Housing Policy and Partnerships Manager), John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager).

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 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. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet

There were no responses for this meeting

4. Housing and mental health – evidence session

Rupert Bateson (Shelter) and Emily Bird (National Housing Federation) introduced themselves and gave evidence to the committee.

Rupert Bateson (Shelter) spoke. The following key points were noted:

- Shelter have a lot of experience of helping people in both social housing and the private rented sector. They provide floating support, but also specialist housing and therefore take a keen interest in what housing-related support and advice can best support people with mental health and housing related problems.
- Shelter have focused much of their housing and mental health work on two areas: maintaining tenancies and helping rough sleepers (who are more likely to have mental health issues) to secure tenancies for the first time.
- Shelter are interested in developing closer links between mental and general health, and multi-agency responses to people's needs. Shelter have seen the benefits of linking housing advice to healthcare settings, such as GP surgeries and community health teams.
- Shelter new 'Welcome Home Service' in Birmingham is an example of good multi-agency working. This is a partnership between Shelter and Birmingham

Mind focused on people who are in hospital either because of a mental health problem or who have developed a mental health problem while they've been in hospital. Specialist staff from both Shelter and Mind are located on site in hospitals, with Mind looking at issues like access to counselling and Shelter looking at problems with landlords, benefits and rent deposits.

- Shelter's work as part of the Manchester Advice Alliance is a good example of housing working closely with GPs. The Manchester Advice Alliance includes social housing providers, local Citizens Advice Bureaus, local CCGs, and GPs. It involves an "advice on prescription approach" – instead of handing out leaflets and signposting – where a GP is able to write a prescription for advice based on their conversations in the surgery.
- The individual can then take their advice prescription to advice agencies, giving them control, and the advice agencies can take into account the recommendations in the prescription. People who have used this service say that they value the ability to access independent agencies, that they feel listened to and understood, and that this in itself can be beneficial.
- Shelter run a mortgage debt helpline, which receives contact from a large number of people with mental health problems. They can help people deal with mortgage providers and set up arrangements like debt plans and payment holidays. Shelter have found that most mortgage providers are willing to set up such arrangements to avoid the eviction process.
- Shelter are currently looking at how to make advice more efficient. There's evidence that phone advice can be as effective as face-to-face. Phone advice can also provide people with immediate help at crisis stage – although it won't necessarily be appropriate with more complex problems.

Emily Bird (National Housing Federation) spoke. The following key points were made:

- Housing associations across the country provide a range of effective interventions for a range of needs, including mental health needs, to help people live more independently and healthily. This includes employment support, tenancy sustainment, floating support, and specialist and supported housing.
- Nationally, organisations are increasingly recognising the importance of linking up health and housing more strategically – the NHS England Mental Health Taskforce, for example, which encourages local partners to consider how housing can affect people's health.
- There's also a national memorandum of understanding on health and housing which advocates a more strategic approach to housing and mental health working together. The National Housing Federation is supportive of approaches that cut through the barriers of different services and look at person's needs as a whole.

- Progress Housing Association in Preston is a good example of housing supporting people with mental health needs. Progress were coming into contact with increasing numbers of people with mental health needs, so developed a number of support services, including financial advice (in partnership local CAB and credit union), employment support services (in partnership with local employers).
- It's pretty early stages for health and housing working together, but Emily cited the health and housing memorandum of understanding in Nottingham as a good example of this. This agreement is intended to bring all local partners around the table and establish a shared understanding of local needs, and shared goals.
- A kitemark scheme for good landlords, with a specific focus on awareness of mental health needs, was to be considered, it could start with larger portfolio landlords, which are more likely to be aware of problems and open to ideas.
- Emily also noted the importance of supported and specialist housing in helping people live independently and stay out of acute settings. The National Housing Federation is concerned, however, about the potentially devastating scenario for supported housing as a result of benefit changes currently being consulted on by the government. Emily notes that local authorities will, in the future, likely have a big role in continuing to fund these services.

Resolved: the Committee noted the witnesses' evidence.

5. Proposed rent and service charge increases

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

- This is the second year of the government's policy to reduce social rents by 1% for four years. For 2017/18, it will mean an average rent reduction of £0.97 and will result in a loss of £0.722 of rental income to the Housing Revenue Account.
- Residents of Lewisham Homes and RB3 have been consulted about the changes and there was very little response.
- This report will also go to Mayor and Cabinet in February as part of budget setting process.
- The number of right to buy sales has remained stable over the last year, at about 100.
- The council's programme to build 500 new council homes aims to have all 500 homes either completed or started by March 2018.

Resolved: the Committee noted the report.

6. New build update

Jeff Endean (Housing Strategy and Programmes Manager) introduced the report and the Committee made a number of comments. The following key points were noted:

- In working towards the council's programme to build 500 new council homes, 196 are completed or currently underway, and 330 have been identified that could be started by March 2018. The target is to have 500 homes started by March 2018. The council will still need to build some homes to sell (around 125) to fund the build costs of the 500 new council homes.
- The 500 new council home target doesn't currently include new homes through the Lewisham Homes Acquisition Programme, the new temporary accommodation at PLACE/Ladywell, or any of the estate regeneration schemes in the borough.
- 500 is a realistic target. The main obstacle to building more homes is the availability of land, particularly easy to develop land. Right to buy is also a factor, but current market values mean numbers have steadied.
- A significant number of homes towards the 500 target will be built this year. The redevelopment of Catford town centre and Ladywell will provide a substantial number of homes in the future.
- Officers are always looking at the possibility of alternative models of housing management – from cooperatives to mutual – but it is a long process.
- The committee suggested that officers compile and share a register of lessons learned from sites that have fallen through so that this knowledge isn't lost.

Resolved: the Committee noted the update.

7. Communal heating systems review update

Martin O'Brien (Asset Management Planning Manager) introduced the report and the Committee made a number of comments. The following key points were noted:

- The officer provided a short recap of the committee's review of communal heating systems in 2014/15, its scope, and its findings.
- The review intended to look at how the council can help to ensure the effective deployment of communal heating systems in the borough. It identified, among other things, problems with over-sized heat sources generating excessive heat, problems with billing, and lack of consumer protection.
- Since the review published its findings there have been a number of developments. The Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineers published the UK Heat Networks Code of Practice, intended to raise standards in communal heating systems. The Heat Trust was launched, offering a free and independent customer complaints resolution services. The Government began

consultation on amendments to the Standard Assessment Procedure for building energy performance, proposing changes relevant to communal heating systems.

- In January 2016 the council published the finding of a feasibility study on the potential for a heat network connecting SELCHP and Goldsmiths. A potential route was identified, but the economic viability of the route was assessed as low.
- The council is carrying out another feasibility study of a network extending to Convoys Wharf and other development sites in the north of borough. The findings are expected to be published before April 2017.

Resolved: the Committee noted the update.

8. Key housing issues

Michael Westbrook (Housing Policy and Partnerships Manager) introduced the report and the Committee made a number of comments. The following key points were noted:

- Several parts of the Housing and Planning act have either been dropped or postponed. “Pay to stay”, for example, will not be going ahead and extending the right to buy to housing associations has been pushed back. The introduction of fixed-term tenancies is still set to go ahead, but no regulations have been published yet.
- The government announced in the Autumn Statement that letting fees would be banned. DCLG will be consulting on the detailed proposals soon. This could save private renters in Lewisham a considerable amount of money.
- The Mayor’s affordable housing programme, *Homes for Londoners*, has also been published. This included £3.15bn funding and aims to achieve 90,000 home starts by 2021.
- There will be a mixture of tenures – including London affordable rent, London living rent, London shared ownership. London living rent will be set at one third of borough median income. For Lewisham, this will be £34,895 a year. The London living rent model is very similar to that used at the Besson Street project in Lewisham.

Resolved: the Committee noted the report.

Select Committee work programme

John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the report.

- To make the next meeting more manageable, the Scrutiny Manager suggested moving the Lewisham Homes and RB3 mid-year reviews to April.

Resolved: the Committee agreed the work programme with the above changes.

9. Referrals

There were no referrals at this meeting

The meeting ended at 21.30pm

Chair:

Date:
