

HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

MONDAY, 7TH SEPTEMBER, 2015

PRESENT: Councillor D Coupar in the Chair

Councillors B Anderson, J Bentley,
S Hamilton and K Ritchie

Tenant/Leaseholder

Ted Wilson
Andy Liptrot
David Atkinson

Independent Representative

Timothy Woods

Co-opted Member

Jo Hourigan

18 Chair's opening remarks

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of Housing Advisory Board in the Council's new committee room and asked Board Members and Officers to introduce themselves

19 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest

20 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from David Glew, Andrew Feldhaus and Matthew Walker

21 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the Housing Advisory Board meeting held on 9th July 2015 be approved subject to the following amendments:

The inclusion of the names of all of the attendees present at the meeting

Minute 11 relating to Environmental Improvement Programme Update to include after ' Councillor Ritchie questioned the spread of projects, suggesting more might be targeted to reduce inequality and deprivation across the city' the words ' and that the spend ought to be proportionate to the Council house stock levels'

Final minutes approved at the meeting
held on Tuesday, 10th November, 2015

Minute 11 relating to Environmental Improvement Programme Update to amend the typing error in the 5th paragraph

22 Matters Arising From the Minutes

The following matters arising/actions from the minutes were highlighted:

Minute 12 – Contract Strategy and future of Construction Services

The Board was informed that approval had now been received to the new pay proposals for staff

Housing Leeds Capital Financial Position Period 2 2015/16 – Minute 8 – 9th July 2015 meeting

That work was continuing to provide information to the Board on a Ward basis, with this being circulated to Members within the next few weeks

Environmental Improvement Programme Update – Minute 11 – 9th July 2015 meeting

Councillor Hamilton thanked Officers for the information which had been provided to her on this matter and queried whether all of the works had been completed by projected period of the end of Summer 2015. The Chief Officer Housing Management stated that she would provide further information on this directly to Councillor Hamilton

23 Housing Leeds Capital Financial Position Period 4 2015/16

The Director of Environment and Housing presented a report setting out the financial position statement on the HRA Housing Leeds Capital programme at period 4 for the financial year 2015/16

The Head of Finance, Environment and Housing presented the report and responded to queries and comments from the Board

Members discussed the report with the key issues being raised relating to:

- the reasons for the adjustment to the budget
- the level of uncommitted funding and the timescales for this to be committed
- new build and the possibility of specifying which properties would include accommodation for older people
- the inclusion of Rosemont under 'Other Planned' as no decision had yet been taken on this
- the number of small, Council owned sites which were to be disposed of and whether the potential of such sites was being considered
- the possibility of achieving some new build in the Wetherby area

The Board was informed that the adjustment of the budget down to circa £75m had been based largely on the capacity in the service to ensure all the work was delivered. There was a need to plan for constancy and the aim was to plan for circa £80m for the next 3 years

In terms of new build, the programme covered the period up to 2018, and in terms of uncommitted funds, Officers were looking at areas of Leeds where there was high demand but currently little supply

It was accepted that in terms of Rosemont, no final decision on this had been reached but that provision had been made to support a new build option

In respect of utilising Council owned sites, the Board was informed that all sites were being considered. A particular difficulty was the need to balance where high demand existed with affordability and where land values were high, new build was difficult to deliver, as in Wetherby. However, working with other Council Departments, a prospectus was being drawn up for developers, to indicate where there was unmet need, particularly for extra care facilities to encourage developers to meet this need

RESOLVED - To note the Housing Leeds and BITMO refurbishment programme and Housing Leeds Council House Growth programme position at period 4, 2015/16

24 Housing Leeds (HRA) Revenue Financial Position July 2015/16

The Director of Environment and Housing presented a report updating the Board on the revenue financial position for the Housing Leeds (HRA) service as at the end of July 2015

A summary of the Key Variances in respect of income and expenditure were outlined in the submitted report together with information on the level of Right to Buy sales

The Head of Finance, Environment and Housing presented the report and responded to queries and comments

Board Members discussed the report with the main areas of debate relating to:

- rent collection rates
- rent arrears and the level of support given to assist people in this
- the level of Right to Buy sales and the impact of these on housing stock levels going forward
- PFI and that further information particularly on the level of income from this was required

The Board was informed of the level of work which had been done to ensure rent collection was maximised, including working in partnership with Revenue and Benefits colleagues and setting targets for each housing manager. In terms of assistance to people who were experiencing difficulties in paying their rent a range of different mechanisms were being considered as were the development of new approaches, especially for those people with variable incomes. In terms of the collection rates for August, the Board was informed these showed an improvement with the collection rate being reported as 96.36%

On the issue of Right to Buy sales, the Director of Environment and Housing stated there was a legal obligation to respond to requests from tenants to purchase their property, however, despite the increase incentives introduced by Central Government, the number of sales had not risen dramatically. It was noted that for each property sold, the Council received a level of funding, however, this sum did not cover the cost of a new build

RESOLVED - To note the contents of the report

25 Performance Report

Final minutes approved at the meeting
held on Tuesday, 10th November, 2015

Housing Advisory Board considered a report of the Director of Environment and Housing summarising the latest available performance against measures relating to the new six Housing Leeds priorities which had been agreed by the Board. The report also highlighted the ongoing development of the relevant performances measures and included statistical and graphical information in the form of dashboards to illustrate the work being undertaken and to provide useful context. Members were informed of an error in the report relating to the figures in the end column of the dashboard relating to priority 1

The Head of Resources, Housing and Strategy presented the report and outlined the current position in relation to each of the Housing Leeds Priorities, (referring the Board to other agenda items that provided further information on particular performance areas). The following information being provided:

- Priority 3 – Housing People – homeless preventions were exceptionally high and Leeds was a top performer in relation to comparator authorities. Councillor Ritchie welcomed the provision of additional information on Homelessness assessment outcomes and commended this performance. In relation to re-lets the number of days had reduced and the cumulative average was now 33 days
- Priority 4 – Repairs – that in general a steady performance was being achieved although not quite to target, and there were some issues in one geographical area which were being addressed
- Priority 6 – Knowing Our Tenants – that the Department was above its target for Annual Home Visits

In terms of apprenticeships the Chair welcomed the hard work which had been undertaken on this

The Board considered the report and commented on a range of issues, with the key areas of discussion relating to:

- re-let times, with Officers advising that work to speed up the process was being undertaken through a more collective approach, with the figures for July showing an average re-let time of 27 days
- the possibility of highlighting the financial benefits achieved through shorter re-let times
- disrepair claims – the work being undertaken to reduce these with better management and increased resources, including picking up issues through the annual visit
- the target for completion of repairs correctly first time and the associated costs of this. The Board was informed that Officers were looking at how targets were managed across different contractors
- the use of local firms by contractors, with the Board being advised that contractors were actively encouraged to use local firms and local labour wherever possible and practical

At this point Councillor Hamilton brought to the attention of the Board

that she had recently been involved in dealing with a long-standing repair issue for a family member

- whether tenants were referred to other agencies if additional support was considered necessary. The Chief Officer, Housing Management advised that Housing Leeds had a duty to provide advice and support and was currently undertaking work on this together with a review of the work carried out by the Tenancy Sustainment Officers, with further information being made available to Members if required
- Housing Advisory Panel funding, with a verbal update being provided on the number of projects which had been supported; those which were in progress and the level of funding which was committed. The Chair asked that this information be put in writing and sent to all Board Members

RESOLVED - i) To note the most recent performance information relating to the six Housing Leeds priorities

ii) To note the progress being made to develop dashboards for each of the six Housing Leeds Priorities which will be reported to future Board meetings

iii) To note the details of apprenticeships at section 4 of the submitted report

26 Key Welfare Changes and Preparations for Universal Credit.

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report informing Housing Advisory Board of the key welfare changes; implications from the recent Budget and the preparations being made for the implementation of Universal Credit which would be introduced in Leeds on 1st February 2016. Appended to the report was a copy of the Housing Leeds Action Plan 2015-2016 relating to welfare reforms and the introduction of Universal Credit and a summary report of the financial implications of the Chancellor's July budget statement

Officers presented the report and informed the Board that initially around 60-80 tenants per month would be affected by the changes, however this would increase with around 24,000 tenants likely to be affected by the welfare reform changes

In terms of the provision of support to those who would be affected, teams of dedicated Officers were being developed who would provide support through access to IT and help with finding employment. In addition an action plan had been developed around communication and training for staff

The Board discussed the report, with the following issues being raised:

- the extent to which tenants affected by Under Occupation were seeking to be rehoused or were accepting reductions in Housing Benefit
- the cessation of Housing Benefit for those aged 18-20 and whether exceptions would be made for those young people leaving care. Members were informed that details of any exceptions had not yet been provided by DWP

- whether any information was available from other Local Authorities where Universal Credit had already been introduced. The Board was informed that a visit to Oldham Council was to take place and that a report on the findings of that visit could be brought to a future meeting
- the need for a representative from the Council's Benefits Service to attend a further meeting to provide information to the Board including on direct payments. Particular concern was raised about the in-built delay of 5-6 weeks before the first payment of Universal Credit was made and the fact that claims would no longer be backdated to 6 months but to 4 weeks. Members were informed that although a mechanism existed whereby payments could be taken directly by the Council this would only be possible after people had already fallen into arrears and of the list of priority debts set out by DWP, rent was not a top priority
- the cost to the Council of the additional staffing required to provide support. The Director of Environment and Housing advised that whilst there would be an additional cost the decision to provide this support was an economically sensible one
- how people with particular needs would be supported. Officers advised that for those people an holistic approach would be taken which looked at the needs of individuals
- how tenants would be involved in the work being undertaken with the Board being advised this would be through VITAL
- the number of other sections within the Council which were working on these changes and that a Scrutiny Inquiry was also taking place
- the composition of the membership of the Welfare Reform Board and the Citizens@Leeds Programme Board
- the implications of the changes together with the 1% cut in rent announced recently by the Chancellor and how pressure could be brought to bear on Central Government, possibly by joining with other Local Authorities to share information and best practice. The Director of Environment and Housing stated that Housing Leeds did engage in consultation with other Local Authorities and that Senior Officers were part of national networks, however it was clear the Government intended to implement the planned changes so the key element was about how Housing Leeds responded to them

The Chair welcomed the work which had been carried out to date but stressed there were many more issues which would need to be considered and addressed and that the Board should retain a watching brief on this matter though the preparation for Universal Credit and its implementation

RESOLVED – i) To note the contents of the report and the support provided to tenants to respond to the challenges of Welfare Reform and the preparations for the introduction of Universal Credit

ii) That the Chief Officer Welfare and Benefits be asked to submit a report to a future meeting which provided further information on the Welfare Reform proposals, including details of exceptions

27 Tenant Engagement Update

Housing Advisory Board considered a report of the Director of Environment and Housing which provided details of the progress being made in the development of tenant involvement and the newly formed city-wide groups together with details of their strategic priorities. Appended to the report was a diagram showing the relationships and reporting structure of the Tenant Involvement Service; the draft terms of reference of the Strategic Tenants Body and a copy of the 2014-2015 Annual Report by the Cross City Chairs Group of the Housing Advisory Panels

Officers presented the report and outlined the key developments which had occurred since this matter was last reported to the Board in May 2015

Members were informed that the overall framework was being embedded; that VITAL – the new strategic tenant body – had been formalised and had met on three occasions

Concerns were raised about work being undertaken by a theology student from Leeds University on a project around the religion or belief of LCC tenants; the cost of this to Housing Leeds; how such information would be of benefit especially as statistical data around this subject already existed. The Board was informed no direct costs would be incurred by Housing Leeds and that the Department had been approached by Leeds University; that such information could be of use in respect of engagement and more practical issues relating to, for example, the layout of kitchens where certain requirements existed.

Concerns continued to be raised about the need for Officers to be involved at some level in the report which would be produced and that there were many more pressing issues for Officers to focus on

The successful work with TARAs in the Bramley area was reported, and that the local Tenant Engagement Officer had played a key role in this success. The Board was informed that the first TARA Panel would meet on Friday 11th September

A typing error in paragraph 4.2 of the submitted report was highlighted

In responding to points which had been raised, the Director of Environment and Housing stated that a significant amount of work had been done with staff on engagement with the wide range of groups which formed Housing Leeds' tenants but that further work was required on this, especially how best to engage with younger people

RESOLVED - That Housing Advisory Board recognises the new city-wide strategic groups and supports the overall approach and direction of travel to create an engaged and representative tenant base within Leeds

28 Housing Leeds Customer Access Strategy

The Director of Environment and Housing presented a report updating the Board on progress which had been made to improve tenant satisfaction in line with Housing Leeds' primary priority of fundamentally increasing tenant

satisfaction. Appended to the report was a copy of the Council's Customer Access Strategy upon which Housing Leeds' action plan would be based

The Board was informed that Housing Leeds' offer to its customers was being examined, with some elements of self-service being introduced which would also free up staff to offer a more personalised approach where this was needed. Staff training was also being undertaken to ensure that all customer-facing staff had received similar training to that in Customer Services and that they also had the skills and tools to provide what was required. In terms of monitoring the strategy, the quality of the experience would be considered

Members commented on the report in relation to routine concerns relating to the length of time tenants had to wait until telephone calls were answered and whether in terms of service delivery, this was carried out to fit around the tenants. The method of how quality would be monitored was also raised

The Board was informed that work had been taking place with the Contact Centre on telephone response rates and that improvements to this could be made. On the issue of hours of operation, it was accepted that Housing Leeds needed to extend their hours more to suit their tenants

On the issue of monitoring of quality, a range of measures would be used, including involving tenants groups and through the biannual tenant satisfaction survey

The Chair welcomed the report and the work which was being done to improve access for tenants and hoped this would in turn translate to higher satisfaction rates in the next tenants survey

RESOLVED - i) To approve the approach as set out in the submitted report

ii) That an update on this issue be provided to the Board together with details on how the differing age ranges of tenants could be addressed in terms of the best way in which to engage with the different groups

29 Housing Adaptations

The Director of Environment and Housing presented a report which provided Housing Advisory Board with an overview of recent changes in the way the housing adaptation service was provided, including detail on current performance and ways in which further service integration and improved customer experience could be achieved

RESOLVED - To note the report

30 Housing Advisory Board Forward Plan 2015

The Board considered the contents of the Housing Advisory Board Forward Plan for 2015

Items for the next meeting for consideration included The Community Lettings Policy and the High Rise Project. The Chair also suggested that the tenant/leaseholder representatives on the Board be asked to provide updates on the work they were doing

A request for information to be provided to Councillor Hamilton on the individual projects for the high rise blocks was noted

RESOLVED - That the contents of the Housing Advisory Board Forward Plan for 2015 be noted

31 Agenda distribution

Concerns were raised that in some cases the papers for this meeting had been received at short notice with a request being made that the papers were delivered to Board Members rather than being sent through the post

The Clerk apologised for this and said that whilst the papers had been sent out in good time for the meeting, the Bank Holiday could have contributed to the papers being received late. The Chair asked that this be monitored and if delays continued to occur that an alternative method of delivery be considered

32 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Tuesday 10th November 2015 at 5.00pm in the Civic Hall, Leeds