

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

THURSDAY, 25TH MARCH, 2021

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors J Akhtar, J Bentley, D Collins,
A Gabriel, P Grahame, A Khan, P Gruen,
N Sharpe, K Brooks, T Smith and
L Mulherin

91 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals.

92 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no exempt information.

93 Late Items

There were no formal late items.

94 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

95 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors A Blackburn and M Dobson.

96 Minutes - 25 February 2021

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held 25th February 2021, be approved as an accurate record.

Matters Arising

Minute No. 87 – Private Sector Housing Update. It was noted that information regarding empty homes had been circulated. However, it was requested that additional information be provided based on new ward structures, and a breakdown of voids in each ward.

97 Update on Fuel Poverty in Leeds

Agenda Items 7 – Fuel Poverty in Leeds, 8 – Energy Efficiency in Council Housing Stock and 9 – Carbon Reduction in the Private Rented Sector, were

considered together by the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities).

The reports of the Sustainable Energy and Air Quality Team and the Director of Resources and Housing, provided the Scrutiny Board with an update on fuel poverty within Leeds, and an overview of recent government policy announcements and their impact on the council's work to tackle fuel poverty in the city. Progress to support the decarbonisation of council housing stock since February 2021 and information on current and pipeline energy projects, and future investment needs and carbon reduction in the private rented sector, and the Council approach to addressing carbon reduction as part of the Climate Emergency, in order to achieve the targets set by the Government to meet the 2050 target.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Coupar, Executive Member for Communities
- Councillor Hayden, Executive Member for Climate Change, Transport and Sustainable Development
- Councillor Scopes, Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Chair
- Neil Evans, Director of Resources and Housing
- George Munson, Senior Project Manager
- Robert Curtis, Programme Officer
- Nahim Rudi-Khan, Head of Strategy and Investment
- Gerard Tinsdale, Chief Officer Housing
- Mark Ireland, Head of Private Rented Sector

Officers in attendance, provided a PowerPoint presentation to the Scrutiny Board, covering the following matters:

Fuel Poverty

- Statistics in Leeds against the national average, showing a positive trend over the last 4 years. Significant impacts as a result of COVID-19 are yet to be identified;
- An overview of the new UK Government Fuel Poverty Strategy, Sustainable Warmth: Protecting Vulnerable Households in England;
- Estimated retrofit costs seeking to achieve net zero and make homes affordable (EPC 'C' or better);
- The various funding opportunities available, such as the Green Homes Grant, Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and the potential follow up to GHG over the next 2 years;
- The roles, requirements and implications, as a result of the new technical standard PAS2035.

Council Housing Stock

- 133m planned investment over 5 years to support decarbonisation of council housing stock and there is currently 31m on-site activity and the intention to maximise future funding opportunities to support the HRA;
- The focus of renewable investment with replacing electric storage heating, with renewable energy in high rise blocks;

- Case studies from residents highlighting the benefits of renewable installation;
- Total carbon savings per annum per project;
- Next steps in terms of the current unfunded need. It was reported that 32.5m was required to improve the lowest performing homes to a SAP C, and this can only be achieved based on affordability, practicality and/availability of current efficiency measures.

Private Rented Sector

- Challenges and implications with over 50% of the PRS being in the pre-1919 stock, with most of the tenure being in inner city areas and owner/occupation;
- The challenges facing the PRS with the move for minimum energy standards EPC C by 2030;
- Financial implications of works for owners to meet standards and energy efficient homes not being a selling point/ market advantage;
- The options available to address issues, including:
 - Education;
 - Finance available;
 - Enforcement;
 - Public policy;
 - Increasing awareness; and
 - Behaviour change.

Members discussed a number of matters, including:

- Funding considerations around how the Council are able to make long-term investments;
- Delivering employment and apprenticeship opportunities;
- Expanding renewable investment across additional high rise blocks and on an individual home basis;
- Clarity on reducing the value of properties, as part of ensuring homes meet energy efficiency standards;
- Clarity on activity and the consultation process regarding local organisations who have been awarded funding from The National Lottery's Climate Action Fund;
- Clarity on where residents can seek advice as to which private schemes are genuine, and whether the Council provide a service to assist with this;
- The cost of fuel and considerations around measures the Council and PRS can take to remove pre-paid metres.

In response to questions, the following had been confirmed:

- Timescale implications with engaging with the local community and liaising with the supply chain / contractors, from when grants are awarded. It was noted that longer timescales would enable job creation and to plan over a longer period of time to provide assurances to builders. Additionally, Members were provided with an update on the scheme carried out in Holbeck to provide additional homes with energy efficiency works/ improvements and take-up from residents.

- Investment will transform the Council's multi storey stock and deliver new council housing at a good standard in terms of energy efficiency. Members were informed of the financial implications and the risks associated with having multiple schemes open. Whilst the Council sought to provide every high rise block with an electric storage system, individual tenant repairs would be looked at on a case by case basis to seek the best solution.
- The Council are taking every opportunity to connect to the 'District Heating Network Leeds Pipe' scheme.
- The Leeds Climate Emergency Action Project is carried out by Third Sector organisations aiming to explore local mobilisation on climate issues. The Council supported National Lottery Funding for the organisation to look at projects across the city to help involve people in climate change activities. The Executive Member for Climate Change, Transport and Sustainable Development confirmed that she would liaise with those groups to encourage them to work with the Council and Elected Members on those projects.
- Private sector companies accessing eco energy funding on a private basis, are encouraged to look at companies carrying out work in accordance with Trustmark standards. It was confirmed that the Council do not have a specific service to provide assurances to residents seeking advice on a specific company. The Chair requested that this be considered as a matter for the successor Scrutiny Board.
- Whilst the Government introduced caps on tariffs that alleviated some issues, self-disconnection remains an issue with residents budgeting by turning off their heating. The Council commissioned the Home Plus (Leeds) service that includes organisations such as Care and Repair and Ground Repair Leeds to provide assistance to residents experiencing issues with their bills. It was confirmed that the new generation of smart metres aim to alleviate issues.

The Executive Member for Communities thanked all officers and Elected Members involved with the schemes carried out to tackle climate change and fuel poverty. Challenges remained in the city, particularly with pre 1919 stock and the retrofitting implications associated with bringing those houses up to an energy efficient standard.

The Chair thanked those officers in attendance.

RESOLVED – The Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities):

- a) Noted the contents of the report, along with Member's comments;
- b) Requested that the successor Scrutiny Board schedule a space on their work programme in the 2021/22 municipal year, and that an update on progress be received;
- c) Requested that the successor Scrutiny Board be minded to look at issues in relation to where residents can seek/ receive advice on specific private sector companies;
- d) Requested that a joint letter from the Chair of the successor Scrutiny Board and the Executive Member for Communities, be sent to the

Government on behalf of the Scrutiny Board, to relay challenges with alleviating fuel poverty, funding implications with Council housing stock and carbon reduction in the private rented sector. It was agreed the letter would highlight the challenges for the sector of delivering fuel poverty interventions in very restricted timeframes to meet the constraints of short term grant funding opportunities. Members wished to highlight to ministers and civil servants the potential for more sustainable arrangements to help deliver green jobs and apprenticeships.

98 Energy Efficiency in Council Housing Stock

This item was considered alongside Agenda Item 7 – Fuel Poverty in Leeds and Agenda Item 9 – Carbon Reduction in the Private Rented Sector. Minute No. 97 refers.

99 Carbon Reduction in the Private Rented Sector

This item was considered alongside Agenda Item 7 – Fuel Poverty in Leeds and Agenda Item 8 – Energy Efficiency in Council Housing Stock.

100 Work Schedule

The report of the Head of Democratic Services set out the Scrutiny Board's work schedule for the remainder of the current municipal year. A draft work programme for the 2021/22 successor board, as well as the final River Cleanliness Report had also been appended to the submitted report, for the Board's consideration.

Discussion focused on the final River Cleanliness Inquiry Report. Members were in agreement with the publication of the report and the Chair in particular, commended Helen Grey (Senior Scrutiny and Governance Support Officer) for all of her work and research on the report.

RESOLVED –

- a) To consider the matters outlined in the submitted report and agreed the overall work schedule for the Board's work for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year.
- b) To consider and agree the draft 2021/22 work schedule for the successor board as set out in Appendix 2.
- c) To consider the final River Cleanliness inquiry report and recommend its publication.

CHAIRS CLOSING COMMENTS

The Chair thanked Members and Officers of the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities) for their support and work over the past year, with specific mention to Becky Atherton and Helen Grey. The Chair also thanked the Director of Resources and Housing for his contributions to the service, as well as Executive Members Councillor Coupar and Rafique.

The Chair acknowledged this would be the last meeting Councillor P Gruen will attend before moving on to new endeavours, and wished him well in the future. It was also noted that it would be Councillor A Khan's final Scrutiny Board meeting before becoming the Lord Mayor in the 2021/22 municipal year, and thanked him for his diligence and hard work on the Scrutiny Board. Both Councillors Gruen and Khan thanked the Board for their words, and the Chair for his support and success of the work carried out by the Scrutiny Board in recent years.

101 Date and Time of Next Meeting

RESOLVED – To note the date and time of the next meeting as 17th June 2021, at 10.30 am (there will be a pre-meet for members at 10 am)

(The meeting concluded at 12:00 pm)