

SCRUTINY BOARD (HOUSING AND REGENERATION)

TUESDAY, 23RD SEPTEMBER, 2014

PRESENT: Councillor J Procter in the Chair

Councillors D Collins, P Grahame,
J Illingworth, D Nagle, J Pryor, A Smart,
C Towler and G Wilkinson

13 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed Councillor Illingworth to his first meeting of the Scrutiny Board. The Chair also welcomed Steve Ilee, Chair of Tenant Scrutiny Board. Members were informed that the Tenant Scrutiny Board was particularly interested in the Arrears Profiling item on the agenda.

14 Late Items

In accordance with his powers under Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair agreed to accept the following late information:

- Agenda item 12, Recommendation Tracking – Recommendation tracking update in relation to Affordable Housing by Private Developers – recommendation 4. (Minute No. 22 refers)

15 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests declared to the meeting, however under agenda item 7, Requests for Scrutiny, Councillor P Grahame drew the Board's attention to the fact that she had recently attended a North East Quadrant planning meeting in Scholes, also attended by George Hall, who had submitted one of the requests for scrutiny.

16 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

There were no apologies for absence.

17 Minutes - 24 June 2014

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2014 be approved as a correct record.

18 Matters arising from the minutes

Minute No. 6 – Matters arising from the minutes

Members were informed that a brief note had been provided by the directorate on the powers available to deal with private tenancies on council estates.

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Tuesday, 28th October, 2014

Minute No. 9 – Protocol between the Tenant Scrutiny Board and Scrutiny Board (Housing and Regeneration)

The Scrutiny Board was advised that Tenant Scrutiny Board members did not represent specific Wards. The membership was drawn from existing ALMO tenant scrutiny arrangements. The Tenant Scrutiny Board was currently reviewing arrangements for selecting new Board members to take account of best practice.

Minute No. 102013/14 Quarter 4 Performance Report

Members were advised that a revised target for completion of adaptations was being included in the quarter 2 performance report due in December 2014.

19 Requests for Scrutiny

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which presented two requests for Scrutiny which had been received from members of the public.

The request for scrutiny received from David Jenkins related to private rented sector housing.

The request for scrutiny received from George Hall related to a previous scrutiny inquiry report produced by the Scrutiny Board in 2011 on housing growth.

The following information was appended to the report:

- A copy of the request for scrutiny received from George Hall together with letters of support submitted by Aireborough Neighbourhood Forum, Wharfedale & Airedale Review Development (WARD) and Boston Spa Parish Council / Boston Spa Neighbourhood Plan Group.
- A copy of the request for scrutiny received from David Jenkins.

The following were in attendance for the item in relation to private rented sector housing:

- John Statham, Head of Housing Partnerships, Environment and Housing.

The key areas of discussion were:

- Clarification of the liaison between Housing staff and the Housing Benefit service.
- Clarification whether Councils had adequate enforcement powers. Members were advised that Councils had powers to issue court proceedings if the landlord did not respond.

- Clarification whether LCC was permitted to undertake repairs to the property and invoice the landlord. Members were advised that repairs could only be undertaken to vacant properties.
- Confirmation that West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service installed smoke alarms within homes which had been assessed as being most at risk from fires.
- A request to keep Members informed regarding progress with the housing issues identified as part of the request for scrutiny.

The following were in attendance for the item in relation to housing growth:

- George Hall, Scholes resident
- Jennifer Kirby, Aireborough Neighbourhood Forum
- David Feeney, Head of Planning Policy, City Development
- Martin Elliot, Data Team Leader, City Development.

The key areas of discussion were:

- Further clarification sought regarding projections for housing growth.
- A suggestion that Peter Boden be invited to attend the October Scrutiny Board meeting to provide an independent view regarding projections for housing growth.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (b) That the request for scrutiny related to private sector rented housing be refused, but that Members be kept informed regarding progress with the housing issues identified as part of the request for scrutiny.
- (c) That Peter Bowden be invited to attend the October Scrutiny Board meeting to provide an independent view regarding projections for housing growth, to assist the Board in deciding how to respond to the request for scrutiny.

20 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.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Neil Evans, Director of Environment and Housing.

The key areas of discussion were:

- Confirmation that bringing the management of the Council's housing stock back in-house had resulted in one-off savings of around £9m with £3.25m savings being realised on a recurring basis.

- Concern about housing difficulties with telephone queries, and planned improvements to the out of hours service.
- A suggestion that details of key housing contacts be provided to Ward Members once the restructure was completed.

RESOLVED –

- (a) The Scrutiny Board notes the considerable progress that has been made to deliver the outcomes of the Housing Management Review, and the benefits (financial and non-financial) that are being realised.
- (b) That details of key housing contacts be provided to Ward Members.

(Councillor Collins joined the meeting at 2.45pm during the consideration of this item.)

21 Arrears Profiling

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which provided the Scrutiny Board with an analysis on the management of rent collection and arrears.

The following were in attendance:

- Liz Cook, Chief Officer (Housing Management), Environment and Housing
- Mandy Sawyer, Head of Neighbourhood Services, Environment and Housing
- Simon Swift, Income Services Manager, Environment and Housing.

The key areas of discussion were:

- The need for a review of the current payment cycle, particularly in terms of ensuring greater flexibility for tenants. The Board was advised that the directorate was in the process of reviewing the current payment cycle so that tenants had the option to determine their own payment date. This would result in a reduction in the number of technical arrears.
- Clarification sought regarding the financial benefit in attempting to recover low level arrears, against the costs incurred.
- Clarification sought regarding the figures contained under paragraph 6.1 to the report entitled 'small arrears'.
- Concern that tenants in technical arrears may have poor credit ratings as a result. The Scrutiny Board requested clarification about this.
- Concern about universal credit being paid directly to the tenant and the potential impact of this on rent arrears.
- Support measures in place for tenants as a result of welfare changes.

RESOLVED –

- (a) The Scrutiny Board notes the content of the report and the work being undertaken by Housing Management to improve rent collection and reduce arrears.
- (b) That a further report be produced to provide further detail on the scope for reducing the number of tenants in technical arrears, and more detailed analysis of the small arrears.

22 Progress in Delivering Housing on Council Brownfield Land

The Director of City Development submitted a report which presented an update on progress to secure new housing development on Council owned brownfield land.

The following were in attendance:

- Adam Brannen, Head of Regeneration, City Development
- Edward Rowland, Principal Land and Property Officer, City Development.

The following information was appended to the report:

- Council Brownfield Land Update Schedule.

The key areas of discussion were:

- Clarification that 7 Barraclough Yard, Butcher Lane, was in the Rothwell Ward not the Kirkstall Ward, as stated in the Council Brownfield Land Update Schedule. Officers undertook to update the Schedule accordingly.
- Concern whether the proposed housing development on the Dalesman public house site in Kirkstall was the most appropriate use for the community. The Board was advised that discussions had taken place with the leaseholder to agree a productive use for the site. The Board asked that Ward Members be consulted regarding any planned development.
- Confirmation regarding the role of the Property Panel.
- A request that a written response be provided to the questions submitted by Councillor Anderson regarding Holt Park.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (b) That Ward Members be consulted regarding planned development at the Dalesman Public House in Kirkstall.
- (c) That the Council Brownfield Land Update Schedule be reported back to the Scrutiny Board on a quarterly basis.
- (d) That a written response be provided to the questions submitted by Councillor Anderson regarding Holt Park

(Councillor Nagle left the meeting at 4.00pm during the consideration of this item.)

23 Financial Position Statement 2014/15 - City Development and Environment and Housing Directorates

The Directors of Environment and Housing and City Development submitted a joint report which presented a financial position statement of the City Development and Environment and Housing Directorate's budgets in relation to this Board's responsibilities at period 4 of the financial year 2014/15.

The following were in attendance:

- Richard Ellis, Head of Finance (Strategy and Resources).

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the Scrutiny Board notes the projected financial position of the Directorates of City Development and Environment and Housing at period 4 of the financial year 2014/15.
- (b) That the Scrutiny Board receives the financial monitoring reports on a 3 monthly basis to tie in with quarterly performance reports.

(Councillor P Grahame left the meeting at 4.15pm during the consideration of this item.)

24 Recommendation Tracking

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which requested Members to confirm the status of recommendations from previous inquiries.

The following information was appended to the report:

- Recommendation tracking flow chart
- Progress report on the one remaining outstanding recommendation from the Board's inquiry report on housing growth
- Progress report on the 4 outstanding recommendations from the Board's inquiry report on the private rented sector
- Progress report on the 8 outstanding recommendations from the Board's inquiry report on affordable housing by private developers.

The status of recommendations were agreed as follows:

- Housing Growth – Recommendation 5 – Achieved
- Private Rented Sector Housing – Recommendation 1 (i) – Achieved
- Private Rented Sector Housing – Recommendation 1 (ii) – Achieved
- Private Rented Sector Housing – Recommendation 1 (iii) – Achieved

- Private Rented Sector Housing – Recommendation 2 (ii) – Not achieved (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring.)
- Private Rented Sector Housing – Recommendation 3 (i) – Achieved
- Private Rented Sector Housing – Recommendation 4 – Achieved
- Affordable Housing by Private Developers – Recommendation 1 – Achieved
- Affordable Housing by Private Developers – Recommendation 2 – Stop monitoring as superseded
- Affordable Housing by Private Developers – Recommendation 3 (ii) – Not achieved (Progress made acceptable. Continue Monitoring.)
- Affordable Housing by Private Developers – Recommendation 6 – Achieved
- Affordable Housing by Private Developers – Recommendation 9 (i) – Defer consideration to the next meeting, to be considered alongside George Hall's request for scrutiny.
- Affordable Housing by Private Developers – Recommendation 3 (i) – Not achieved. The Scrutiny Board to define a new piece of work regarding the issue of institutional finance.
- Affordable Housing by Private Developers – Recommendation 4 – Not achieved. The Scrutiny Board to define a new piece of work regarding the issue of institutional finance.
- Affordable Housing by Private Developers – Recommendation 5 – Not achieved. The Scrutiny Board to define a new piece of work regarding the issue of institutional finance.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the contents of the report and appendices be noted
- (b) That the Scrutiny Board approves the status of recommendations as set out above.

25 Work Schedule

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which detailed the Scrutiny Board's work programme for the current municipal year.

The following information was appended to the report:

- The Scrutiny Board's work schedule
- Minutes of the Executive Board meeting held on 16 July 2014
- Minutes of the Tenant Scrutiny Board meeting held on 23 July 2014.

Members were advised that the Tenant Scrutiny Board was commencing its inquiry into Annual Tenancy Visits at its meeting on Wednesday, 24 September 2014.

The Scrutiny Board was also advised about follow up work identified by the Housing Standards working group to comment on the explanatory memorandum to accompany the Leeds Housing Standard prior to approval.

Members requested that a report on the housing repairs performance monitoring system be added to the work schedule

RESOLVED – That the work schedule be approved, subject to the above additions.

26 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Tuesday, 28 October 2014 at 1.30pm (pre-meeting for all Board Members at 1.00pm)

(The meeting concluded at 4.35pm.)