



## Housing Select Committee

### **Report title: Select Committee work programme report**

**Date:** 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020

**Key decision:** No.

**Class:** Part 1

**Ward(s) affected:** All

**Contributors:** Assistant Chief Executive (Scrutiny Manager)

### **Outline and recommendations**

To ask members to discuss the committee's priorities for the 2020/21 municipal year and to agree an annual work programme.

The Committee is asked to:

- Consider the themes set out in the draft work programme at **appendix E**.
- Discuss the committee's priorities and agree a work programme for 2020/21.
- Consider opportunities for public engagement throughout the work programme.

### **Timeline of engagement and decision-making**

The meeting dates below were agreed at the Council AGM on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2020:

- Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020
- Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2020
- Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021
- Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021

## 1. Summary

- 1.1. This report asks members to discuss and agree priorities for the committee's work programme for the year ahead and describes the process for approval by the business panel and ongoing monitoring by the committee.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The Committee is asked to:
  - Consider the themes set out in the draft work programme at **appendix E**.
  - Discuss the committee's priorities and agree a work programme for 2020-21.
  - Consider opportunities for public engagement throughout the work programme.

## 3. The role of the select committee

- 3.1. The role of the Housing Select Committee is to monitor the provision of the council's housing functions. This includes scrutinising Lewisham Homes and Regenter B3, which manage the council's stock of council properties, and establishing links with other social housing providers in the borough.
- 3.2. A key part of the Committee's role is scrutinising the performance and objectives of the council's housing strategies. This includes support and accommodation for those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness; measures to increase the supply of new, affordable housing; improving conditions in the private rented sector; and improving standards in social housing.
- 3.3. The Committee's full terms of reference are set out in **appendix A**.

## 4. Agreeing the committee's work programme

- 4.1. A draft work programme is attached at appendix E. It currently includes suggestions made by last year's committee; suggestions from council officers; and issues arising as a result of previous scrutiny (further detail is set out in sections below).
- 4.2. It is for the committee, however, to set its own work programme and agree any other priority issues it would like to include – the committee does not have to look into everything officers, the public or other members suggest.
- 4.3. When deciding on issues to include in the work programme, the committee should consider the key services and programmes within the committee's remit and the criteria for selecting and prioritising topics (see flowchart below).
- 4.4. The committee should also take into account upcoming Mayor & Cabinet decisions (appendix D) and avoid duplicating the work of any agreed task and finish groups (TFGs). No TFGs have been agreed to date.
- 4.5. Items within the work programme should also be linked to the priorities of the Council's Corporate Strategy for 2018-2022 (appendix B):
- 4.6. The committee is recommended to schedule **two substantive items per meeting**, leaving space available for Mayor & Cabinet responses and other urgent business as the need arises throughout the year.
- 4.7. Taking into account the provisional work programme attached at Appendix E, there is capacity for *two* further items to be added to the programme – one extra item at both the January and March meetings.
- 4.8. Provision is made for meetings to last for up to 2.5 hours, but the committee should aim

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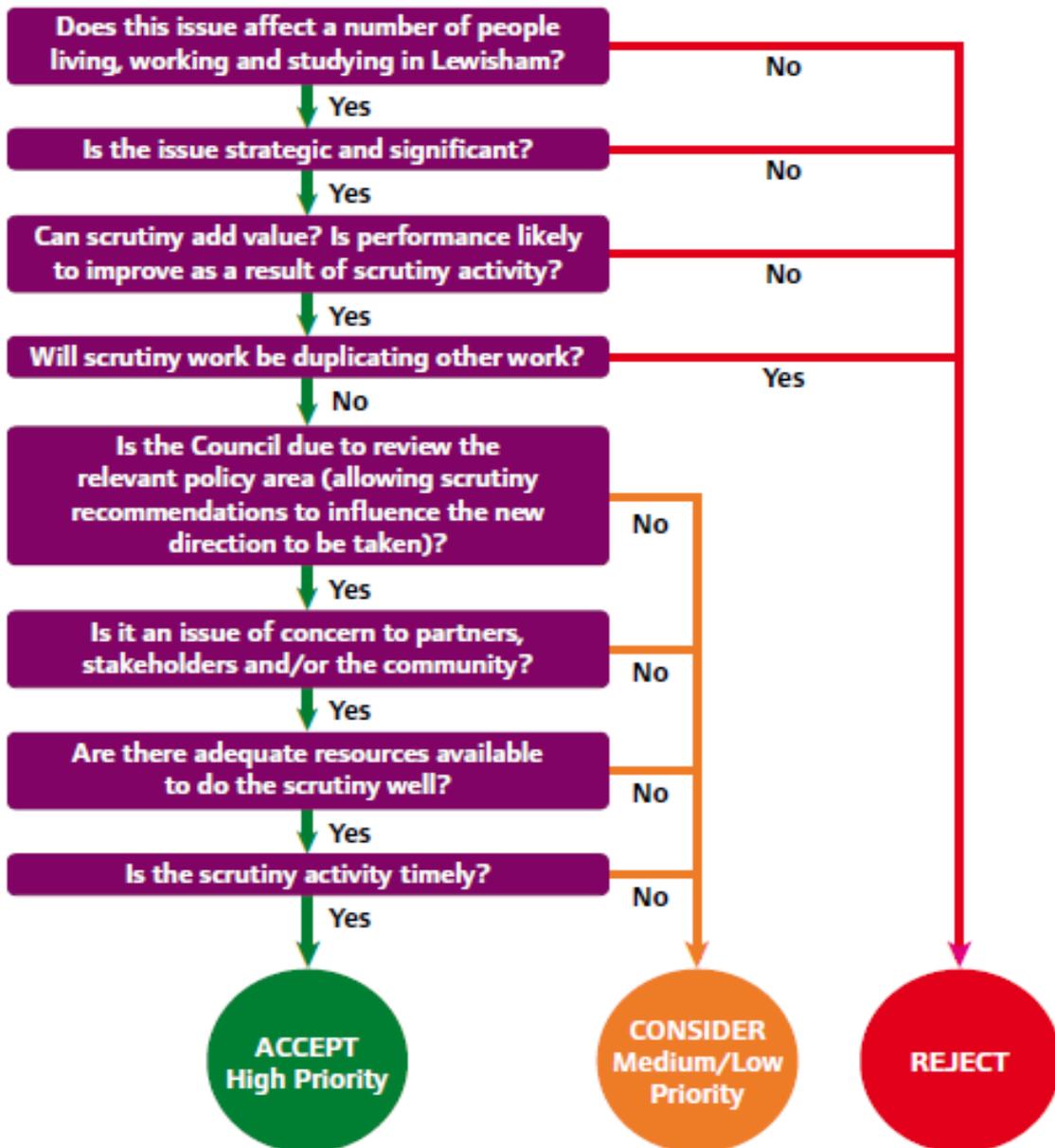
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to **manage its business within 2 hours**. In exceptional cases the committee may decide to suspend standing orders and extend the meeting for a further 30 minutes to conclude any urgent business.

- 4.9. The committee should specify the information it would like for each item to ensure that officer reports and other evidence meets its needs. This should be done under the work programme item at every meeting.

## Scrutiny work programme – prioritisation process



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- 4.10. There is no provision at committee for the discussion of information items (reports to note). If required, they will be circulated to members by email with questions put to the report author for a written response.
- 4.11. Some of the regular reports that fall under the committee's remit, which are usually presented as reports to note and therefore likely to be circulated by email in the first instance, include:
- Lewisham Homes annual report and business plan
  - Regenter B3 annual report and business plan
  - Annual lettings plan
  - Rent and service charge increases
  - New homes programme updates
- 4.12. It's the Chair's responsibility to keep abreast of other developments within the committee's remit and escalate any issues that require action by the committee to the work programme as appropriate.
- 4.13. Suggestions made by the committee at the last meeting of 2019-20
- 4.14. **The performance of Lewisham Homes' repairs service** – to look into the quality of repairs being carried out including complaints and commendations about the service; business plans, budgets and KPIs; and best practice from other providers, including private contractors. Depending on the time and resources available, to also consider the possibility of the repairs service being expanded in the future to serve non-Lewisham Homes residents in the private sector. (Timeframe – tbc).
- 4.15. **Medical assessment for banding within the Lewisham Housing Allocations Scheme** – to look into how the process works and how our decisions are communicated to applicants. The committee may want to request an initial written briefing on how the process works before considering at a later meeting. (Timeframe – tbc).
- 4.16. **Homesearch, Lewisham's choice-based lettings scheme, (or its replacement)** – to look into information and data on applications and outcomes, including customer issues and complaints. The committee may want to request an initial briefing before deciding whether to consider at a later meeting. (Timeframe – tbc).
- 4.17. **Shared ownership** - Vice Chair, Cllr Penfold, recently circulated a briefing outlining a number of potential issues with the model relating to, among other things, arrears, service charges, subletting and bereavement. The committee should also note that the London Assembly Housing Committee concluded its own investigation into shared ownership in March and made a number of [recommendations to the Mayor of London](#) on service charges, lease extensions, staircasing, and transparency. The committee may want to take this into account when deciding the direction of any further work on this issue. (Timeframe – tbc).
- 4.18. Suggestions from officers in view of forthcoming developments
- 4.19. **Financial stabilisation: budget update and medium term plan (15<sup>th</sup> September)** – a monitoring update and medium term financial planning report to show how officers are managing the current challenges and uncertainties.
- 4.20. **Covid response (15<sup>th</sup> September)** – a comprehensive briefing on the housing service's response to Covid-19 covering, among other things, homelessness, rough sleeping, temporary accommodation, hostels, No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), new homes programme, housing targets, and Homesearch.
- 4.21. **Budget cuts proposals (18<sup>th</sup> November)** – the council continues to identify areas from which it will deliver significant budget reductions in order to agree a balanced budget, as required by legislation. A paper outlining budget cuts/proposals will be available to be

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considered by each select committee in the November/December round of meetings. The main budget report will then go to Public Accounts on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 and the Chairs of Select Committees will be invited. Last year ([September 2019](#)) the committee considered cuts to NRPF and the Private Sector Housing Agency.

- 4.22. **Fire safety (Suggested timeframe – 9<sup>th</sup> March)** – an opportunity to scrutinise progress on fire safety across Lewisham-owned stock, housing association stock and private sector stock. The committee has received similar reports since 2017. There may be particular areas of interest to the committee such as the replacement of defective fire doors (last considered in [May 2019](#)), the Lewisham Homes fire safety standard ([Dec 2018](#)) and the [draft fire safety bill](#), for example.
- 4.23. Issues arising as a result of previous scrutiny
- 4.24. **Overcrowding / allocations – (timeframe – 18<sup>th</sup> November)** the committee is due a response to its referral regarding the adoption of the statutory definition of overcrowding as an additional measure of overcrowding (made in [January 2020](#)). Officers also stated, in [March](#), that they would be reviewing the housing allocations policy this year, with a focus on priority banding such as overcrowding and victims of domestic abuse. As well as this, the council is also rolling out a new integrated housing IT system for allocations and lettings. Given previous work and upcoming developments the committee may want to allocate further time to these issues.
- 4.25. **No recourse to public funds (NRPF) (timeframe – tbc)** – the committee considered the findings of the independent review of the NRPF service in [October 2020](#). The committee requested a progress update on the recommendations of the review, including the number of legal reviews and to hear from the advocacy groups and stakeholders the council has been engaging with, such as Project 17, for example. The committee may also want to explore the impact of Covid-19 on the service.
- 4.26. **Homelessness (suggested timeframe – 28<sup>th</sup> January)** – even before Covid-19, homelessness, rough sleeping and temporary accommodation pressures were among the most pressing issues for the council. In the last municipal year, the committee dedicated a large part of its time to considering the impact of the *Homelessness Reduction Act 2017* (HRA) (most recently in [March 2020](#)) and out-of-borough placements (in [September 2019](#)). At its meeting in March the committee asked for further information on the financial impact of the HRA and the number of households representing as homeless after being placed in the private rented sector. Officers also stated, in [March](#), that they would be reviewing both the location priority policy for the allocation of temporary accommodation and the resettlement service for out of borough placements. The committee may want to continue to review these matters alongside Covid-related issues such as potential future increases in demand.
- 4.27. **Resident engagement in housing development (timeframe – tbc)** – following an in-depth review of this area the committee made a series of recommendations to Mayor & Cabinet in [January 2020](#). The committee is due a response to its recommendations and has previously considered inviting other local housing associations to committee to discuss this topic. The committee may also wish to consider the changes in approach that have been developed since Covid-19 and the restrictions that have been in place.

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## 5. Different types of scrutiny

- 5.1. It's important to think early on about the most effective way to scrutinise each item on the work programme. Some issues may only require an initial briefing for information, circulated by email, for information, some may require site visits and public engagement, and others may require detailed questioning at a formal committee meeting and input from stakeholders
- 5.2. The *Effective Scrutiny Guidelines* at **appendix C** sets out 5 key principles to take into account when carrying out scrutiny: *Prioritise; Be independent; Work Collectively; Engage; make SMART recommendations*. This will help the committee decide on the most appropriate approach for the issue at hand.
- 5.3. Members should also note the comments in the [Local Democracy Review](#) about how scrutiny can be even more effective, participative and open. Suggestions included:
  - Focusing on fewer issues more closely linked to council priorities
  - More engagement with the public outside of formal meetings
  - Individual scrutiny members leading on defined topic areas
  - Contributing to new policy proposals at an early stage
- 5.4. Some of the most common scrutiny methods are described below, but members are encouraged to try new ways of gathering evidence and engaging the public.
- 5.5. “Standard items”
- 5.6. The majority of work programme items tend to be “standard items”, where scrutiny is carried out as part of a single meeting with members:
  - agreeing in advance the information and analysis needed
  - receiving an officer report presenting the relevant information
  - gathering additional evidence from activity outside of meetings
  - asking questions of the presenting officers or expert guests
  - agreeing recommendations to Mayor and Cabinet and partners.
- 5.7. Policy development
- 5.8. When the council is due to renew a policy the committee may be asked to consider the options available and officer recommendations before a decision by Mayor and Cabinet. Select committees should be engaged at an early enough stage to be able to influence and contribute to the new policy.
- 5.9. Performance monitoring
- 5.10. Scrutiny can request a wide range of performance information to examine the effectiveness of council services. This includes monitoring data on key performance indicators and outcomes and assessing the delivery of particular programme or projects against set targets or timescales.
- 5.11. Task and Finish Groups
- 5.12. For issues that require more extensive evidence gathering, members may put forward a proposal for a Task and Finish Group (TFG). The Overview & Scrutiny Committee will agree which TFGs should be established, their membership, terms of reference and duration. TFGs are independent of select committees and make recommendations directly to Mayor & Cabinet.
- 5.13. Information items
- 5.14. Some low-priority items may only require a briefing report to be circulated to committee members by email, with questions put to the report author for written response. There is no provision for discussion of information items at committee meetings.

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## **6. Approval and ongoing monitoring of the work programme**

- 6.1. Each select committee is required to submit its work programme to the Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel for approval. This is to ensure a coordinated overview and scrutiny work programme across select committees that avoids duplication of effort and supports effective scrutiny. The Business Panel will meet on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2020.
- 6.2. The committee's work programme can be reviewed at each meeting to allow urgent items to be added and lower priority issues to be removed. Any potential items should be considered against the priority criteria outlined earlier in this report. If a high-priority item is included, a lower-priority item should be removed. The committee's work programme must be achievable in the time available.

## **7. Financial implications**

- 7.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. Items on the Committee's work programme will have financial implications and these will need to be considered as part of the reports on those items

## **8. Legal implications**

- 8.1. In accordance with the Council's Constitution, all scrutiny select committees must devise and submit a work programme to the Business Panel at the start of each municipal year.

## **9. Equalities implications**

- 9.1. Equality Act 2010 brought together all previous equality legislation in England, Scotland and Wales. The Act included a new public sector equality duty, replacing the separate duties relating to race, disability and gender equality. The duty came into force on 6 April 2011. It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 9.2. The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
  - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
  - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
  - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 9.3. There may be equalities implications arising from items on the work programme and all activities undertaken by the Select Committee will need to give due consideration to this.

## **10. Climate change and environmental implications**

- 10.1. There are no direct climate change or environmental implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. Items on the Committee's work programme may have climate change implications and these will need to be considered as part of the reports on those items.

## **11. Crime and disorder implications**

- 11.1. There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. Items on the Committee's work programme may

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have crime and disorder implications and these will need to be considered as part of the reports on those items.

## **12. Health and wellbeing implications**

- 12.1. There are no direct health and wellbeing implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. Items on the Committee's work programme may have health and wellbeing implications and these will need to be considered as part of the reports on those items.

## **13. Report author and contact**

- 13.1. If you have any questions about this report please contact: John Bardens, 020 8314 9976 [john.bardens@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:john.bardens@lewisham.gov.uk).

## **14. Appendices**

Appendix A – [Committee terms of reference](#) (see below)

Appendix B – [Council corporate priorities](#) (see below)

Appendix C – Effective scrutiny principles (see attached)

Appendix D – Notice of forthcoming executive decisions (see attached)

Appendix E – Draft work programme (see attached)

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## Appendix A

The following roles are common to all select committees:

### (a) General functions

- To review and scrutinise decisions made and actions taken in relation to executive and non-executive functions
- To make reports and recommendations to the Council or the executive, arising out of such review and scrutiny in relation to any executive or non-executive function
- To make reports or recommendations to the Council and/or Executive in relation to matters affecting the area or its residents
- The right to require the attendance of members and officers to answer questions includes a right to require a member to attend to answer questions on up and coming decisions

### (b) Policy development

- To assist the executive in matters of policy development by in depth analysis of strategic policy issues facing the Council for report and/or recommendation to the Executive or Council or committee as appropriate
- To conduct research, community and/or other consultation in the analysis of policy options available to the Council
- To liaise with other public organisations operating in the borough – both national, regional and local, to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working in policy development wherever possible

### (c) Scrutiny

- To scrutinise the decisions made by and the performance of the Executive and other committees and Council officers both in relation to individual decisions made and over time
- To scrutinise previous performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives/performance targets and/or particular service areas
- To question members of the Executive or appropriate committees and executive directors personally about decisions
- To question members of the Executive or appropriate committees and executive directors in relation to previous performance whether generally in comparison with service plans and targets over time or in relation to particular initiatives which have been implemented
- To scrutinise the performance of other public bodies in the borough and to invite them to make reports to and/or address the select committee/Business Panel and local people about their activities and performance
- To question and gather evidence from any person outside the Council (with their consent)
- To make recommendations to the Executive or appropriate committee and/or Council arising from the outcome of the scrutiny process

### (d) Community representation

- To promote and put into effect closer links between overview and scrutiny members and the local community
- To encourage and stimulate an enhanced community representative role for overview and scrutiny members including enhanced methods of consultation with local people
- To liaise with the Council's ward assemblies so that the local community might participate in the democratic process and where it considers it appropriate to seek the views of the ward assemblies on matters that affect or are likely to affect the local areas, including accepting items for the agenda of the appropriate select committee from ward assemblies.
- To keep the Council's local ward assemblies under review and to make recommendations to the Executive and/or Council as to how participation in the democratic process by local

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people can be enhanced

- To receive petitions, deputations and representations from local people and other stakeholders about areas of concern within their overview and scrutiny remit, to refer them to the Executive, appropriate committee or officer for action, with a recommendation or report if the committee considers that necessary
- To consider any referral within their remit referred to it by a member under the Councillor Call for Action, and if they consider it appropriate to scrutinise decisions and/or actions taken in relation to that matter, and/or make recommendations/report to the Executive (for executive matters) or the Council (non-executive matters).

**(e) Finance**

- To exercise overall responsibility for finances made available to it for use in the performance of its overview and scrutiny function.

**(f) Work programme**

- As far as possible to draw up a draft annual work programme in each municipal year for consideration by the overview and scrutiny Business Panel. Once approved by the Business Panel, the relevant select committee will implement the programme during that municipal year. Nothing in this arrangement inhibits the right of every member of a select committee (or the Business Panel) to place an item on the agenda of that select committee (or Business Panel respectively) for discussion.
- The Council and the Executive will also be able to request that the overview and scrutiny select committee research and/or report on matters of concern and the select committee will consider whether the work can be carried out as requested. If it can be accommodated, the select committee will perform it. If the committee has reservations about performing the requested work, it will refer the matter to the Business Panel for decision.

**The Housing Select Committee has specific responsibilities for the following:**

- a) To fulfil all overview and scrutiny functions in relation to the discharge by the authority of its housing functions. This shall include the power to:
- b) review and scrutinise decisions made or other action taken in connection with the discharge of the Council of its housing function
- c) make reports or recommendations to the authority and/or Mayor and Cabinet with respect to the discharge of these functions
- d) make recommendations to the authority and/or Mayor and Cabinet proposals for housing policy
- e) to review initiatives put in place by the Council with a view to improving, increasing and enhancing housing in the borough, making recommendations and/or report thereon to the Council and/or Mayor and Cabinet
- f) To establish links with housing providers in the borough which are concerned with the provision of social housing

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## Appendix B

Council corporate priorities 2018-2022

Items within the work programme should be linked to the priorities of the Council's Corporate Strategy for 2018-2022 (set out below):

**Open Lewisham** - Lewisham is a welcoming place of safety for all, where we celebrate the diversity that strengthens us.

**Tackling the housing crisis** - Everyone has a decent home that is secure and affordable.

**Giving children and young people the best start in life** - Every child has access to an outstanding and inspiring education, and is given the support they need to keep them safe, well and able to achieve their full potential.

**Building an inclusive local economy** - Everyone can access high-quality job opportunities, with decent pay and security in our thriving and inclusive local economy.

**Delivering and defending: health, social care and support** - Ensuring everyone receives the health, mental health, social care and support services they need.

**Making Lewisham greener** - Everyone enjoys our green spaces, and benefits from a healthy environment as we work to protect and improve our local environment.

**Building safer communities** - Every resident feels safe and secure living here as we work together towards a borough free from the fear of crime.

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