

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Thursday 31 January 2019, 7.30pm

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

Also Present: John Barker (Housing Options and Advice Service Manager), Sarah Miran (Commissioning Manager), Declan Flynn (Bench Outreach), Louisa Snow (999 Club), Harriet Thomas (Homelessness Forum), Rachel Dunn (Housing Policy and Partnerships Manager), Angus Macdonald (Pinnacle), Jon Kanareck (Lewisham Homes), David Lee (Estates Manager), Gloria Biggs (Tenants' Fund), Tony Riordan (Principal Accountant), James Masini (Regeneration and New Supply Manager), Madeleine Jeffery (Assistant Director of Housing), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services), Cllr Paul Bell (Cabinet Member for Housing) and John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager).

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2018

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

2. Declarations of interest

The following non-prejudicial interests were declared:

- Cllr Peter Bernards is a board member of Lewisham Homes (in relation to item 5) and has a business which works with St Mungo's (item 4).
- 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.
- Cllr Stephen Penfold is employed by the Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network (in relation to item 4).

3. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet

There were no responses.

5. Proposed rent and service charge increases

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

- 5.1 This year is the fourth and last year of the government's 1% rent reduction for social landlords.
- 5.2 In 2020/21 rents levels are expected to increase in line with previous government guidance. This was the rate of CPI inflation (target of 2%) plus 1%.
- 5.3 Information on rent levels from 2020/21 cannot be shared with tenants until guidance and confirmation is received from the government.

- 5.4 In April 2020 the council will come under the social housing regulator for social rents.
- 5.5 Over the four years that the 1% rent reduction has been in place, Lewisham Homes has received around £25m less in rent than previously forecasted.
- 5.6 The added pressure on the HRA following the Grenfell disaster has started to place significant pressure on health and safety issues and major works.
- 5.7 The committee expressed concerned about the 25% increase in charges for garages at a time when there are increased complaints about repairs and asked about refurbishment plans for garages following the increase.
- 5.8 The 25% increase in garage charges is intended to bring charges up to market rent, it is not intended for repairs and refurbishment. However, some of the extra income will be put towards a programme to invest in garages.
- 5.9 There is not expected to be an increase in voids following the garage charge increase.

Resolved: the committee noted the report.

4. Lewisham Homelessness Forum

John Barker (Housing Options and Advice Service Manager) introduced the item. The following key points were noted:

- 4.1 There are different ways of counting rough sleeping. CHAIN is the established method in London, which counts verified contacts with rough sleepers and is ongoing, whereas the government looks at street counts, which are a snapshot.
- 4.2 However, not all boroughs or districts do street counts and many will make an estimation. Street counts do not take account of rough sleepers in shelters either.
- 4.3 The national rough sleeping figures likely significantly underestimate the issue.
- 4.4 The most effective way to measure rough sleeping is to take the intelligence from CHAIN and street counts to a meeting with local partners and look at individual names.
- 4.5 Local authorities tend to work closely with each other on rough sleeping on a case by case basis. Lewisham will often assist non-Lewisham residents and other local authorities will assist Lewisham residents sleeping rough outside of the borough.
- 4.6 Rough sleeping street counts are organised along five or six areas and based on intelligence gathering beforehand. Lewisham Hospital is frequently visited during street counts. There are also moves to monitor public transport - London Street Rescue, for example, has recently been given funding to monitor public transport at night.
- 4.7 Increasing the rough sleeping outreach team is the biggest current challenge in Lewisham.
- 4.8 Tenancy sustainment is a significant issue with homelessness and rough sleeping. Many people on the verge of being evicted just need assistance with their universal credit or housing benefit.

- 4.9 *Housing First* is a homelessness intervention strategy aimed at people with complex needs, particularly rough sleepers, which prioritises the early provision of permanent housing. Around 90% of Lewisham's *Housing First* cohort, had social housing tenancies. People are often evicted, and made to go through the homelessness process, only to end up with a social housing tenancy. Housing First type support should be provided before people are evicted.
- 4.10 The committee noted the correlation between homelessness and brain injury and the risk of rough sleepers being misdiagnosed with mental health issues and put into the completely wrong pathway.
- 4.11 The committee noted the significant increase in rough sleeping nationally since 2010.

Resolved: the committee thanked the Lewisham Homelessness Forum for the information and comments presented to the committee and suggested that the Forum should be invited again next year to provide an update. The committee also agreed to receive a copy of a recent study of the Housing First initiative.

6. New Homes Programme

James Masini (Regeneration and New Supply Manager) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- 6.1 The Mayow Road development will provide around 27 temporary accommodation and 6 supported living units for families. Most units will be 2 bedroom, with some 3 bedroom units
- 6.2 The development will be a permanent, traditional build. Modular housing was not appropriate given some of the supporting living requirements.
- 6.3 The committee commented that 2 bedroom units should not be considered family sized and suggested that it is be made clear that family size is 3 bedrooms plus.
- 6.4 The committee asked to receive information about the size mix of the Mayow Road development as soon as it became available.
- 6.5 Officers are working closely with Lewisham Homes and development partners to come up with a programme to deliver 1,000 new council homes.
- 6.6 A pipeline of all the proposed homes will be ready by March 2019.
- 6.7 Work on the Tidemill development will start as soon as possible. The council is currently in discussions with Peabody about signing over the land.

Resolved: the committee noted the report and agreed to receive further information on the Mayor Road Development and the 1,000 council home pipeline once available.

7. Select Committee work programme

John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the work programme.

- 9.1 The Scrutiny Manager noted that the work programme item at the next meeting, the final meeting of this municipal year, is a good opportunity for members of

the committee to make suggestions about topics that the incoming committee could consider in the next municipal year.

Resolved: the committee agreed the work programme.

8. Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet

There were no referrals.

The meeting ended at 21.30pm

Chair:

Date:
