

Lewisham Tenants and Residents Association (TRA) Chairs' Meeting Notes

On Thursday 5th September 2024, I attended the in-person TRA Chairs Meeting at the Civic Centre, Lewisham Town Hall. This is a bi-monthly meeting that provides an opportunity for Lewisham TRA Chairs to raise residents concerns about what is happening on their estate or street, directly to Lewisham Council Managers and Officers.

Below is a summary ie my notes of the meeting, the minutes will be posted when available.

In October, it will be a year since Lewisham Council took back direct management of the housing stock from an arms length management organisation (ALMO) called Lewisham Homes, since then the Council have been working through a 'transformation process' that aims to address the problems they inherited and on Thursday, **Dean Cooper (Head of Repairs)** provided an update on how the Repairs team were tackling some of the issues they had faced:

- **Waiting Times** – more contact centre staff have been recruited, reducing waiting times for residents reporting a repair
- **Damp and Mould** – the entire contact centre team recently undertook intense training so that they can accurately diagnose what kind of repair is needed when a resident reports a problem with damp and mould. Also Inspectors are being recruited, to speed up the process of dealing with damp and Mould
- **Contractors** – they're building a Commercial Team to get repairs out to Contractors more quickly, and monitor the work to a satisfactory standard/completion
- **Backlog** – inherited from Lewisham Homes has been reduced from just over 18,000 repairs, to just over 6,000 repairs
- **Re-letting** - the time it takes to re-let a property has decreased
- **Disrepair Team** - there are now 3 caseworkers (previously there was only 1)

We pointed out that the delay to a communal repair had resulted in ASB increasing on the Tanners Hill Estate, and also that we were unsure as to who/how to report communal repairs, eg when an electrician finishes work on a block and leaves the communal walkway and stair lights permanently on, which isn't sustainable and increases the cost to residents in either service charges or rents. We noted that residents can't report a communal repair on another block ie where they don't themselves live.

Dean Cooper said he would send a flier with all the ways repairs could now be reported, so that we could display on Notice Boards around the estate, and would also include a specific email address for Communal Repairs.

Stock Condition Survey Update – currently over 8000 properties have been accessed and surveyed, out of 11,000+ and it should be completed December 2024. This is being done by an independent company, Savilles, and is based on the current Decent Homes standard but has also taken into account Housing Health and Safety feedback – so it's going beyond just looking at the brick and mortar. There will be a 30 year plan with 5 and 10 year priorities set.

We asked if **Bin Chute Hoppers** were part of the Survey, and raised the problems caused by their redesign to comply with fire regs – they're now too small so rubbish bags block chutes, caretakers can no longer unblock as they're not removable so they have to be dealt with as a repair which takes longer and incurs cost. Finally, the gap under the ground floor doors of the bin cupboards would allow air to be sucked in, in the event of a fire the chute would become a chimney. We've been raising this issue in many meetings where Lewisham Officers are present - but never get an answer to our questions ie was the design a 'one size fits all' that might work in one block but wouldn't in another, can we adapt the design so the chutes can work?

Although it was noted that the Hoppers had to comply with fire regs, one solution would be to close bin chutes and stop using Hoppers, it was suggested that as a new initiative for dealing with food waste is going to be introduced, a 'Waste Working Group' could be set up to include the Hoppers ie is it the best/only design? Is it a 'one size fits all' design? Even if nothing can be done to rectify the problems in Tanners Hill, it might prevent this happening on other estates.

Cllr Will Cooper, the Lewisham Council Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness, provided an update:

- **Self Referral to the Ombudsman** – Lewisham Council (along with many other Councils and Housing Associations) have done this to acknowledge the problems inherited from Lewisham Homes and also problems caused as a result of the funding crisis affecting 90% of Councils and Housing Associations including L&Q
- **Social Rents** – the previous Government introduced a 1% reduction in social rents over a 4 year period. While this reduced the Government's Bill for Housing Benefit, it left a 'black hole' in the budget of many councils, particularly the big Housing stock holders like Lewisham where the shortfall is £664 million
- **Long Term Funding** – over the course of the last decade, Government Funding of Local Authorities has been short term, with Funding being withheld beyond deadlines and agreed time frames, making it very hard to set budgets and plan long term, hampering the ability of LA's to deliver services
- **Sale of Council Housing** – pulled the rug on new-builds and increased homelessness, Councils bear the huge cost of providing temporary accommodation for 3000+ a night
- **Small Grants** – in recent years Councils were forced to bid for small pots of money which was costly in terms of time and effort for little return. Thankfully this has now been suspended with the new Government allocating funding according to need

Meeting with the Minister of Housing - twenty LA's, (the biggest Housing stock holders), have written jointly to the new Government, stating that Government intervention is required to avert this crisis, this initiative is also supported by over 100 other LA's in the UK. The Councils are meeting with the Minister for Housing Wednesday 11th September, to discuss problems and solutions. This is the first meeting with a Government Minister for many years.

Public Spaces Protection Orders – I asked when the signage for the PSPO's would be put up, as various forms of Anti-Social Behaviour can't be enforced until the signage is in place. Cllr Cooper said this would be happening shortly.

The date of the next Chairs Meeting is Thursday 5 December 2024

Barry Still

**Chair
Tanners Hill TRA
Residents Association**