

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT AND HOUSING)

THURSDAY, 13TH OCTOBER, 2016

PRESENT: Councillor J Procter in the Chair

Councillors J Bentley, A Blackburn,
K Bruce, D Collins, A Gabriel,
A Garthwaite, P Grahame, R Grahame,
A Khan, K Ritchie and G Wilkinson

34 Late Items

There were no late items.

35 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests declared to the meeting.

36 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

An apology for absence was submitted by Councillor M Lyons. Notification had been received that Councillor R Grahame was to substitute for Councillor M Lyons.

37 Minutes - 22 September 2016

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2016 be approved as a correct record.

38 Matters arising from the minutes

Minute No. 29 – Odour monitoring and impacts relating to Veolia's Recycling and Energy Recover Facility (RERF)

It was noted that arrangements have now been made for the Executive Member for Environment and Sustainability to meet with Veolia and Elected Members to discuss how communications to Ward Members could be improved.

Minute No. 30 – Environment related matters

Maintenance of gullies – Board Members requested details of the guidance in place linked to the co-ordination of services between Environmental Action and Highways Services.

Minute No. 31 – Scrutiny Inquiry into improving air quality – draft terms of reference

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Thursday, 24th November, 2016

Reference was made to the public interest surrounding the Board's forthcoming inquiry into air quality and it was agreed that further consideration be given on how to engage the public during this inquiry. It was also noted that session 2 of the inquiry will be focusing specifically around mechanisms used to engage the public and various stakeholder groups on the issue of air quality.

39 Lettings Policy Review Consultation Update

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which provided a further update in relation to the proposed changes to the current lettings framework and policy.

The following were in attendance:

- Neil Evans, Director of Environment and Housing
- Jill Wildman, Chief Officer Housing Management
- Mandy Sawyer, Head of Neighbourhood Services

The key areas of discussion were:

- The Board received an overview of the consultation findings.
- It was noted that the final proposals will now be developed and reported to the Executive Board in February 2017.
- It was highlighted that the Council is still awaiting government guidance on the implementation of the Housing and Planning Act, with particular reference made to the introduction of mandatory fixed term tenancies before finalising proposals linked to a Tenant Transfer Policy.
- The Board emphasised the importance of developing an implementation strategy now to prepare housing officers to deliver the proposed changes without any unnecessary delays. The Board also requested to see details of this implementation strategy as soon as possible.
- In relation to the ward based community lettings plans, the Board advised that the Council consults with Housing Advisory Panels when developing these plans.
- The Board noted that only 33% of the consultation respondents were in favour of pre-tenancy training for prospective tenants and highlighted the need to explore the reasons for this response in more detail.
- The Board noted the legal opinion, as set out in the report, relating to the use of age related local lettings policies. Linked to this, the Board discussed the difficulties faced by the Council in balancing the need to fill empty properties against the desire to attract tenants from the targeted cohort. However, it was noted that further work would be undertaken to make such properties more attractive to their targeted cohort.
- Particular importance was placed on ensuring that the support needs of vulnerable tenants are being met. The Board was pleased to note that the recent procurement process linked to the Council's Supporting People housing contract, places more emphasis on the role of the housing

provider in ensuring that there is appropriate housing related support for vulnerable tenants.

- The Board discussed the provision of extra care housing and identified the need for the Council to work more effectively in attracting private sector providers.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the above requests for information be provided as soon as possible.
- (c) That the Scrutiny Board be kept informed of any significant issues arising from the anticipated governance guidance in relation to the Housing and Planning Act 2016.

(Councillor K Bruce arrived at 10.30 am during the consideration of this item)

40 Housing Related Matters

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report covering particular areas of housing policy/activity as requested by the Scrutiny Board.

The following were in attendance:

- Neil Evans, Director of Environment and Housing
- Jill Wildman, Chief Officer Housing Management
- Mandy Sawyer, Head of Neighbourhood Services

The key areas of discussion were:

Housing and Planning Act

- It was noted that the implementation date of April 2017 was still expected despite delays in receiving further government guidance on each of the policy changes.
- It was noted that a project group, chaired by the Chief Officer – Housing Management, had been established to co-ordinate proposals and develop a project plan for implementing the Act.
- A communications plan has also been developed to ensure that tenants are given the right information at the right time. This involves a dedicated webpage at www.leeds.gov.uk/hpa2016.
- The Board discussed the implications surrounding the sale of higher value vacant local authority homes and particular concerns were raised regarding the lack of guidance on how 'higher value' will be determined.
- The Board noted the potential resource implications in administering the new Pay to Stay policy.

Quality of Private Rented Sector Housing

- The Board noted the current estimated figure of 60,000 private rented sector properties in the city and sought clarification of whether this figure included student accommodation.
- It was highlighted that the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme is to be replaced with a new sector led Leeds Rental Standard.
- References were made to the creation of a rogue landlord unit and the Board emphasised the importance of having a clear understanding of what constitutes a 'rouge' landlord.
- The Board questioned what, if any, conditions could be placed on a property that is sold through the Council's Right-to-Buy scheme and subsequently becomes a private rented sector property.
- The Board sought clarification surrounding the processes in place for checking if a property bought under the Council's Right-to-Buy scheme is subsequently sold and the owner then reappplies for another Council property. Linked to this, the Board requested that further analysis is undertaken and reported back to the Board at the next Housing themed meeting in January 2017.
- Clarification was also sought regarding the Community Right to Bid process and whether this had been used in relation to council residential properties.

Void Turnaround Times of Council Homes

- Particular reference was made to the above average relet times within the South of the city and it was noted that targeted work within this area will assist in bringing the performance figure back within the target of 28 days.
- Clarification was sought regarding the areas where Housing Leeds has recently introduced a Variable Lettable Standard.

Tenant Scrutiny Board

- The Board acknowledged the recommendations and service responses linked to the recent Tenant Scrutiny Board inquiry into the environment of estates.
- The Board noted that the Tenant Scrutiny Board is now undertaking an inquiry into the East Leeds Repairs Service, which is expected to conclude in March 2017.
- Board Members sought further information in respect to the Tenant Scrutiny Board's governance and support arrangements.
- The Board also discussed the role of Housing Advisory Panels (HAPs) and sought clarification on Ward Member relationships with HAPs, in particular relating to bids, as this appeared inconsistent across the city.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the above updates and requests for information be provided.

41 Work schedule

The Head of Governance Services and Scrutiny Support submitted a report which invited Members to consider the Board's work schedule for the 2016/17 municipal year.

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser conveyed the apologies of the West Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner to the Board's November meeting, which is theme around Community Safety. The Board agreed to invite the PCC to its next Community Safety themed meeting in February 2017.

Board Members requested that the Community Safety themed meeting also includes an update surrounding the provision of Community Safety Area Coordinators.

The Chair informed Members that the first session of the Scrutiny Board's Inquiry into Air Quality was now scheduled for 17th November 2016 as a working group meeting.

Further to the Board's discussion in September regarding Peckfield Landfill Site, Members were concerned to learn about the recent fire incident at the site. The Board agreed to arrange a further meeting in the work schedule to continue its discussions on this matter and that the Environment Agency and the Operator be requested to attend.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the West Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner be invited to attend the Board's meeting in February 2017.
- (b) That the Board's Community Safety themed meeting in November also includes an update on the provision of Community Safety Area Coordinators.
- (c) That a further meeting is arranged in the work schedule in relation to Peckfield Landfill Site and the Environment Agency and the Operator be requested to attend.

(Councillor G Wilkinson left at 12.20 pm during the consideration of this item)

42 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Thursday, 24 November 2016 at 10 am (Pre-meeting for all Board Members at 9.30 am).

(The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm)