

# **MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE**

**Monday 26 June 2017, 7.30pm**

Present: Councillors Carl Handley (Chair), Peter Bernards (Vice Chair), John Coughlin, Olurotimi Ogunbadewa, Jonathan Slater, Bill Brown, Pat Raven, Sophie McGeevor.

Apologies: Councillors David Britton and Jamie Milne.

Also present: Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing), Jeff Endean (Housing Strategy and Programmes Manager), and John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager).

## **1. Minutes of the meeting held on 18 April 2017**

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

## **2. Declarations of interest**

2.1 The following non-prejudicial interests were declared:

- Councillor Slater is a member of the board of Phoenix Community Housing.
- Councillor Coughlin is member of the Brockley Tenants' Cooperative

## **3. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet**

3.1 There were no M&C responses for this meeting.

## **4. Lewisham Housing Strategy**

Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing) and colleagues provided a brief verbal update, with a full report due to come to the next meeting of the committee. The following key points were noted:

4.1 Officers didn't want to bring an update on the strategy that didn't take into account the Grenfell Tower fire tragedy. A full report at the next meeting will outline progress on the four priorities of the housing strategy and there will be a separate report around what's happened since Grenfell.

4.2 Officers are also currently holding off of a full review of the housing strategy while the legislative outlook for housing remains unclear. A number of housing-related regulations have been delayed since the general election was called, including those on high-value voids, right to buy in housing associations, and fixed-term tenancies. It is still unclear, following the Queen's speech, what direction the government is going to take in the area of housing.

4.3 Officers were also asked questions about the Grenfell Tower fire tragedy.

4.4 Lewisham officers are currently investigating the number of high-rise (over 6 floors) blocks in the borough and have so far confirmed 121. 71 of these are

managed by Lewisham Homes, 10 by RB3, and 40 by a mix of housing association partners and private developers.

4.5 The Director of Customer Services has written to those responsible for the tower blocks in the borough. So far 6 tower blocks managed by Lewisham Homes have been found to have cladding. Samples are being removed and tested (BRE). So far 2 out of 6 have been sent for testing.

4.6 Some housing association partners have also identified how many of their tower blocks have cladding and need to be tested and this information is still being collated.

4.7 Officers will meet and plan the response when the test results come back. Results are expected to start coming in later this week (w/c 26 June 2017).

4.8 So far, across the country, buildings that have combustible cladding, but no other complicating factors, are not being evacuated. Additional measures such as fire safety officers on site are being taken instead.

4.9 Where it is just cladding that needs to be removed, the plan is to convey the results, meet and reassure residents, put fire marshals in place on site, and start the removal process. If there are other concerns, a different response may be needed. Contingency plans, including interim accommodation, are in place if there is a need to decant tower blocks in the borough.

4.10 Officers are not sure if the Government is going to fund the cost of this work.

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

4.11 The Committee asked if councillors could be made aware of any tower blocks with cladding in their wards.

4.12 The Committee stressed the importance of the council working closely with the fire authorities to assess the risks.

4.13 The Committee also expressed concern that, regardless of who is responsible for a particular building, if something goes wrong people will look to the council.

4.14 The Committee expressed concern about the possibility of poor tenant representation with larger social landlords.

4.15 The Committee said that there is an argument for setting up a tenants' forum in the borough to provide a direct relationship with tenants.

4.16 The Committee suggested that it would be beneficial to carry out safety checks with as much tenant involvement as practical.

4.17 The Chair informed the committee that the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny had written to the Council's Chief Executive requesting further information on the fire safety of tall buildings in the borough and that the response to this would be coming to the next meeting.

*Resolved: the Committee noted the update.*

## **5. Models of delivering new housing – scoping paper**

Jeff Endean (Housing Strategy and Programmes Manager) gave a short presentation setting out some statistics on the scale of housing delivery in Lewisham and John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the scoping report. The following was noted:

- 5.1 Of the 13,000 new homes built in the borough over the last ten years, two thirds have been by private developers, 4,000 by housing associations, and 57 by the public sector.
- 5.2 The Lewisham New Homes Programme includes a number of measures to try to increase the public sector number. This includes building new council homes, temporary accommodation, estate regeneration, and community-led developments.
- 5.3 The main considerations for officers are speed and scale of delivery. If a particular model delivers more slowly, officers will look at whether the other advantages of that approach are worth the wait.
- 5.4 The Committee asked if officers could explain in all future reports the different types of affordable housing being referred to and the exact definition.

*Resolved: the Committee agreed the key lines of enquiry for the in-depth review.*

## **6. Select Committee work programme**

John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the report. The following was noted:

- 6.1 A full report on the Lewisham Housing Strategy will come to the next meeting.
- 6.2 The response to the Chair of Overview & Scrutiny's information request to the Chief Executive about tall building fire safety will come to the next meeting.
- 6.3 The first evidence session of the committee's review of housing-delivery models will be scheduled for September.

## **7. Referrals**

- 7.1 There were no referrals at this meeting

The meeting ended at 21.00pm

Chair:

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Date:

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