18 January 2018 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT:

Vice-Chair: Councillor Peter Barnett (in the Chair)

Committee Members: Councillors Millie Balkan, Nick Halebi, Gerry Lyons, Keith Rayner

Councillors in Attendance: Councillor Khevyn Limbajee

Officers in Attendance:

Susan Gatrell, London & Quadrant
Matthew Peel, London & Quadrant
Maureen McEleny, Interim Assistant Director, Housing Management Services
Darren Welsh, Director of Housing
Modester Anucha, Assistant Director, Housing Solutions
Ade Fashade, Policy Officer
Anthony Clements, Democratic Services Officer

18. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Councillor Anna Mbachu, Councillor Keith Rayner substituting.

Apologies were also received from James Holden, Head of Policy.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

20. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Members asked that the duplication in the attendance list of the names of Councillors Balkan and Limbajee be removed. It was agreed that the minutes should also be amended to reflect that Councillor Aktar Beg was in attendance.

The minutes were otherwise agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

21. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None.
22. ROLE OF HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS IN THE LOCAL DELIVERY AND MANAGEMENT OF HOUSING

Officers from London & Quadrant (L & Q) (Susan Gatrell and Matthew Peel) outlined the work of their Housing Association in Waltham Forest. This explained that the Housing Association was a not for profit social enterprise business model allowing a long term view of the delivery of housing. L & Q was the second largest provider of housing in Waltham Forest with up to 6,000 homes in the borough. The Housing Association was also in the process of moving to a position of resident-led governance of estates etc.

Councillor Balkan asked about the support given by L & Q to the Citizens’ Advice Bureau and officers confirmed that the Bureau was supported to offer residents debt advice etc. The percentage of properties occupied by social tenants was 60-80% although Susan Gatrell would provide an exact figure.

Councillor Halebi queried the charge for affordable housing in Waltham Forest. Matthew Peel responded that, in central London, this would be 30-40% of the market rate but he would supply the exact figure for Waltham Forest. Examples of current rental figures in Waltham Forest were, for a one bedroom property - £129.45 per week, three bedrooms - £178 and four bedrooms - £199. The proportion of sale to rental properties was aimed to be 50:50 but exact figures for this in Waltham Forest could also be supplied.

Councillor Rayner raised the absorption by L & Q of East Thames Housing including East Homes. The lifts in one of the sheltered housing blocks had been out of order for in excess of nine months and East Thames had also reduced their staff presence on site. Matthew Peel responded that previous issues with East Homes were under review and that a strategy was in place to enhance the East Homes service. Further information could be provided on the strategy for East Homes. Councillor Rayner added that East Thames had not provided keys or training for residents in how to operate stair lifts.

Councillor Barnett asked what had been the impact of shared ownership on L & Q. Susan Gatrell responded that L & Q had a mixed tenure of housing but there should still be full quality of service to all residents. Shared ownership was offered and the property manager was responsible for each site, allowing continuity and better quality of service.

A map and details of L & Q properties in the Chingford area would also be provided to the Committee.

Action:

- Percentage of properties in Waltham Forest rented by London & Quadrant to social tenants – Sue Gatrell (London and Quadrant) to provide.
- Details of rent charged by London & Quadrant for affordable housing in Waltham Forest – Matthew Peel (London and Quadrant) to forward.
• Proportion on of London & Quadrant properties that are for sale or for rent – Mathew Peel to supply.
• Dog Track Development – Number of properties in total and how many properties went to the open market – Matthew Peel to provide.
• Breakdown and map of London & Quadrant properties in Chingford – Sue Gattrell to provide.

Decision:

Committee noted the presentation.

23. **PREPARATION FOR UNIVERSAL CREDIT (FULL SERVICE)**

Maureen McEleny, Interim Assistant Director Housing Management Services explained that Waltham Forest was due to offer a full service for Universal Credit (UC) from May 2018. Services in Leytonstone would not start until July 2018 due to the possible closure of a DWP office in Leytonstone.

Housing benefit was included within UC and around 50% of rental income was received via housing benefit. Councillor Halebi pointed out that housing benefit was always paid in arrears. Work was in progress with the Citizens Advice Bureau to support residents in arrears or who wished to make UC appeals.

The Council’s pre-tenancy conference had been delayed until February or March 2018 and a pre-tenancy course would be introduced for all prospective new tenants.

The Interim Assistant Director added that UC imposed large budgeting and prioritising responsibilities on tenants. Some concerns had been mitigated by the recent Budget announcement that up to one month’s worth of UC could be accessed early and that the seven-day waiting period would be removed. Temporary accommodation would also be removed from UC from April 2018.

Councillor Barnett felt that arrears rates were very worrying and it was agreed that regular reports on arrears should be brought to the Committee. The Interim Assistant Director added that the arrears management by the small existing number of UC tenants had been very good. It was confirmed that there was not any additional funding available for the UC work.

Councillor Rayner raised the issue of tenancy audits. It was confirmed that 20% of housing stock was targeted for audit each year. The aim of the audit was to check that the person living in a property was the correct one and hence identify any instances of sub-letting. This also allowed officers to inspect the property and identify any vulnerable residents.

Councillor Balkan asked if payment by direct debit could be made compulsory but this could not be made a condition of tenancies. The use of direct debit was heavily encouraged however.

The Rentsense system was used to produce a list of housing arrears to be chased. This used prediction analytics to identify the highest priority arrears.
Councillor Rayner queried whether the figures in the report for Billericay included Outwood Common and if those for Wickford included Barnfield. The Interim Assistant Director would confirm this to the Committee.

**Action:**

- It was agreed that the Committee would receive regular reports on the early intervention arrears programme – Maureen McEleny to take forward.
- Query on whether the Billericay figures in the report include Outwood Common and if the Wickford figures include Barnfield. Maureen McEleny to check.

**Decision:**

That the report be noted and the risk mitigation measures planned be supported.

24. **STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BOARD**

Darren Welsh, Director of Housing confirmed that there were 15,000 Housing Association homes in Waltham Forest. The Council was often the first point of contact if a tenant had difficulties but did not have any formal powers over Housing Associations. Information on Housing Association stock in Waltham Forest was presented to the Committee including that the largest Housing Associations by number of properties were London & Quadrant, Peabody and Clarion (formerly Circle 33).

Areas of collaboration for the Strategic Partnership Board were expected to include working together on community projects to promote community engagement and capacity building, building community capacity through education, training and jobs and sharing best practice in areas of common interest. The specific work programme for the Board would be brought to the Committee for comment.

The Director of Housing added that Waltham Forest exceeded the requirements of the ‘Never Again’ pledge on fire safety.

**Action:**

It was agreed that the Committee would scrutinise this issue again when further information was available.

**Decision:**

The Committee noted the report.

25. **HOUSING BIG CONVERSATION REPORT**

The Director of Housing confirmed that the Mayor of London's consultation on his housing strategy had now closed and that the strategy would be launched in summer
2018. Consultation and engagement had begun in Waltham Forest via the ‘Big Conversation’ which allowed engagement with the local community about the local context and challenges. The majority of responses to an initial consultation had supported the questions in the Big Conversation document.

Councillor Barnett looked forward to the final report. Councillor Lyons felt that there should be a percentage of affordable housing that was social housing and also asked if there had been progress with the Community Land Trust. The Director of Housing responded that planning policies were required to operate in accordance with a national framework. All the Council’s new build programme was however at social rents and it was hoped to have more developments such as these via the Council’s housing company. The Council was currently looking at options for the delivery of community-led housing in Waltham Forest which would be via a Community Land Trust or other schemes. An event on these issues had been held in December 2017 that attracted 70-80 residents and a policy paper was also due to be taken to Cabinet.

Councillor Limbajee added that Social Grant Funding and the Government Affordable Housing Programme curtailed what the Council could do. Councillor Limbajee had visited the Community Land Trust in Tower Hamlets which had a very ambitious vision. This allowed local residents to buy properties at a large discount.

Councillor Limbajee supported the Community Land Trust but felt that there could be problems with where a resident moved next. Properties in the Trust were covenanted to peg what they could be sold on for to local wage levels.

The Committee noted the report.

26. WORK PROGRAMME & ACTION LOG

A breakdown of affordable housing in Waltham Forest was tabled and noted by the Committee. It was agreed that a full report on affordable housing should be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

The meeting closed at 9.03 pm

Chair’s Signature

Date