

# MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Thursday 5 July 2018, 7.30pm

Present: Councillors Susan Wise (Chair), Peter Bernards (Vice Chair), Tom Copley, Aisling Gallagher, Leo Gibbons, Silvana Kelleher, Olurotimi Ogunbadewa and Stephen Penfold.

Apologies: Genevieve Macklin (Head of Strategic Housing).

Also Present: Tracy Jones (Operations Manager, Regenter B3), Louise Wallace (Contract Manager, Pinnacle), Sandra Simpson (Leasehold Manager, Pinnacle), Hugo Marrias (Operations Manager, Rydon), Margaret Dodwell (Chief Executive, Lewisham Homes), Adam Barrett (Director of Resources, Lewisham Homes), Jeff Endean (Housing Strategy and Programmes Manager), Rachel Dunn (Housing Policy and Partnerships Manager), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services), and John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager).

## 1. Confirmation of the Chair and Vice-Chair

John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager) opened the meeting and asked Members to confirm the appointment of the Chair and Vice-Chair.

Resolved: that Councillor Susan Wise be confirmed as the Chair and Councillor Peter Bernards be confirmed as the Vice-Chair of the Select Committee.

## 2. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2018

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

## 3. Declarations of interest

The following non-prejudicial interests were declared:

- Cllr Peter Bernards is a member of the Lewisham Homes board.
- Cllr Silvana Kelleher is a Lewisham Homes tenant.
- Cllrs Aisling Gallagher is a Lewisham Homes tenant.

## 4. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet

There were no responses from Mayor and Cabinet.

## 5. Brockley PFI annual report and business plan (moved from agenda item 8)

Tracy Jones (Operations Manager, Regenter B3) and colleagues introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- 5.1 In 2017/18, RB3 achieved an overall customer satisfaction level of 93%. This is 4% less than it achieved in 2016/17. This may have been the result of more

proactive fire safety work, such as the zero tolerance policy on items left in communal areas, which some residents have objected to.

- 5.2 Participants in the customer satisfaction survey are chosen randomly. Surveys are carried out through a combination of face-to-face, telephone and postal surveys. There are set questions, which have been used since the start of the contract.
- 5.3 The committee noted and queried the fall in the collection rate over the summer. Officers informed the committee that tenants are encouraged to pay by direct debit.
- 5.4 RB3 collected 96% of service charges in 2017/18. Very few leaseholders have historic balances. For those that have, RB3 have tried to come to an agreement, but have had to take court action in some cases.
- 5.5 Officers from RB3 informed the committee that its performance targets are part of the PFI contract.
- 5.6 The committee noted that at the last meeting of the previous municipal year, after considering an item on a service failure by the out of hours repairs service during a period of cold weather, the committee suggested that officers write to residents who expressed concerns and report back to tenant and leaseholder groups.
- 5.7 The Brockley Residents Panel provides residents with a range of opportunities to comment on services. In 2017/18 RB3 introduced new Focus Groups for residents to focus on key issues that are important to them.
- 5.8 Brockley also has a resident association and RB3 have identified a group of residents who require support in establishing a new residents association and will work with them on this.
- 5.9 RB3 officers have received mental health training and have ties with social services. If a tenant is having problems with paying their rent, officers will provide support before considering an eviction. Very few tenants were evicted in 2017/18. Most evictions are for illegal subletting.
- 5.10 Rydon also deliver free of charge works to vulnerable tenants, such as changing lightbulbs and changing locks if locked out.

*Resolved: the committee noted the report.*

## **6. Housing in Lewisham overview (moved from agenda item 5)**

Rachel Dunn (Housing Policy and Partnerships Manager) gave a presentation. The following key points were noted:

- 6.1 Bringing empty homes back into use is part of the council's plans. There is also, among other things, a programme of property acquisition with Lewisham Homes, conversions of existing properties, and measures in the private rented sector to tackle rogue landlords.
- 6.2 The committee noted the increase in the number of people approaching the council for homelessness support since the coming into force of the Homelessness Reduction Act, and queried whether there has also been an increase in the number of people for which the council is accepting the full housing duty.
- 6.3 With Universal Credit soon to be rolled out in Lewisham, the council is expecting to receive some additional money for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). The council manages the money it had for DHP over the year and tries to forecast the impact of any changes, such as Universal Credit. It spends 100% of the money it receives for DHP.

*Resolved: the committee noted the presentation.*

## **7. Milford towers leasing arrangements (moved from agenda item 6)**

Rachel Dunn (Housing Policy and Partnerships Manager) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- 7.1 The officer report is due to go to Mayor and Cabinet recommending the extension of the leasing arrangements at Milford Towers for a further 6 years while plans for the redevelopment of Catford Town Centre are formed.
- 7.2 Plans for the final decant of Milford Towers will be managed closely with Notting Hill Genesis. Plans will be made well in advance to avoid putting any unnecessary pressure on housing stock in Lewisham. Officers will work with tenants to find opportunities as they arise. The Milford Towers contract includes annual review points which allows the council to plan the decant over time.
- 7.3 Milford towers is used to house homeless families where the units are big enough. Any re-lets that come up will go to homeless families for temporary accommodation. No properties will be left empty awaiting demolition.
- 7.4 Rents at Milford Towers started out at around 70% of market rents.

7.5 Money from the Milford Towers contract goes towards the housing budget.

*Resolved: The committee noted the report and agreed with the recommendations due to be made to Mayor and Cabinet on Wednesday 11th July.*

## **8. Lewisham Homes annual report (moved from agenda item 7)**

Margaret Dodwell (Chief Executive, Lewisham Homes) and Adam Barrett (Director of Resources, Lewisham Homes) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- 8.1 Over 2017/18, following the Grenfell fire tragedy, Lewisham Homes did a significant amount of work reviewing fire safety. Only three properties were found to have ACM cladding, which has now been removed.
- 8.2 Lewisham Homes have reduced the number of homes being built for market sale so that more are available for social rent. Out of the 29 new build properties in 2017/18, 8 were for market sale.
- 8.3 Lewisham Homes would like to see housing officers spending more time out on estates, visiting tenants if and when they need something. This is the direction of travel, however Lewisham Homes does not yet have the technology for fully mobile working like this.
- 8.4 Lewisham Homes collects information about its residents on an individual basis in order to get to know tenants better, improve services and flag up where tenants require support.
- 8.5 Lewisham Homes has a downsizing initiative, which has had some success. The underlying issue is however that there is more demand than supply. Lewisham Homes said that it is important to review the support and incentives to downsize and that this is something they will look at again.
- 8.6 Lewisham Homes acknowledged that they have had some problems with their customer service line. They are working hard to improve things and will come back to the committee on this. The average call turnaround time is currently around 2 minutes. Communications and engagement is an area of improvement that Lewisham Homes are focussing on.

*Resolved: the committee noted the report.*

## **9. New Homes Programme (moved from agenda item 7)**

Jeff Endean (Housing Strategy and Programmes Manager) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- 9.1 There will be three more projects involving Modern Methods of Construction, such as PLACE/Ladywell, over the next 18 months. Unlike PLACE/Ladywell, which is temporary housing, the next projects will be permanent housing.
- 9.2 The New Mayor has pledged to create 1,000 social homes over the next four years. Officers are currently planning for this and will bring a report in the autumn.
- 9.3 Officers are looking into ways of raising the finance necessary for these additional social homes. This includes speaking to the GLA about grant funding. Officers expect this to be formalised over the next few months.
- 9.4 Officers said that the council has enough delivery vehicles to build what it needs to, but stressed that the biggest challenge is land.

*Resolved: the committee noted the report.*

## **10. Select Committee work programme**

John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the draft committee work programme for 2018/19. The committee made the following comments and suggestions:

- 10.1 To include an item on the work programme looking into the way the council carries out consultation with residents of estates due for regeneration. Officers mentioned Achilles Street as a current example.
- 10.2 To include an item on the work programme looking at the housing element of the Lewisham Local Plan.

*Resolved: the Committee agreed the work programme for 2018/19.*

## **11. Referrals**

There were no referrals.

The meeting ended at 21.45pm

Chair:

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Date:

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