

HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

TUESDAY, 28TH JANUARY, 2014

PRESENT: Councillor P Gruen in the Chair

Councillors B Anderson, J Bentley, A Lowe,
K Maqsood and P Truswell

Tenant / Leaseholder

David Atkinson
Ted Wilson
Jo Hourigan

Independent Representative

Timothy Woods
Andrew Feldhaus

Co-opted Member

David Glew

1 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first formal meeting of the Housing Advisory Board.

Councillor Gruen said the work to be undertaken by the Board would be interesting and challenging. Referring to the Shadow Advisory Board, he said the initial good work carried out by the Shadow Board had created a useful platform on which to move forward.

2 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against the refusal of the Inspection of Documents

3 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no items identified where it was considered necessary to exclude the press or public from the meeting due to the confidential nature of business to be considered

4 Late Items

There were no formal late items submitted, however the Chair did accept the inclusions of the following items of business:

- (i) A schedule of unresolved actions arising from the Shadow Housing Advisory Board – 4th December 2014
- (ii) An addendum to Item No.14 “Implementation of the Review of Housing Management Services” – Details of the Senior Management Structure, Housing Leeds (Minutes No.15 refers)
- (iii) A schedule of future meetings of the Housing Advisory Board (Minutes No.17 refers)

RESOLVED – That in respect of (i) above, any unresolved actions be added to the Board’s Work Programme for 2014

5 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of any disclosable pecuniary interest

6 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Matthew Walker

7 Minutes

The minutes of the Shadow Housing Advisory Board held on 4th December 2013 were received and noted

8 Matters Arising from the Minutes

To note that any unresolved actions arising from the work of the Shadow Board would be carried forward onto the Board’s Work Programme for 2014 (Minutes No.4 (i) refers)

9 Governance Arrangements - Housing Advisory Board

The Head of Governance Services submitted a report which set out the Governance arrangements for the Housing Advisory Board.

The Director of Environment and Housing reported on the provision of the Board to establish Sub Committees to deal with specific housing issues.

It was also reported that provision existed to appoint additional Members to the Board, selecting up to three non-voting co-optees, with some specialist skill or knowledge who would be of assistance to the Board.

The Chair proposed that Mr David Glew, a specialist in energy conservation at Leeds Metropolitan University, be co-opted onto the Board.

Board Members were supportive of the proposal

RESOLVED –

- (i) To note the governance arrangements approved by full Council for the Housing Advisory Board
- (ii) To note the terms of reference for the Board as set out in Appendix 2 of the submitted report
- (iii) To note that initial appointments for co-optees was for the remainder of this municipal year, and that longer term staggered appointments would be made by full Council at its annual meeting in June.
- (iv) That Mr David Glew be appointed as a Co-opted (non-voting) Member of the Board.
- (v) That a report be brought back in due course setting out proposals for the establishment of a Sub Committee(s)

10 Financial Position Statement 2013/14 Housing Period 8

The Head of Finance, Environments and Housing submitted a report which provided the 2013/14 financial position for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

Richard Ellis, Head of Finance, Environments and Housing presented the report and responded to Members' comments and queries.

Detailed discussion ensued on the contents of the report which included:

- The Housing Revenue Account and the projected surplus of £419K at period 8
- Rent Areas
- Right to Buy Sales
- Capital Programme

Referring to section 3.4 of the submitted report (Right to Buy) Councillor Truswell sought clarification on the amount retained by the City Council following the sale of a property.

In responding Officers confirmed that in accordance with Government formula, 25% was returned to the Treasury.

In making an observation, the Chair reported that the City Council had invested £650m. into social housing. Tenants wishing to buy these properties were given up to a 70% discount. For each property sold the Council would retain one third (33%) of the cost of the property. It was the newly refurbished

properties which were being sold, the less desirable properties remaining unsold.

Officers reported that they were working closely with Housing Associations to provide a joint coordinated response to social housing.

The Director Environment and Housing reported that Housing Services were looking to supply appropriate housing stock for particular niche markets; e.g. families with disabilities, due to the need across the city.

In responding Councillor Truswell welcomed the targeted resource to address particular needs but there continued to be a need for social housing.

Commenting on rents for Council housing, Councillor Anderson suggested there still remained a question mark over social housing rent – “the model needs to stack up” but it was not yet agreed.

Councillor Anderson asked if he could receive an update on the situation.

The Director Environment and Housing confirmed that appropriate arrangements would be made.

In summing up the Chair welcomed the report, commenting that the projected targets had been achieved

RESOLVED – To note the projected financial position at period 8 of the financial year 2013/14

11 Housing Leeds Capital Programme 2014/15

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which set out the proposed Housing Leeds HRA Capital Programme 2014/ 15.

The report sought Members’ views on revisions to the Leeds Decent Homes Standard and in particular to give thermal efficiency requirements greater prominence

The report also asks the Housing Advisory Board to endorse the programme for approval by the Executive Board at its meeting on 14th February 2014.

Appended to the report was the proposed Capital Programme 2014/15

Steve Hunt, Chief Officer, Property and Contracts, Housing Leeds presented the report and responded to Members queries and comments

Detailed discussion ensued on the contents of the report which included:

- Resources available
- Investment priorities

- Headline spend items (Empty properties, Adaptations, Decency, Fire Safety, Heating upgrades, Sheltered Housing upgrades and Multi storey works)
- How do we spend additional resources?
- Emerging investment needs.

Specific issues raised by Board Members included:

- Energy efficiency schemes in multi storey blocks
- Highway works/ Car parking issues
- Refuse collection issues/ Provision of brown bins

In offering comment, Councillor Bentley welcomed the focus on energy/ thermal efficiency.

Referring to Council Estates in general, Councillor Bentley suggested that individual homes tended to be of a good standard but on occasion were let down by the poor condition of the estate. Could there be a focus on the estate rather than the individual home?

Jo Hourigan (Tenant Representative) welcomed the proposals around energy efficiency schemes.

David Glew (Co-opted Member) also welcomed the focus around energy efficiency. In offering comment he referred to the practice of “piggy backing” i.e. scheduling additional services to be carried out at the same time as a major job e.g. when replacing boilers, draft exclusion measures could also be carried out.

In responding to highway and car parking issues, Steve Hunt said any such works were often expensive with the need to re-position drains, gas/ electric supply which was a considerable addition to the costs.

The Chair confirmed that car parking and highway works were often very expensive and suggested the possibility of Housing Services employing their own contactors to carry out such works which covered large areas.

Commenting on the suggestion to address the poor condition of some estates, the Director of Environment and Housing said this was a useful suggestion and it was for Members of the Board to influence such choices.

In summing up the Chair thanked Mr Hunt for his presentation commenting it had been an informative report and stimulated much discussion.

The Chair acknowledged that Members were generally supportive of including energy efficiency measures and added that Leeds needed to determine its own decency standard

RESOLVED –

- (i) That the Executive Board be recommended to endorse the proposed Housing Leeds HRA Capital Programme 2014/15
- (ii) To recommend to the Executive Board that approval be given to develop a Leeds Decent Homes Standard which gives greater prominence to thermal efficiency requirements
- (iii) That the Director of Environment and Housing be requested to investigate the possibility of using some of the un-committed capital programme resources to address environmental conditions on estates.

12 Proposal for Maximising the Use of Council Homes

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which proposed a new incentive scheme to facilitate moves which enhance use of council stock and deliver improved outcomes for customers.

It was reported that the report was presented to the Executive Board at its meeting on 22nd January 2014 where it was resolved:

- (i) To note the success of the council's under occupation scheme and the mutual exchange incentive scheme.
- (ii) To approve the formal closure of the council's previous under occupation incentive scheme.
- (iii) That the Executive Board earmarks £200,000 from the Housing Revenue Account for 2014/15 to fund a new incentive scheme to operate from April 2014 – March 2015, based on the principles outlined in sections 4.16 – 4.37 of the submitted report.
- (iv) That a new scheme is developed by the Chief Officer, Statutory Housing in conjunction with officers from Housing Leeds Housing Management to be launched from 1 April 2014.

Referring to section 4.28 of the report Councillor Anderson raised the issue of identifying tenants living in one bedroom houses and flats, which were overcrowded, with a view to assisting them with a move to a suitably sized property. Councillor Anderson asked how this would be tested

Officer reported that the information would be gathered using tenancy visits.

Referring to section 4.33 Councillor Anderson asked for clarification about minor rent arrears.

In responding the Chair said it was for Housing Managers to use their discretion through a framework of decision making

In offering comment Councillor Bentley said fixed rules were not necessary, but good reasons would be required.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report be noted

13 Mears - Service Improvement and Modernisation Plan

The Board received a presentation from David Miles and Colin Middlemass representing the Mears Group on the Service Improvement and Modernisation Plan.

In providing background information Mr Miles said that the Mears Group acquired the Morrison's contract in November 2012. A lot of complaints had been received about the level of service delivered by the previous contractor and Housing Leeds was considering termination of the contract.

Mears immediately put in place a Mobilisation Team to gain client confidence, address Trade Union issues and re-brand the company. Twelve months later the level of service was categorised as adequate/ good moving away from the previous poor category. The Mobilisation Team had since withdrawn.

Mr Miles Said the emphasis was now to move to the next level by building a consistent level of good service and continue to build relationships with the trade unions. Good progression had been achieved in year 1 and the company were now looking to align to meet the Council's aspirations for 2014/15.

Board Members questioned Mears on the following

- Use of contractors
- Availability of local skills/ Apprenticeship
- How tenant satisfaction was monitored

In responding Mr Miles said that approximately 15% of the work was undertaken by sub-contractors and in most instances it was the smaller specialised jobs where sub-contractors were used. Commenting on the availability of local skills, it was reported that availability was good but only for single jobs. Often two to three tradesmen may be required to complete the job. Mears did operate their own apprenticeship scheme, 35 apprentices taken on last year all being taught in multiple skills. All would be retained following completion of training. Responding to how tenant satisfaction was monitored, Mr Miles said feedback would be received through the complaints process and Customer Services.

The Chair thanked Mr Miles and Mr Middlemass for their attendance and presentation commenting that good progress had been achieved in the first year.

14 HRA funded Enhanced Street Cleansing Pilot

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which set out some initial outcomes of a pilot project to deliver enhanced street cleansing in the city, trialling a new approach using temporary staff and a new job description.

Appended to the report was a copy of an Impact Analysis: May –September 2013

Helen Freeman, Chief Officer, Environmental Action, presented the report and responded to Members queries and questions.

Detailed discussion ensued on the contents of the report which included:

- Commencement of the pilot scheme in May 2013
- Early indications suggested the pilot was proving to be successful
- Positive feedback from local people
- Development of new job descriptions
- The creation of zonal teams with significant influence on the local area

Commenting on the development of new job descriptions Councillor Truswell ask if the trade unions had been consulted?

In responding Helen Freeman said proposals were currently been shared with Members with a view to looking at the need to change and also challenging it, but in due course the trade unions would be consulted.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That the contents of the report be noted
- (ii) To welcome the success of the pilot scheme
- (iii) To support the approach for going forward in the future

15 Implementation of the Review of Housing Management Services

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which provided an update on progress with the delivery of Housing Management Review outcomes.

Appended to the report was a copy of the Housing Leeds Senior Management Structure.

Circulated at the meeting was an updated version of the Housing Leeds, Senior Management Structure which identified recent appointments.

Neil Evans, Director of Environment and Housing presented the report and responded to Members comments and queries.

Detailed discussion ensued on the contents of the report which included:

- The reduction of 11 Senior Management posts representing savings of £600k.
- Release of an additional £4.4m from ALMO funds now incorporated into the Capital Programme
- Savings on running costs of £0.5m as a result of the closure of the companies
- £400k savings arising from vacancies on some support services

RESOLVED – To note the progress being made to deliver the outcomes of the Housing Management Review

16 Any Other Business

There were no items raised under any other business

17 Date and Time of Next Meetings

RESOLVED – That future meetings of the Board be arranged as follows:

Tuesday 8th April 2014

Tuesday 3rd June 2014

Tuesday 9th September 2014

Tuesday 11th November 2014

All meetings to take place at the Civic Hall, Leeds commencing at 5.00pm