

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 31 October 2018, 7.30pm

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

Apologies: Susan Wise (Chair)

Also Present: Margaret Dodwell (Chief Executive, Lewisham Homes), Cllr Paul Bell (Cabinet Member for Housing), David Austin (Head of Corporate Resources), David Syme (Strategic Planning Manager), Madeleine Jeffery (Private Sector Housing Agency Manager), Jeff Endean (Housing Strategy and Programmes Manager), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services), and John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager).

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2018

Resolved: the minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true record with the following amendment:

- 1.1 Under the declarations of interest, Cllr Olurotimi Ogunbadewa to be recorded as a board member of Phoenix Housing instead of Lewisham Homes.

2. Declarations of interest

The following non-prejudicial interests were declared:

- Cllr Peter Bernards is a board member of Lewisham Homes.
- Cllr Olurotimi Ogunbadewa is a board member of Phoenix Housing.
- Cllr Silvana Kelleher is a Lewisham Homes tenant.
- Cllr Aisling Gallagher is a Lewisham Homes tenant.

3. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet

There were no responses.

4. Lewisham Homes business plan 2019-2022

Margaret Dodwell (Chief Executive, Lewisham Homes) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- 4.1 Lewisham Homes is developing its business plan for the next three years. It has engaged with residents, staff, staff unions, council officers, the Mayor, and local MPs.
- 4.2 As the council's housing-delivery company, Lewisham Homes' business plan will be aligned with the priorities of the council.

- 4.3 The business plan will include working in partnership with local organisations, such as health partners, to promote independent living, reduce social isolation, and improve access to employment.
- 4.4 The Chief Executive of Lewisham Homes will be meeting with the Director of Public Health for Lewisham to see how public health can be advanced through the housing agenda.
- 4.5 Finding ways to generate more income to fund tenancy sustainment and other discretionary activities is another key part of the business plan.
- 4.6 Lewisham Homes is taking into account the findings of the Hackitt report – which was commissioned by government following the Grenfell Tower fire to make recommendations on the future regulatory system.
- 4.7 Lewisham Homes is exploring opportunities for creating more homes by adding more stories on top of existing buildings – commonly known as ‘top-hatting’. This process could involve the use of modern methods of construction.
- 4.8 In order to deliver new homes, partnership working may involve joint ventures with housing associations, private contractors and other organisations.
- 4.9 Lewisham Homes wants to ensure that it is adding social value through its development programme by, for example, creating apprenticeships.

The committee asked a number of questions. The following key points were noted

- 4.10 Repairs are one of the most important issues for residents and fall within a number of areas of the draft business plan. The use of smart technology in assets, such as lifts for example, will be explored further as a way of improving services for residents.
- 4.11 Inclusivity training will be provided to the Lewisham Homes leadership team.
- 4.12 The committee noted Lewisham Homes’ responsibility to help tenants tackle anti-social behaviour and suggested that more detail on this should be included in the business plan.
- 4.13 The committee asked about the impact of the Government’s announcement to remove the cap on borrowing against the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
- 4.14 The Cabinet Member for Housing informed the committee that a briefing on the lifting of the HRA cap, and what this enables, will be provided to all members once the detail has been worked through.
- 4.15 The committee will have the opportunity to scrutinise the business plan again in early 2019.

Resolved: the committee noted the draft business plan.

5. The budget

David Austin (Head of Corporate Resources) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- 5.1 The council's Medium Term Financial Strategy identified the need for continued cuts to be made to the council's budget over the coming four years.
- 5.2 This report sets out £21m of cuts proposals against the target of £30m cuts in the two years to 2020/21 - £17m in 2019/20 and £13m in 2020/21.
- 5.3 The proposals are aligned to the 10 corporate objectives and Lewisham 2020 strategy.
- 5.4 Officers will be developing and returning with further cuts proposals for the second year (2020/21).

Jeff Endean (Housing strategy and Partnership Manager) introduced budget cut proposal **CUS9**: *Cost reductions in homelessness provision – income generation and net budget reductions*. The following key points were noted:

- 5.5 CUS9 comprises two proposals. The first is focused on generating income by investing in further developments like PLACE/Ladywell, which generate a net financial return to the council.
- 5.6 The proposal is to generate £460k of income from five temporary accommodation projects. This will also provide at least 90 new purpose-built homes as alternative to nightly paid accommodation.
- 5.7 One of the five projects is to provide homes for adults with learning disabilities, which would allow residents currently housed outside of the borough to be brought back to Lewisham.
- 5.8 The second part of CUS9 is focused on reducing the number of households in nightly-paid accommodation through a number of measures, including the delivery of further council-developed alternatives like PLACE/Ladywell.
- 5.9 This part of the proposal is planned to save £641k over 2019/20 and 2020/21.
- 5.10 The committee also noted proposal COM9, *cut to intensive housing advice and support service*, and queried whether reducing this service could lead to more people falling into the cycle of homelessness, which could end up costing the council more.
- 5.11 Officers informed the committee that risk would be mitigated by the council's work on the Homelessness Trailblazer project and extra investment in the Housing Options Centre and Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention services. As part of the Homelessness Reduction Act, the council is switching

its focus to homelessness prevention and training frontline staff to support and advise residents at a much earlier stage.

- 5.12 Officers agreed to report back on the implementation of COM9 in six months to see how the pressures have changed and how the council has coped with the new arrangements.

Resolved: the committee noted proposal CUS9 and agreed to receive an update on the implementation of proposal COM9 six months after implementation.

6. Lewisham local plan

David Syme (Strategic Planning Manager) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- 6.1 The council is currently undergoing a review of the Lewisham local plan.
- 6.2 The local plan sets out a strategy for development in the borough over the next 15 years, with a particular focus on housing needs and the infrastructure and community facilities necessary to meet these.
- 6.3 The current local plan has delivered significant investment in homes, infrastructure and jobs, but most of the sites identified have now been built or have planning approval.
- 6.4 There have been significant changes in regional planning policy, with the draft London Plan, and in national policy, with the new National Planning Policy Framework.
- 6.5 The key challenge in relation to housing will be meeting the significant increases in housing targets set to be required by regional and national policy.
- 6.6 The draft London plan increases the borough's housing target by almost 50% - from 1,385 to 2,117 homes per annum. This equates to more than 20,000 new homes over the next ten years that have to be delivered. Lewisham's historical delivery rate is around 1,500 units a year.
- 6.7 The new NPPF introduces a new housing delivery test, which introduces tough sanctions on those councils that are not meeting their housing targets. By 2020, if the council falls below 75% of the housing target, it will be classified as a council with the presumption in favour of sustainable development. This means that the council's ability to refuse planning applications on local issues, and defending appeals from developers, becomes much weaker. The council would be assessed on national planning policy and there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development that meets the national policy. This is a significant risk for the council going forward.

- 6.8 The draft figures for April 2017 to March 2018 from the annual monitoring review, which provides data on, among other things, completions, approvals, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) revenue, and s106 agreements, shows a significant reduction in the number of homes completed.
- 6.9 The local Lewisham Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) identifies the housing need within the borough, for example, students, older people, people with disabilities, families, and sets out the mix of housing that needs to be provided. This document will provide much more detail on affordable housing.
- 6.10 The draft SHMA is expected to be published by mid November 2018.
- 6.11 The council is bidding for new funding through the Mayor of London's Homebuilding Capacity Fund, which provides funding to support councils to develop the capacity to deliver new approaches to increasing housing supply. Councils can bid for up to £750,000 for two years.

The Chair proposed to suspend standing orders to continue the meeting. The committee agreed to suspend standing orders.

- 6.12 The committee noted that new NPPF introduces a requirement to carry out viability tests of local affordable housing targets at the local plan stage and queried what impact this would have on the council's affordable housing target.
- 6.13 Given Lewisham's historical housing delivery rate, the committee expressed some concern about new regional and national housing targets and the consequences for local planning decisions of not meeting these.

Resolved: the committee noted the report and agreed to receive a report on the Lewisham Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) once published.

7. Housing assistance policy refresh

Madeleine Jeffery (Private Sector Housing Agency Manager) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- 7.1 The council's housing assistance policy sets out how the council will target financial support and assistance to those in the private housing sector who are not able maintain their own home due to age, disability, vulnerability, lack of resources or lack of knowledge.
- 7.2 The key aims of the policy are to improve health outcomes, promote independent living, delay and reduce the need for long-term care and support, improve the sustainability of private sector homes, and bring empty homes back into use.

- 7.3 Last year, the council improved nearly 100 homes through this policy, with a 95% satisfaction rate.
- 7.4 The committee noted the significant difference between the discretionary fund that is budgeted and that which is spent and queried why this was.
- 7.5 Officers explained that the difference between the budget and spend of the discretionary fund was due to number of reasons, including capacity within the team, backlogs, and awareness of the scheme among residents.
- 7.6 One of the key challenges with the housing assistance policy is to better target the support to the people who need it. A key part of this is improving communications and raising awareness of the scheme.
- 7.7 The Cabinet Member for Housing offered to provide a briefing on the housing assistance scheme for councillors, which they can share with their constituents.
- 7.8 The committee also asked how many empty homes had been brought into use through this scheme. Officers agreed to provide the statistics on this. Officers noted that they are seeing an increase in the number of empty homes.

Resolved: the committee noted the report; agreed to receive a briefing for councillors on the housing assistance policy; and agreed to receive statistics on the number of empty homes brought back into use through the policy.

8. New Homes Programme

Jeff Endean (Housing Strategy and Programmes Manager) introduced the report.

Resolved: the committee noted the report.

9. Select Committee work programme

John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the work programme.

- 9.1 The committee agreed to receive a report on the Lewisham Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) at its meeting in December.
- 9.2 The committee agreed to amend to work programme to receive a report on the Lewisham Housing Strategy in March rather than January.

Resolved: the committee agreed the work programme.

10. Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet

There were no referrals.

The meeting ended at 22.10pm

Chair:

Date:
