

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOODS)

MONDAY, 13TH OCTOBER, 2008

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors A Blackburn, B Cleasby,
D Coupar, D Hollingsworth, G Hyde,
L Mulherin and M Rafique

35 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed everyone to the October meeting of the Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods).

36 Late Items

In accordance with his powers under Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair consented to the submission of a late item of business relating to a summary report of the working group's discussions regarding the Board's Inquiry into Street Cleaning (Agenda Item 11) (Appendix B) (Minute 45 refers). The report was late due to the short timescale involved in producing the report and consulting working group members on its content.

37 Declarations of Interest

The following personal declarations were declared:-

- Councillor B Anderson in his capacity as Chair of the West North West Homes (Agenda Items 8, 9, 10 and 11) (Minutes 42, 43, 44 and 45 refer)
- Councillor A Blackburn in her capacity as a Director of West North West Homes (Agenda Items 8, 9, 10 and 11) (Minutes 42, 43, 44 and 45 refer)
- Councillor D Coupar in her capacity as a member on Belle Isle North Estate Management Board (Agenda Items 8, 9, 10 and 11) (Minutes 42, 43, 44 and 45 refer)
- Councillor D Hollingsworth in his capacity as a Director of East North East Homes (Agenda Items 8, 9, 10 and 11) (Minutes 42, 43, 44 and 45 refer)
- Councillor G Hyde in his capacity as a Director of East North East Homes (Agenda Items 8, 9, 10 and 11) (Minutes 42, 43, 44 and 45 refer)

38 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor A Gabriel, Councillor G Kirkland and Councillor J Marjoram.

39 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 8th September 2008 be confirmed as a correct record.

40 Matters Arising from the Minutes

(a) Members' Questions – Executive Member for Environmental Services (Minute 27(a) refers)

That this Board notes the follow up of information in the form of a written submission from Councillor S Smith on **dog fouling enforcement**.

In addition to the written submission, the Board sought clarification on a number of issues from Councillor S Smith, Executive Member for Environmental Services and Andrew Mason, Chief Environmental Services Officer who were in attendance.

Specific reference was made to the following issues:-

- clarification as to why **fixed penalty notices** in relation to dog fouling had reduced over the last three years
- the need for dog fouling enforcement to become a standing item on the Board's agenda until further notice
- the need for more staff to be employed within the Dog Warden Service
- clarification of the hours worked by Dog Wardens
(The Chief Environmental Services Officer responded and agreed to provide the Board with the relevant details)

Following a brief discussion, the Board agreed to have a standing item on dog fouling enforcement at future meetings to include information on the number of dog fouling fixed penalty notices, prosecutions, stray dogs impounded and the number of service requests dealt with on a ward basis.

(b) Update on the Supporting People Programme (Minute 29 refers)

That this Board notes the follow up information provided by the Head of Housing Strategy and Commissioning in relation to the Supporting People Programme. In particular, the Board noted the **Housing Strategy and Commissioning - Competitive Procurement Overview Plan**, but requested further detail around the dates for each tendering exercise.

(c) Scrutiny Inquiries – Draft Terms of Reference (Minute 30 refers)

The Principal Scrutiny Adviser reported on the latest developments with regards to a possible Board visit to the Brunswick Gardens Retirement Village in Sheffield to observe a new retirement village as part of the Board's Inquiry into **Older People's Housing**.

Following a brief discussion, the Principal Scrutiny Adviser agreed to arrange a suitable date for the visit (avoiding Tuesdays and Thursdays) and to advise Board Members accordingly.

The Board also noted that Councillor J Chapman (Chair of Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board) would be joining the Board for this particular Inquiry.

- (d) CO2 Emissions Inquiry – Formal Response (Minute 32 refers)
That this Board notes the follow up information provided by the Head of Sustainable Development in relation to those outstanding issues on **CO2 emissions** referred to within the minutes.

The Board agreed that no further action was required.

- (e) Lettings Policy – Proposed Changes (Minute 33 refers)
That this Board notes the decision of the Executive Board on 8th October 2008 in endorsing the changes in relation to the **Lettings policy**.

(Councillor D Coupar joined the meeting at 10.05 am during discussion of the dog fouling enforcement issue)

41 Executive Board - Minutes

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Executive Board meeting held on 2nd September 2008 be received and noted.

42 Accountability Arrangements for 2008/09 and Quarter 1 Performance Report

The Head of Policy Performance and Improvement submitted a report on performance information at the end of Quarter 1 (April 2008-June 2008).

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

- (a) Performance Indicators to be reported to Environment Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board 2008-09 (Appendix 1 refers)
- (b) Accountability Reporting Guidance (Appendix 2 refers)
- (c) Environment and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board Quarter 1 Performance Report 2008-09
- (d) Corporate Balanced Scoreboard 2008/09 (based on predicted year end performance from quarter 1 results)

The following representatives were in attendance and responded to Members' queries and comments:-

Councillor J L Carter, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Housing
Councillor S Smith, Executive Member for Environmental Services
Neil Evans, Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods
Andrew Mason, Chief Environmental Services Officer
Heather Pinches, Performance Manager

The Board was initially asked to provide their views on the format of the new reporting arrangements and to identify any gaps or areas where further information was required.

The following comments were made on the format of the new reporting arrangements:-

- the need to ensure that those indicators that fall outside of the national set were still being monitored regularly
(*The Performance Manager responded and reassured the Board that the new reporting arrangements still allow for the monitoring of local indicators. Directorates were asked to complete a performance indicator checklist and to cross reference these to improvement priorities, related policies and strategies and service plan/risk register activity*)
- the need to clearly differentiate between the performance results and the data quality status within the report. A suggestion was also made for the inclusion of data quality 'traffic lights', rather than just comments within future reports
(*The Performance Manager responded and agreed to feed this back to the Policy, Performance and Improvement Team*)

In summary, specific reference was made to the following performance issues:-

General Issues

- reference to a reduction in the reported incidents of **domestic violence** and whether the Leeds Women's Aid had provided any opinion on the reasons for this fall in numbers
(*The Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods responded and outlined the well established networks that were in place with other agencies and clarified that this fall was a regional trend which may be linked to a change in recording practices or impacted upon by referrals to the new Sanctuary scheme. It was noted that this was to be investigated further and would involve closer working with the Crown Prosecution Service*)
- the concerns expressed at the 13% increase in the **serious violent crime rate**. It was noted that the Home Office had changed the definition of this target and that the Council was awaiting baseline data in line with the new definition
- clarification of the number of offences of **dwelling burglary** recorded by the police; the target hardening work to improve security in vulnerable households; and the work with ALMOs to update security in these properties
- reference was made to other **Community Safety National Indicators** where the West Yorkshire Police were working towards producing district level information before December 2008. It was suggested that once this information was available, it should be reported to Area Committees
- the need to address the issue of dog fouling and to effectively utilise existing resources by exploring the use of other enforcement officers as well as dog wardens

- the concerns expressed that the total number of **homeless acceptances** had seen a quarterly increase of 34% from 224 in Quarter 4 07/08 to 301 in Quarter 1 08/09. Members queried whether this was due to the **credit crunch**
(The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Housing responded and informed the meeting that the 'credit crunch' was only one of a number of influencing factors. The Board noted that the Advisory Service was key in supporting people in retaining their homes and that people needed to raise any concerns as early as possible)
- the concerns expressed about the poor condition of some **temporary accommodation** properties and the need to inspect them thoroughly
(The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Housing and the Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing responded and agreed to reply directly to Councillor G Hyde on this specific issue)

Streetscene/Refuse Issues

- clarification of the start date and the wards chosen in relation to the **fortnightly green bin collection pilot**
(The Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods responded and informed the Board that the pilot would commence on 27th October 2008 taking in a cross section of wards from Otley to the centre of Leeds)
- the concerns expressed that members of the public were generally confused as to what should be placed in **green bins** and that some members of the public were still unaware of the problems associated with **contaminated bins**
(The Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods responded and informed the meeting that the number of contaminated bins throughout the city was reducing due to the current educational awareness programmes in place)
- assurances were sought that no waste material from the UK, and from Leeds City Council had been found buried in India
(The Executive Member for Environmental Services responded and confirmed that there was an investigation underway given that the Council did not have a contract with India. He agreed to keep the Board informed of the ongoing investigation. In addition to this, Board Members were also invited to visit the premises of the main contractor dealing with kerbside collected materials to see what processes the materials go through before exporting)
- the concerns expressed about the continuing practice of **missed bin collections** in wards throughout the city and the need for effective procedures to be in place
(Following discussions, it was agreed to add the missed bins collections performance indicator to the list of local indicators for future reports and for this information to be broken down into different rounds if possible)

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the contents of the report and appendices be noted.
- (b) That the outstanding issues referred to above be dealt with by those officers identified within the minutes and reported back to Board Members.

(Councillor G Hyde joined the meeting at 10.20 am during discussions of the above issue).

43 Recommendation Tracking

Referring to Minute 31 of the meeting held on 8th September 2008, the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report on recommendation tracking which focused on the **Streetscene Grounds Maintenance Contract**.

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

- (a) Performance tracking flowchart and classifications: Questions to be considered by Scrutiny Boards (Appendix 1 refers)
- (b) Recommendations Tracking – Progress Report (October 2008) (Appendix 2 refers)

The following officers were in attendance and responded to Members' queries and comments:-

Steve Smith, Head of Environmental Services
Andrew Mason, Chief Environmental Services Officer
Claire Warren, Chief Executive, West North West Homes, Leeds
Phil Hirst, Housing Services Development Manager, Aire Valley Homes, Leeds

In summary, specific reference was made to the following issues:-

- the views expressed that the Streetscene Grounds Maintenance Contract was not working effectively and seeking clarification of when the residents of Leeds would eventually see an improvement in service delivery
(The Head of Environmental Services responded and commented that many of the problems encountered were weather and staff related and that the department was monitoring the contract performance)
- the concerns expressed about areas of land still not being identified as part of the contract
- clarification of how the department identified areas of land where grounds maintenance was required
(The Head of Environmental Services responded and confirmed that the mapping database had been in-accurate. He informed the Board that a Grounds Maintenance Service Improvement Plan would be produced in early 2009. The Board agreed to revise its work programme with a view to considering the Service Improvement Plan in January/February 2009)

- the concerns expressed that residents were unaware of the frequency of **grass cutting and shrub maintenance**
(The Head of Environmental Services responded and outlined the general timetable for grass cutting and shrub maintenance. He agreed to supply a copy of the comprehensive timetable to the Board for their retention/information)
- the need for robust and consistent contract monitoring arrangements for ground maintenance
- clarification of the training arrangements made available to grounds maintenance staff
- clarification of how the local contractor dealt with the banking areas across the city which should be cut as part of the contract
(The Head of Environmental Services responded and agreed to provide an update for the Board on this issue)

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the contents of the report and appendices be noted.
- (b) That the outstanding issues referred to above be dealt with by those officers identified within the minutes and reported back to Board Members.

(Councillor L Mulherin left the room at 11.35 am and returned at 11.40 am during discussions of the above item)

(Councillor M Rafique left the room at 11.35 am and returned at 11.45 am during discussion of the above item)

44 Miscellaneous Properties

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods submitted a report on the numbers and occupation levels of miscellaneous properties belonging to the Council but not within the ALMO portfolios.

John Statham, Strategic Landlord Manager and Laura Kripp, Asset and Development Manager were in attendance and responded to Members' queries and comments.

In summary, specific reference was made to the following issues:-

- the concerns expressed about a number of properties in the Wharfedale area which were occupied by squatters and the need for action
(The Strategic Landlord Manager responded and reiterated the importance of the ongoing work around miscellaneous properties to tease out such issues)
- clarification of the process and timelines involved when a property was being returned to the Council

- clarification of the long term leases in relation to the **Supporting People Programme**
- the need to bring returned properties up to the Decent Homes Standard
- clarification of the process involved in relation to the **homebuyers scheme**

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (b) That the Strategic Landlord Manager and the Principal Scrutiny Adviser be requested to prepare an update on progress in relation to this issue for submission to a future Board meeting.

45 Inquiry into Street Cleaning

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report presenting evidence in line with session one of the Board's Inquiry into Street Cleaning.

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

- (a) Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) – Inquiry into Street Cleaning – Terms of Reference (Appendix 1 refers)
- (b) Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) – Inquiry into Street Cleaning – Summary report of the working group meeting held on 24th September 2008 (Appendix 2 refers)

The following officers were in attendance and responded to Members' queries and comments:-

Steve Smith, Head of Environmental Services
 Andrew Mason, Chief Environmental Services Officer
 Claire Warren, Chief Executive, West North West Homes, Leeds
 Phil Hirst, Housing Services Development Manager, Aire Valley Homes, Leeds

Prior to discussing the report, the Chair invited the ALMO representatives to outline their key roles in relation to Street Cleaning for the benefit of Board Members.

In summary, specific reference was made to the following issues:-

- clarification of what the ALMOs perceive to be the minimum standard of cleanliness for their estates
(The Board's Principal Scrutiny Advisor agreed to follow up written briefings from each of the ALMOs about what they perceive to be their responsibilities for street cleaning and also what they perceive to be the minimum standard of cleanliness of their estates)

- clarification of whether the ALMOs were supported by Streetscene Services when undertaking walkabouts on their estates
- the need to simplify the arrangements for street cleaning as the current arrangements appear confusing, particularly in relation to the streetscene/ALMO responsibilities
- the importance of regular **ginnel cleaning**
(The Head of Environmental Services responded and acknowledged that whilst maintenance was the key factor, ginnel cleaning was an on-going issue)
- clarification of the procedure in relation to leaf fall on ALMO land and the equipment used by Streetscene Services
- the need to move towards a common monitoring standard
- reference to a recent press release issued in relation to the Scrutiny Board's Inquiry into Street Cleaning and the responses already received from members of the public regarding the standard of street cleanliness
(The Chief Environmental Services Officer responded and made a commitment to provide a summary of the department's response to the public letters received)

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the contents of the report and appendices be noted
- (b) That the evidence provided in line with session one of its Inquiry into Street Cleaning be received and noted.

(Councillor L Mulherin and Councillor M Rafique left the meeting at 12.25 pm during discussion of the above item)

46 Inquiry into Asylum Seeker Case Resolution - Draft Terms of Reference

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report presenting draft terms of reference for the Board's forthcoming Inquiry into Asylum Seeker Case Resolution.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the contents of the report and appendices be noted.
- (b) That approval be given to the terms of reference for the Board's forthcoming Inquiry into Asylum Seeker Case Resolution.

47 Current Work Programme

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report on the Board's current work programme.

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

- Current work programme (Appendix 1 refers)

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Monday, 10th November, 2008

- Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period 1st October 2008 to 31st January 2009 (Appendix 2 refers)

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the contents of the report and appendices be noted.
- (b) That a standing item on dog fouling enforcement be incorporated within the Board's work programme.
- (c) That the Grounds Maintenance Service Improvement Plan be incorporated within the Board's work programme for January/February 2009.
- (d) That an update on miscellaneous properties be incorporated within the Board's work programme

48 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Monday 10th November 2008 at 10.00 am (pre-meeting for Board Members at 9.30 am)

(The meeting concluded at 12.35 pm).