

HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

TUESDAY, 3RD FEBRUARY, 2015

PRESENT: Councillor P Gruen in the Chair

Councillors B Anderson, J Bentley,
A Gabriel and P Truswell

Tenant/Leaseholder

Ted Wilson
Andy Liptrot
David Atkinson

Independent Representatives

Timothy Woods
Matthew Walker
Andrew Feldhaus

Co-opted Members

David Glew
Jo Hourigan

31 Chair's Opening Remarks

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

The Chair introduced and welcomed David Atkinson from the Leeds Tenants Federation who was attending in the absence of Maddie Hunter.

The Chair also announced that Steve Hunt, Chief Officer, Property and Contracts would shortly be retiring and today's meeting would be Mr Hunt's final Advisory Board Meeting.

In paying tribute the Chair said that Steve had been an important figure in the Housing Leeds scheme for many years as Chief Executive of East North East ALMO and more recently overseeing the Capital Programme - his knowledge and experience would be greatly missed.

Board Members joined the Chair in expressing their best wishes to Steve in his retirement and future endeavours.

32 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against the refusal of inspection of documents.

33 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no items identified where it was considered necessary to exclude the press or members of the public from the meeting.

34 Late Items

There were no late items of business.

35 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests made at the meeting.

36 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Maddie Hunter

37 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 11th November 2014 be accepted as a true and correct record.

38 Matters Arising from the Minutes

The following Matters arising/ Actions from the Minutes were highlighted:

Housing and the Jobs and Skills Agenda – Minute No.6 – 4th December 2013
(Shadow Advisory Board refers)

David Glew raised the issue of action against minutes. Neil Evans suggested a more detailed log to be taken in future, with a named officer marked against each action.

In providing an update Officers reported that the main contractors had recently taken on a full complement of apprentices (50+). Other opportunities within Housing Leeds would continue to be explored. The Housing Advisory Board would continue to receive updates – Status of action “Open in progress”

Towards a New Housing Strategy – (Minute No.29 – 8th April 2014 refers)

It was noted that an item “Draft Leeds Housing appeared elsewhere on the agenda. Status of action “Closed”

Housing Advisory Board Forward Plan 2014/15 – Minute No. 65 – 9th September 2014 refers)

It was noted that an item “Housing Revenue Account Investment Strategy” appeared elsewhere on the agenda. Status of action “Closed”

Issues around High Rise Blocks – Minute No. 29 – 11th November 2014 refers)

It was reported that an officer had been appointed (Martyn Long) to lead on the high rise strategy – Status of action “Open in progress”

Tenant Working Group – Minute No. 29 – 11th November 201 refers

Added to Forward Plan (March 2015) - Status of action “Open in progress

Adaptations – Minutes No. 29 – 11th November 2014 refers

Added to Forward Plan (March 2015) - Status of action “Open in progress

39 Draft Leeds Housing Strategy

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which sought the views of the Board on the draft Leeds Housing Strategy.

Simon Costigan, Chief Officer, Strategic Housing, Environments and Housing, presented the report. In provided background information it was reported that the Housing Strategy was one of Leeds key strategic plans, enabling the Council and its partners to form a clear understanding of the City’s significant housing challenges and identify innovative solutions to meet the needs and aspirations of its communities.

It was explained that the draft Strategy was framed around five key themes: Affordable Housing Growth, Improving Housing Quality, Promoting Independent Living, Improving Health through Housing and Creating Sustainable Communities. Each theme containing a number of priorities reflecting the key housing related priority areas for the city

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

- The delivery of 70,000 new homes by 2018
- Initial annual target of 3,600 (1,100 to be affordable)
- The five key themes

In offering comment, David Glew said there was some useful detail but overall he was disappointed with the contents. He suggested the document looked dated, the strategy could be more aspirational, more detail was required in some of the key sections, further consideration should be given to establishing more links to the various topics and better use of graphics was required.

David Atkinson said there was absence of a carers strategy and suggested the development of such a strategy with a possible link to new lettings.

Andrew Feldhaus echoed the comments of other Members in that the strategy lacked aspiration and also suggested that the themes should not be viewed in isolation.

Tim Wood stressed the importance to challenge targets and be more aspirational

Referring Section 5.2 of the report David Glew questioned the accuracy of the information “There may be a need to create around 40 new Primary Schools and 6 New Secondary Schools” – Was this correct?, more site allocations could be added which could affect these numbers.

In offering comment the Chair said checking and cross reference was essential but accepted situations may change over time and the strategy could be out of date by the time of publication, he said there was a need for a living document.

Matthew Walker said it was difficult to meet all needs; the draft strategy was a “best fit” document and could not be everything to everybody.

Jo Hourigan said the Sub Group had made some innovative suggestions but these had not been included. It was important to “think outside the box”, be bold in order to sell the document, otherwise opportunities would be missed.

Councillor Bentley said it was a good report but it should not be the final submission. In commenting on the content he suggested the themes were good but more connections were required: Homes/Health/ Insulation for example.

Commenting on Affordable Housing Growth, paragraph 3.5 Councillor Truswell suggested more substantive targets were required.

David Glew commented on the target referred to in section 4.4 Ageing Well, suggesting caution / review, such statements may hold us “hostage to fortune”

In drawing the discussion to conclusion the Chair thanked Members for their comments, suggesting some useful ideas had been raised in particular the need to be more aspirational, the challenging of targets and the accuracy of the information presented were all issues which should be revisited.

The Chair invited the Director to comment on the feedback received.

The Director of Environment and Housing thanked Board Members for their contributions. The Director said we need to be mindful of the audience the document is intended for, possibly drafting a short/ sharp version intended for residents with a more detailed version for professionals. We would also need to form a judgement on ambition, provide more depth on contextualisation and look again at the diversity of themes. Overall it was a good step forward.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That the comments made by Board Members be received and welcomed
- (ii) That the Director of Environment and Housing be requested to look again at the draft strategy taking into account the feedback received
- (iii) That the report be brought back to the next meeting of the Board (April 2015) for further consideration

40 Housing Leeds Capital Financial Position Period 8 2014/15

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which provided a financial position statement on the Housing Leeds Capital programme at period 8 for the financial year 2014/14.

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.

- Housing Leeds Services & BITMO
- Housing Leeds Newbuild and Other

It was noted that actual spend and commitment at period 8 was £30.4m (47% of revised available resources). Planned works in 2014/15 were estimated at £48.3m with a total spend and commitments at period 8 of £20.7m (43% of revised programme).

Referring to the BITMO programme, the Head of Finance, Environments and Housing said spend and commitments at period 8 was £1.7m (59% of available resources of £2.9m)

Spend on the Council House growth and new build programme was £2.1m in 2014/15. The current cash flow projection at period 8 was £5.9m. It was reported that the additional HCA funding secured in July would take available resources for the Council House Growth Programme to £81.4m

In offering comment the Chair welcomed the report and asked if details of progress on major schemes could be incorporated in the next Capital Financial Position report to the Board

RESOLVED –

- (i) To note the Housing Leeds Service refurbishment programme and Housing Leeds Council House Growth programme position at period 8 2014/15

- (ii) That details of progress on major schemes be incorporated in the next Capital Financial Position report to this Board

41 Housing Leeds (HRA) Revenue Financial Position Period 8 2014/15

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which provided an update on the revenue financial position for the Housing (HRA) Services at period 8

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.

- Income
- Expenditure
- Right to Buy (RTB) Sales
- Arrears

Commenting on section 3.7 of the submitted report Councillor Anderson asked how many disrepair claims had been made because “we did not get it right”

In responding the Chair said that it was possibly not dealing with the repairs quickly enough.

Commenting on the funding for a vehicle replacement programme for Construction Services, Ted Wilson asked, why purchase, could the vehicles not be leased?

In responding the Head of Finance, Environments and Housing said a surplus on accounts had been identified and it was more economical to buy outright than lease.

Commenting on collection rates, the Director of Environment and Housing said collection made in respect of 5,500 properties, previously fully covered by benefit payments paid directly to Housing Services were now more difficult to collect, following changes to occupation rules.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report be noted

42 Proposed Rent and Service Charge Increases for 2015/16

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which set out proposals for rent and Service charge increases for 2015/16.

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.

- Proposals to increase dwelling rents in 2015/16
- Government Rent Policy (A new rent setting formula, to be fixed for ten years from 2015/16)
- Proposed introduction of a nominal service charge for medium rise flats and increasing service charges for multi storey flats (MSFs)

Commenting on Section 3.1 of the submitted report Ted Wilson sought clarification around the proposal to introduce a service charge to low/medium rise flats.

In responding the Head of Finance said no charge had been previously made for the cleansing of communal areas in low/ medium rise flats. Under the new proposals a £1 per week service charges would be made to these properties.

Andy Liptrot referred to the siting of telephone communication equipment on high rise blocks and the income it generated. He asked if the income generated could go directly back to the tenants of the block.

In responding the Chief Officer Property and Contracts said that such income has been used to cover subsidies to Council tenants with shared service areas not just the ones specific to that block.

RESOLVED – To note:

- (i) The proposed 2.88% increase in rents for 2015/16 and;
- (ii) The proposal to introduce a £1 per week service charges at low/medium rise flats and increase service charges by £1 at Multi Storey flats.

43 Housing Revenue Account Investment Strategy

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which provided an update on the capital investment need in the existing stock and the resources available to meet that need.

The report also sought the views of the Board on proposals to align spend profiles with income levels in years 1-4.

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.

- Numerous changes affecting the original Housing Revenue Account Business Plan (HRA BP) approved in 2012
- Meeting investment aspirations over the next 10 years
- The need to priorities investment in key areas

Offering comment on the need to priorities investment in key areas, Councillor Anderson said he would not support slipping the budget for energy efficiency schemes.

On the theme of renewables, David Glew said it was important to maintain the simple things: ensuring draft excluders were properly fitted and checking boiler thermostats were working properly. There were other solutions, he suggested.

Councillor Bentley suggested more creativity around treasury management was required.

In echoing Councillor Bentley's comments Councillor Truswell said it was important to priorities certain areas of expenditure.

David Atkinson said the High Rise Group had raised this issue of "cost of heating" as a major concern and a priority (43% of tenants) but they appeared not to be listened to.

In responding the Chief Officer, Property and Contracts said there was a boiler replacement programme but this was area based and subject to cash flow.

The Director of Environment and Housing explained that the capital budget was increasing, but that the standards the Board had signed up to had increased too. In order to allow longer term aspirations to be planned and to fit overall, priority investment needed to be identified.

In summing up the Chair said that in order to deliver a balanced budget and programmes over the next four years some difficult decision were required.

The Chair suggested the setting up of a Working Group to work closely with officers to gain an insight into the resources available and identify areas of potential savings. Anyone wishing to join the Working Group should contact the Chief Officer, Property and Contracts.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That the contents of the report and the resources available for investment be noted
- (ii) To approve the setting up of a Working Group with a view to identifying areas of potential saving

44 Housing Advisory Panels (HAP) - Funding and Decision Making Arrangements

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which provided an update on the Housing Advisory Panels (HAPS), in particular outlining and proposing improvements to the funding and decision making arrangements.

Mandy Sawyer, Head of Neighbourhood Services, Environments and Housing, presented the report. It provided background information. It was reported that current allocation of funding was based on an equal distribution to the 11 panels and did not take into account the number of Council homes and tenants within each panel area. Under the revised arrangements it was proposed to adopt a fairer funding allocation, providing 50% by area and 50% on the basis of the number of homes.

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

- Funding allocations
- HAPs had supported 229 local projects
- The establishing of consistent decision making practices amongst local panels.

In offering comment Jo Hourigan said the small villages and the less populated areas would lose out with funding been allocated to the high density areas.

In responding Councillor Truswell said that the less densely populated would continue to receive more funding per head (Outer North East receiving 1.5 x per head)

The Chair suggested that groups would be able to pool resources to fund larger schemes, ideas/ suggestions were welcome.

The Director of Environment and Housing said that between 75% – 80% of the funding had already been committed which was really positive.

RESOLVED -

- (i) To support the proposal for the allocation of HAP funding in accordance with option 3 in the submitted report –allocating £60k to each HAP and then allocating the remaining half of the budget based on the proportion of Housing Leeds dwellings within the area.
- (ii) To support other funding arrangements to HAPs for 2015/16 as outlined in Section 3 of the submitted report.

45 2014/15 Quarter 3 Performance Report

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which provided a summary of the Quarter Three Performance data for 2014/15 against the six Housing Leeds priorities.

Appended to the report were copies of the following documents for the information/ comment of the meeting:

- Priority 1 – Homelessness (Housing Support Dashboard)
- Priority 2 Dashboard – Void Dwellings
- Priority 3 Dashboard – Maximise Rent Collection
- Priority 4 Dashboard – Welfare Change
- Priority 5 Dashboard – Annual Tenancy Visits

Debra Scott, Head of Resources and Strategy, Environments and Housing, provided a brief update on each of the priority areas

In summing up the Chair welcomed the report commenting that performance against the six Housing Leeds priorities showed a general improvement.

RESOLVED –

- (i) To note the Quarter 3 performance information relating to the six Housing Leeds priorities
- (ii) To note the intention to review the priorities and high level performance measures

46 Housing Advisory Board - Forward Plan 2015

The Board considered the contents of the Housing Advisory Board Forward Plan 2015.

With reference to Minute No. 38 – Draft Leeds Housing Strategy, this item be brought back to the next meeting of the Board for further consideration.

RESOLVED – That subject to the inclusion of the above, the contents of the Housing Advisory Board Forward Plan for 2015 be noted

47 Date and Time of Next Meeting

RESOLVED – To note that future meetings of the Board will take place as follows:

- Tuesday 7th April 2015
- Tuesday 7th July 2015
- Tuesday 8th September 2015
- Tuesday 10th November 2015