

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT AND HOUSING)

TUESDAY, 15TH SEPTEMBER, 2015

PRESENT: Councillor J Procter in the Chair

Councillors D Collins, A Gabriel,
R Grahame, P Gruen, A Khan, M Lyons,
J Pryor, K Ritchie and G Wilkinson

22 Late Items

There were no late items.

23 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests declared to the meeting.

24 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillors J Bentley, P Grahame and M Iqbal. Notification was received that Councillor R Grahame was substituting for Councillor M Iqbal and Councillor P Gruen for Councillor P Grahame.

25 Minutes - 21 July 2015

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2015 be approved as a correct record.

26 Matters arising from the minutes

Minute No. 17 – Refreshed Safer Leeds Strategy 2015-16

The Board requested an update regarding a breakdown of PCSOs across all Wards. This was to be provided at the October Board meeting as part of the community safety theme.

Minute No. 20 – Work Schedule

Members were advised that the Police and Crime Commissioner was unable to attend the October Board meeting. He was also unable to attend in November and December. It was suggested that an additional Board meeting or working group meeting be arranged involving the Police and Crime Commissioner.

It was advised that Tenant Scrutiny Board was undertaking an inquiry on the environment of estates. The agreed terms of reference had been circulated for information.

RESOLVED – That the Board be kept informed regarding arrangements for meeting the Police and Crime Commissioner.

27 Housing related matters

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which provided a summary of housing issues that the Board had previously identified.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Debra Coupar, Executive Member (Communities)
- Councillor Richard Lewis, Executive Member (Regeneration, Transport and Planning)
- Neil Evans, Director of Environment and Housing
- Liz Cook, Chief Officer (Housing Management)
- Mark Ireland, Service Manager (Private Sector Housing)
- Maggie Gjessing, Executive Manager (Regeneration).

The key areas of discussion were as follows:

Council House Growth Programme

- An update on development of the Council House Growth Programme.
- Exploring opportunities to more evenly distribute affordable housing across Leeds.
- Grant funding arrangements to Registered Providers and the need to encourage greater appetite for future developments.
- Concern about the future of housing associations and the support arrangements in place.

Empty Homes Strategy

- The reduction in long term empty homes over recent years.
- Clarification sought regarding Council Tax collection rates for empty homes that had been unoccupied for more than 2 years. Members also sought clarification as to whether the current charging threshold of 150% could be increased.
- Supporting the work of local organisations to buy empty homes and the need to be more proactive in informing Ward Members of which empty properties were under the care of such organisations.

Standards within the Private Rented Sector

- Inspection of properties and ensuring value for money.
- Recognition that this remains the fastest growing housing sector which requires a different funding mechanism to help tackle issues in relation to raising standards within the private rented sector.

- The need to tackle rogue landlords by working more collaboratively with responsible landlords.
- New legal responsibilities being placed upon letting agents and landlords to respond to tenant complaints.

Estate Management Arrangements

- An update that the Tenant Scrutiny Board had started an inquiry on the environment of estates.
- The importance of partnership working with other key service areas and the role of the locality teams, particularly in terms of ensuring that estates were kept clean and tidy.
- Development of area actions plans that could be shared with Community Committees.
- Skills learning for staff and the need to offer formal qualification opportunities.
- Development of specific approaches to high rise and sheltered housing.
- Raising awareness and education in relation to managing waste and recycling. Specific issues associated with the removal of bulky waste in high rise housing.
- Identifying issues through tenancy sign-up and the annual home visit.

Community Lettings Policy review

- The need for greater involvement of Ward Members, especially in terms of developing the principles for community lettings. The Board expressed a wish to consider and comment on the proposals prior to being formally approved and therefore requested a further report in November.
- A suggestion that a Members' seminar be arranged regarding community lettings.

Estate Management arrangements – Enforcement of tenancy agreements

- Concern about inconsistent approaches to breaches of tenancy agreement.
- Clarity and the need for better communication surrounding Council and tenant responsibilities.
- Development of a single approach for those tenants that may require assistance in maintaining their gardens.

Housing Forums

- The role of existing Forums and the recognised need to encourage external representatives to have a greater input in terms of sharing their views and best practices.

Temporary Accommodation

- Development of supported housing provision and a review to be undertaken of the Council's requirements. The Board asked to receive further information on this.
- Clarification sought regarding the support needs of refugees. It was advised that the Citizens and Communities Scrutiny Board was undertaking some work in relation to this.

RESOVLED –

- (a) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (b) That the requests for information / clarification be provided.

(Councillor R Lewis left the meeting at 2.30pm, Councillor D Coupar at 2.40pm, Councillor A Khan at 3.00pm and Councillor P Gruen at 3.40pm during the consideration of this item.)

28 Work Schedule

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which invited Members to consider the Board's work schedule for the 2015/16 municipal year.

Further to the Board's discussion, it was agreed that the following be added to the work schedule:

- That the environment themed report scheduled for November also includes details surrounding the management of waste, and particularly the disposal of bulky waste, in high rise housing.
- That a report on the Community lettings policy proposals be scheduled for the Board's November meeting.
- That the housing themed report scheduled for December also includes information on how the role of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and the Devolution Agenda may impact on local housing decision-making.
- That the community safety themed report in October also includes details of the role and funding arrangements relating to LeedsWatch.

RESOVLED – That the work schedule, as amended, be approved.

29 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Tuesday, 13 October 2015 at 1.30pm (Pre-meeting for all Board Members at 1.00pm)

(The meeting concluded at 3.50pm)