

# MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 4 June 2019, 7.30pm

Present: Councillors Peter Bernards (Chair), Stephen Penfold (Vice Chair), Aisling Gallagher, Tom Copley, Olurotimi Ogunbadewa, Sue Hordijkenko, and Susan Wise.

Apologies: Cllrs Alan Smith and Silvana Kelleher.

Also present: Natasha Valladeres (Projects and New Supply Strategy Manager), Jon Kanareck (Director of Resident Experience, Lewisham Homes), Rowann Limon (Director of Finance and Technology, Lewisham Homes), Gordon Shepherd (RB3), Maxeene McFarlane (RB3), Kate Donovan (Pinnacle), Paul Bell (Cabinet Member for Housing), Kevin Sheehan (Executive Director for Customer Services), and John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager).

## 1. Minutes of the meeting held on 1 May 2019

*Resolved: the minutes of the last meeting were agreed with the following amendments:*

- 1.1 The inclusion of Cllr Alan Hall on the attendance list
- 1.2 The addition of the following comments under item 5, Lewisham Homes annual business plan:

*One councillor asked why the Deputy Chief Executive and Finance Director of Lewisham Homes had left. The Chair of Lewisham Homes agreed to provide further details outside of the meeting.*

- 1.3 The following amendment to para 5.12

*The committee queried the specific reasons behind the eviction statistics and asked for a detailed breakdown of the reasons, for example, rent arrears, anti-social behaviour, succession, and if this could be set out in future reports.*

## 2. Declarations of interest

The following non-prejudicial interests were declared:

- Cllr Olurotimi Ogunbadewa is a board member of Phoenix Housing.
- Cllr Sue Hordijkenko is a board member of Phoenix Housing.
- Cllr Susan Wise is a board member of Lewisham Homes.
- Cllr Silvana Kelleher is a Lewisham Homes tenant.
- Cllrs Aisling Gallagher is a Lewisham Homes tenant.

## 3. Responses from Mayor and Cabinet

There were no responses from Mayor and Cabinet.

#### **4. Lewisham Homes acquisitions programme**

Natasha Valladeres (Projects and New Supply Strategy Manager) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- 4.1 The acquisitions programme has allowed Lewisham Homes to acquire properties on the open market to increase the supply of temporary accommodation and reduce the use of nightly-paid temporary accommodation.
- 4.2 Mayor and Cabinet are due to consider a proposal to provide a loan of up to £5m for Lewisham Homes to continue the acquisitions programme.
- 4.3 The loan will allow Lewisham Homes to act quickly if properties become available, particularly “buybacks” (buying back homes previously sold under right-to-buy).
- 4.4 Lewisham Homes are carrying out extensive modelling to see how many properties can be acquired with £5m, but anticipate a minimum of 20. Lewisham Homes have to be able to pay back the loan with rents received at the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate.
- 4.5 The loan will be on an interest-only basis with the principal repaid by Lewisham Homes at the term of the loan. The interest rate will be established at the point the loan is drawdown.

*Resolved: the committee noted the report and the proposed recommendations to M&C.*

#### **5. Lewisham Homes – 2018/19 Performance Update**

Jon Kanareck (Director of Resident Experience, Lewisham Homes) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- 5.1 Lewisham Homes is introducing a quarterly STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) and moving towards a Net Promoter Score for measuring tenant and leaseholder satisfaction. Residents who want to will be contacted to discuss dissatisfaction so that issues can be looked into in more detail.
- 5.2 Lewisham Homes has a large manual workforce and now has a referral process for staff to physiotherapy and a variety of other services.
- 5.3 The committee asked why only 18 new homes had been completed against a target of 31. Lewisham Homes noted that there had been issues with delivery, but that more homes are starting to come out of the ground. The committee asked to receive an update at a later meeting from the Director of Development at Lewisham Homes.

- 5.4 Lewisham Homes has achieved a 94% rent collection rate for Universal Credit claimants and is putting in additional resource as the number of claimants is expected to increase.
- 5.5 Lewisham Homes is working with the credit union to help tenants in temporary accommodation who are finding it difficult to access permanent accommodation because they are in arrears.
- 5.6 The committee noted that people with mental ill health are more likely to fall into arrears and asked what measures are in place to identify this before starting the eviction process.
- 5.7 Where there is an issue around vulnerability Lewisham Homes will work closely with the council to review the case and provide support from social workers and social care.
- 5.8 The committee asked to receive a breakdown of the reasons for evictions – rent arrears, anti-social behaviour, or succession, for example.

*Resolved: the committee noted the report and agreed to receive a breakdown of the reasons for evictions.*

## **6. Lewisham Homes – 2018/19 Performance Update**

Gordon Shepherd (RB3) introduced the report. The following key points were noted:

- 6.1 The committee welcomed the creation of new Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs).
- 6.2 Regenter have been working with the residents' panel to discuss responsibility and timescales for repairs. Tenants have asked for this information to be communicated better. The committee noted the timescales for repairs and maintenance asked to see examples of each repairs category.
- 6.3 Regenter are in ongoing discussions about who is responsible for aesthetic decoration following planned works like re-pointing, brickwork, and window repairs, for example.
- 6.4 The committee asked if tenants with mental health needs and other vulnerabilities are identified through the tenancy check process.
- 6.5 The tenancy check process is primarily intended to identify fraudulent subletting, but housing managers are trained to look out for any vulnerability issues. Regenter are looking to develop stronger links with relevant agencies in Lewisham over the next 12 months.
- 6.6 The committee expressed concern about anti-social behaviour and resident safety and asked what is being done to improve security in blocks?

- 6.7 Where Regenter believe that there's a particular security issue they approach the council about making security improvements to that block. Regenter offered to look into developing proposals for additional security measures on its blocks. As it is a PFI, any additional security would need to be funded by the council.
- 6.8 The committee requested further information on the number of tenants evicted for rent arrears.

*Resolved: the committee noted the report and agreed to receive the further information specified in the minutes.*

## **7. Resident engagement in housing development scoping paper**

John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the scoping paper. The following key points were noted:

- 7.1 The committee discussed arranging visits to other local authorities as part of the review, including Islington, Southwark (Creation Trust), Hackney (King's Crescent Estate) and Camden (Cherry Court).
- 7.2 The committee suggested that the review should look into what the council has learned from previous engagement and whether this has led to any changes to internal processes and the way the council carries out engagement around housing development.
- 7.3 The committee suggested that the review should also seek to gather the views of the community on what the council has done well and what hasn't worked. The committee agreed to put out a public call for evidence on the council's website as part of the review. The scrutiny manager agreed to draft a set of questions for the call for evidence.
- 7.4 The committee suggested speaking to Tenant and Resident Association (TRA) chairs and reps on some of the estates that have been affected by housing development. The committee also suggested visiting some TRAs to have an informal discussion. The committee suggested that September/October would be the best time to engage with the TRAs and the public.
- 7.5 The committee queried whether the council had ever brought in external organisations to provide support to residents during engagement and consultation periods.
- 7.6 The committee expressed interest in attending any engagement activity happening in the borough during the course of the review.

*Resolved: the committee agreed the key lines of enquiry and timetable for the review; the focus of the first evidence session; and to put out a call for evidence on the council website.*

## 8. Select Committee work programme

John Bardens (Scrutiny Manager) introduced the work programme:

- 8.1 The committee discussed a councillor-produced briefing on overcrowding and agreed to include an item on overcrowding in its work programme – provisionally in July.
- 8.2 The committee discussed including an update on new development in its work programme and inviting Lewisham Homes' Director of Development and the council's Director Regeneration & Place.

*Resolved: the committee agreed the work programme.*

## 9. Referrals

There were no referrals.

The meeting ended at 21.25pm

Chair:

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Date:

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