

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

MONDAY, 6TH NOVEMBER, 2023

PRESENT: Councillor S Golton in the Chair

Councillors P Stables, J Akhtar,
P Grahame, A Maloney, J Tudor,
A Hannan, A Rontree, S Seary,
N Harrington, C Anderson, K Brooks and
E Thomson

49 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals.

50 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

Members were informed that Appendix C to the Executive Board report had been designated as being exempt from publication under the provisions of Access to Information Procedure Rule 10.4 (3).

51 Late Items

Supplementary information had been provided by the Director of Communities, Housing and Environment in relation to item 7, Future of Six High Rise and Resident Rehousing – Bailey and Brooklands Towers, Ramshead Heights, Leaffield Towers, Raynville Court and Grange. This information had been published and distributed prior to the meeting.

52 Declaration of Interests

There were no late items.

53 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors B Anderson (signatory to the Call-in), A Khan and Councillor A McCluskey.

Councillors C Anderson, K Brooks and E Thomson were in attendance as substitutes.

54 Call In Briefing Paper

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report advising the Scrutiny Board on the procedural aspects of Calling In the decision.

Members were advised that the Call In is specific to the key decision in question, and issues outside of the decision, including other related decisions, were not to be considered as part of the Board's decision regarding the outcome of the Call In.

Members were also advised that the options available to the Scrutiny Board in respect of this particular called in decision were as follows:

Option 1- Release the decision for implementation

Having reviewed this decision, the Scrutiny Board may decide to release it for implementation. If the Scrutiny Board chooses this option, the decision will be immediately released for implementation and the decision may not be called in again.

Option 2 - Recommend that the decision be reconsidered

The Scrutiny Board may decide to recommend to the decision maker that the decision be reconsidered. If the Scrutiny Board chooses this option a report will be submitted to the decision maker.

In the case of this officer decision, the report of the Scrutiny Board will be prepared within three working days of the Scrutiny Board meeting and submitted to the relevant Director.

In reconsidering the decision and associated Scrutiny Board report, the Director may vary the decision or confirm the original decision. In either case, this will form the basis of the final decision and will not be subject to any further Call In.

Failure to agree one of the above options

If the Scrutiny Board, for any reason, does not agree one of the above courses of action at this meeting, then Option 1 will be adopted by default, i.e. the decision will be released for implementation with no further recourse to Call In.

RESOLVED – That the report outlining the Call In procedures be noted.

55 Future of six high rise and resident rehousing - Bailey and Brooklands Towers, Ramshead Heights, Leafield Towers, Raynville Court and Grange

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report that presented background papers to a decision made by Executive Board at its meeting of 18th October 2023, which had been Called-In in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

The decision had been called in for review by Councillors Barry Anderson, Mark Dobson, Wayne Dixon, Robert Finnigan and Diane Chapman

The Scrutiny Board considered the following written information:

- Copy of the completed Call In request form.
- Report of the Director of Communities, Housing and Environment presented to Executive Board at its meeting of 18 October 2023.
- Extract from the draft minutes of the Executive Board meeting held on 18 October 2023.

The following were in attendance:

- Councillor Barry Anderson, Lead Signatory to the Call In
- Councillor Jessica Lennox, Executive Member for Housing
- James Rogers, Director of Communities, Housing and Environment
- Gerald Tinsdale, Chief Officer – Housing
- Helen Jackson, Head of Business Development and Housing Projects

As the Nominated Lead Signatory to the Call In, Councillor B Anderson addressed the Board on the reasons for the Call-in.

The following concerns were raised:

- While it was acknowledged that the buildings were not fit for purpose, all signatories to the call in had concerns regarding the provision of Council, social and affordable housing.
- Further information was requested about the consultation process including in relation to individual concerns that had been raised by tenants and the details of the questions asked during the consultation.
- The signatories sought clarity about how many residents supported the proposals, how many had concerns and how many opposed the proposal.
- Lessons that had been learned from previous consultations.
- Cllr Anderson queried why copies of the consultation documents and FAQs had not been appended to the Executive Board report.
- Clarity was sought about whether people had been consulted about the proposed levels of compensation and been provided with information how this could affect their benefits.
- Whether independent legal advice was available for tenants.
- The impact on the housing register of including tenants within priority bandings, particularly for those who already have band A and A+ status.
- Housing supply – signatories queried how many lets per annum are made by the Council and how long would it take to adequately re-house the affected tenants.
- What happens if suitable accommodation is not found? Will the process be held up until the last resident had moved out of an existing block?
- What will be the impact of allocating affected tenants direct let status?
- Has there been a timescale set for re-investment on the sites?

- Have land swaps with developers been considered?
- Could a housing company be developed to take over these sites?
- Why has planning permission for the future use of these sites not been sought?
- What green priorities have been considered?
- Has WYCA funding or Government funding been sought for re-development?
- Could the sites be sold in their current state to a registered social landlord or developer?
- What works need doing in the interim to keep properties safe and secure?
- What assurances can be given with regard to measures being taken to prevent future investment programmes overspending?
- What would the carbon footprint of demolition be?
- What would the impact on the Housing Revenue Account be?
- This would take properties out of use in the same way as right to buy.

In conclusion it was felt that the original proposal should have been referred to scrutiny before submission to Executive Board so that further examination could have been undertaken by members.

In response to questions from the Board, the following was discussed:

- Further consideration needed to be given to the impacts of the decision rather than the decision being reversed.
- There was a need for these properties to be demolished and for the provision of new housing.
- Concern was expressed regarding the length of time it could take for blocks to be demolished following tenants vacating.
- Further information was requested regarding the future use of the land, what the blocks would be replaced with, the housing mix needed in the local area and the need for further consultation with Ward Members.

Councillor Lennox, Executive Member for Housing and James Roges, Director of Environment, Communities and Housing addressed the Board. The following was highlighted:

- Appendix B of the report set out various options for the blocks along with the associated costs. Doing nothing would not address the needs of residents or deliver improved energy efficiency. There was also a possibility that in future safety certificates may not be achieved.
- Full refurbishment would have required residents to move out of the properties and in those circumstances it could take up to 5 years for re-occupation. Refurbishment would not be financially viable – costs are projected to be around £485k per flat, which is higher than the current cost of providing new build housing units.
- Engagement has taken place with 85% of affected residents. Data collected had been analysed to ensure the necessary support could

be provided to tenants throughout the process of re-housing. Only 8% of households had shown any trepidation and one in five were already seeking re-housing.

- Repairs to improve the standard of accommodation would still require tenants to vacate the properties.
- Residents being placed on Band A would not necessarily penalise others already on the list, allocations would still be made to those with the highest needs.
- Tenants would be given a choice in terms of re-housing and it was expected that the vast majority would be allocated housing in the area of their choice.
- Council housing growth – there had been an additional 500 homes provided in Leeds over the past year but there were still pressures on finances and due to loss of properties under right to buy.
- The proposed approach would see demolition carried out ahead of options being developed for alternative delivery at these sites. It was too early at this stage to carry out any planning applications. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment was due to be updated which would give a clearer picture of housing demand across Leeds and the housing mix needed.
- It was not proposed to move residents on a short-term basis and most tenants have already expressed a preference in terms of area. Tenants could also apply for other social/private rented housing without affecting their home loss payments.
- The demolition would result in a loss of income for the Council due to the demolition. However, the substantial costs that would be incurred for necessary ongoing maintenance and repair costs mean it is not viable to continue to retain these blocks.
- The Council has a clear lettings policy, which has been agreed by Elected Members and is publicly available.
- There is a clear risk that future safety certificates may not be obtained without substantial works being undertaken on the sites.

In response to questions from the Scrutiny Board. Discussion included the following:

- A safety case for the blocks had to be submitted by 31st March 2024. If the Council cannot meet the necessary standards, it has to be demonstrated that a plan is in place to address those concerns. If the buildings are safe and secure, they could still be occupied.
- There are approximately 125 people currently on Band A+ and 5,300 on Band A. There are approximately 26,000 on the register. 3,100 properties were allocated last year. The number of people waiting with Band A status had been reducing.
- It was estimated that by 2026/27 everybody will have been successfully re-homed, with many in the same area.
- There has been a lower take up of engagement with residents of Ramshead Heights but efforts are continuing to engage with residents.
- There is only one leaseholder property across the six blocks and work is ongoing with the tenant.

- The Council could ultimately apply for possession of a property through the courts if someone refused to move out.
- The preference would be to replace the blocks with council housing which would be high quality and energy efficient. It is anticipated that work could commence in 2027 following demolition.
- There has been positive comments from residents regarding the decision to rehouse people and demolish the blocks.
- 673 properties have been lost through right to buy over the past year. During 2023/24 officers estimate around 200 additional properties for applicants from the building of new homes and acquisition.
- Information was requested on the number of families with children that would be affected and how it would affect school places.

Councillor Lennox thanked Members for their engagement and reiterated that the proposal aims to deliver a proactive, managed process to rehouse people in high quality housing across the city.

In conclusion, Councillor Anderson reiterated that the signatories agree with the decision to demolish the blocks but believe more detail should have been provided to members at an earlier stage with regards to future proposals and timescales to ensure more accountability. There is some concern over the need for a safety certificate and whether people should still be in these properties. He asked the Executive Member to involve scrutiny at all further stages of the decision.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report, along with comments from Members, be noted.

56 Outcome of the Call In

The Scrutiny Board considered whether or not to release the decision for implementation. A vote was subsequently held and the Scrutiny Board agreed (by majority decision) that the decision be released.

RESOLVED – That the decision be released for implementation.

57 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Thursday, 7 December 2023 at 10.30 a.m. There will be a pre-meeting for Board Members at 10.00 a.m.