

## HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

TUESDAY, 10TH NOVEMBER, 2015

**PRESENT:** Councillor D Coupar in the Chair

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

### **Tenant/Leaseholder**

Ted Wilson

### **Independent Representative**

Timothy Woods  
Matthew Walker  
Andrew Feldhaus

### **Co-opted Member**

David Glew

### **33 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents**

There were no appeals against the refusal of inspection of documents.

### **34 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public**

There were no items identified where it was considered necessary to exclude the press or public due to the confidential nature of the business to be considered.

### **35 Late Items**

There were no late items of business

### **36 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

### **37 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillor A Gabriel, Andy Liptrot and Jo Hourigan

### **38 Minutes of the Previous meeting**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2015 were accepted as a true and correct record.

### **39 Matters Arising from the Minutes**

The following matters arising/ actions from the minutes were highlighted

#### Minutes No. 72 - Housing Leeds Capital Financial Position Period 2 2015/16

That a breakdown of housing works in each ward would be circulated to members as it became available – Status Open, in progress

#### Minutes No.24 - Housing Leeds (HRA) Revenue Financial Position July 2015/16

Councillor Ritchie asked if he could be supplied with a Briefing Note as to how the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme operated in Leeds.

Officers confirmed a Briefing Note would be prepared and supplied to Councillor Ritchie.

#### Minute No.25 - Performance Report

Provision of information in writing for Board members on Housing Advisory Panel funding allocations and spending/ commitments - Requested information provided to the Board – Status, closed

#### Minutes No. 26 - Key Welfare Changes and Preparations for Universal Credit

Provision of information following visit to Oldham to be brought to a future meeting – Information to be reported to HAB in February 2016 – Status Open, in progress

Chief Officer Welfare and Benefits to submit a report to a future meeting, including details of exceptions - Information to be reported to HAB in February 2016 – Status Open, in progress

#### Minute No. 28 - Housing Leeds Customer Access Strategy

An update on this issue would 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 – Information to be reported to HAB in February 2016 – Status Open, in progress

### Minute No. 30 - HAB Forward Plan

A request for information to be provided to Councillor Hamilton on the individual projects for High Rise blocks - Requested information supplied – Status, closed

### Minute No. 31 – Agenda Distribution

A request to monitor receipt of papers to ensure that there were no further delays – Status Open, in progress

## **40 Voice of Involved Tenants across Leeds**

Ted Wilson, Chair of the Cross City Chair's Group presented a report on behalf of "Voice of Involved Tenants Across Leeds (VITAL)

In addressing the report Mr Wilson said the intention was to provide an insight into the creation of, and direction of travel of the new strategic tenant body known as VITAL.

Mr Wilson explained the main aims of VITAL were:

- To support the development and oversee the implementation of the Tenant Involvement Strategy;
- To oversee consultations to avoid duplication or consultation fatigue;
- To ensure wide-spread feedback to tenants;
- To co-ordinate communications via a single communications plan;
- To enable communication between tenant forums to avoid duplication;
- To bring issues of concern to Housing Leeds for action;
- To review Tenant Involvement budgets for Value For Money and assess impact;
- To co-ordinate tenant training programmes and providers;
- To review representation within tenant involvement and co-ordinate approach to address any under-representation; and
- To co-ordinate tenant consultation on policy development/strategic direction.

In offering comment Councillor Bentley welcomed the establishment of the group suggesting it was important that tenants had adequate representation.

Matthew Walker also welcomed the involvement of VITAL but it was important, he said that duplication/ overlap did not take place.

Councillor Ritchie welcomed the enhanced engagement through VITAL.

Councillor Hamilton requested information on the funding of expenses to VITAL Members and the extent and cost of officer involvement.

In summing up the Chair said the Board appeared to be supportive of the involvement of VITAL and asked that the work of VITAL be reported back to the Board on a regular basis.

**RESOLVED –**

- (i) To welcome the establishment and involvement of VITAL
- (ii) To receive progress reports on the work of VITAL on a regular basis
- (iii) That information on the funding of expenses to VITAL Members and the extent and cost of officer involvement be provided to Councillor Hamilton

**41 Housing Leeds Capital Financial Position Period 6 2015/16**

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which provided a financial position statement on the HRA Housing Leeds Capital programme at period 6 for the financial year 2015/16.

Appended to the report was a copy of the following document for the information/ comment of the meeting:

- Progress update on the Council House Growth Programme (Appendix A referred)

Richard Ellis, Head of Finance, Environments and Housing presented the report and responded to Members comments and queries.

Detailed discussion ensued on the contents of the report which included:

- Housing Leeds Services and BITMO refurbishment programme
- Housing Leeds Newbuild Programme &

Councillor Bentley sought clarification on the right to buy back scheme.

In responding the Director of Environment and Housing reported that the Council had set aside funding to purchase 100 long empty properties by March 2018 to be refurbished and let as council housing. In order to qualify as a long term empty home, the property had to have been empty for 6 months.

It was reported that earlier this year, Capita had been awarded the contract to carry out valuations and conveyancing on behalf of the council for this programme.

**RESOLVED** – To note the Housing Leeds and BITMO refurbishment programme and the Housing Leeds Council House Growth programme position at period 6, 2015/16.

## **42 Housing Leeds (HRA) Revenue Financial Position - Period 6 - 2015/16**

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which provided an update on the revenue financial position for the Housing Leeds (HRA) service as at the end of September 2015.

Richard Ellis, Head of Finance, Environment and Housing, presented the report and responded to Members comments and queries.

Detailed discussion ensued on the contents of the report which included:

- Key variances to Income – Income projected to be £515K
- Expenditure, particularly around disrepair provision projected to be £1,932K, £32K above the original estimate
- Right to buy sales (RTB) sales
- Collection Rates – 96.70% for dwelling rents, compared to the target of 98.06%
- Arrears – Currently £6.4m compared to £5.8m at the end of 2014/15

Councillor Anderson referred to paragraph 6.1 of the submitted report suggesting that 53% of under-occupiers were in arrears. He asked if a distinction could be made between those who will not pay and those cannot pay.

In responding the Director of Environment and Housing said the Council would try to assist but tenants must qualify for subsidy under the policy. Collection would be pursued for those Tenants who did not qualify.

Councillor Bentley referred to collection rates and the attempt to get tenants to pay by direct debit/ standing order. He highlighted that many tenants worked part time or had zero hours' contracts which could cause problems for many households, and suggested that it might be useful to break collection rates down by the three different collection streams i.e. those receiving full housing benefit, partial housing benefit and no housing benefit.

Councillor Ritchie agreed that tenants on low pay/zero hours contracts were likely to struggle and needed signposting to relevant support.

In responding Liz Cook, Chief Officer Housing Management, said there was a range of strategies available to tenants but officers had to be aware of the household circumstances in order to address the tenant's needs.

Commenting of paragraph 3.2 of the report and the projected overspend by £400k for the repairs budget. David Glew welcomed the more pro-active approach to avoid expensive disrepair claims in the future.

**RESOLVED –**

- (i) That the report be noted
- (ii) That a breakdown be provided of collection rates by the three different collection streams

**43 Performance Report**

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which provided a summary of the most recent performance data against the new six Housing Leeds priorities and informed the Board of progress with the development performance measures and dashboards for each priority. It was reported that the purpose of the dashboards and extended range of performance measures was to give greater insight on matters that affected tenants and to help to put service performance into context.

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

- Priority 1 Dashboard – Environmental Improvement (Appendix 1 referred)
- Priority 2 Dashboard – Rents and Benefits (Appendix 2 referred)
- Priority 4 Dashboard – Repairs (Appendix 3 referred)

Debra Scott, Head of Resources and Strategy, Environment and Housing, presented the report and responded to Members comments and queries.

Detailed discussion ensued on the contents of the report which included:

- Progress on Environmental Improvement schemes
- Improvements in rent collection and arrears performance in quarter 2
- Homeless preventions
- Temporary Accommodations
- Re-Let Days
- Number of Void Lettable Properties
- Adaptation
- Repairs
- Annual Home Visits and outcomes
- Disrepair

Referring to paragraph 3.1 of the report, Environmental Improvement, Councillor Ritchie highlighted concerns with one of the city-wide schemes and

suggested that there be some evaluation of the quality and impact of these schemes.

Ted Wilson confirmed that the Chair's group had also asked for a value for money evaluation.

Referring to paragraph 3.3.5 of the report, voids, Councillor Hamilton queried the inclusion of PFI new builds if, by doing so, it gave a distorted view of performance, and asked what was likely to be causing delays in getting the new properties let.

In responding, Simon Costigan, Chief Officer Property and Contracts, explained that the PFI properties were not 'voids' and shouldn't be included. He went on to say that performance measures needed to reflect the whole process, including void works and lettings.

Referring to paragraph 3.6.3, Annual Home Visit Outcomes and the 12% of tenants would did not have bank accounts. Councillor Anderson asked what arrangements were being put in place for those tenants when Universal Credit was implemented.

Andrew Feldhaus also noted the high number of rent arrears within the £100 to £500 band, which may point to short-term pressures associated with variations in income and those without bank accounts

In responding on these points Liz Cook, Chief Officer, Housing Management, said discussions were taking place with tenants around future rent arrangements. The use of bank accounts and credit union accounts was been explained and promoted. Tenants would also receive additional support during the transition to Universal Credit.

Referring to paragraph 3.4 of the report, Councillor Hamilton noted that there had been a significant number of outstanding repairs reported via the Annual Homes Visits.

Councillor Anderson had also noted this and suggested that some analysis be done to determine whether they are new issues requiring attention or existing repairs that have already been reported.

A discussion then took place in relation to repairs performance and the ability to accurately compare the respective performance of contractors and the in-house service.

In responding, Simon Costigan, Chief Officer, Property and Contracts, confirmed that work was being done to develop more consistency of performance measurement across contractors and the Leeds Building Service

Ted Wilson, referring to Repairs Satisfaction, asked for further information on the telephone survey that had been introduced.

David Glew referring to the Annual Home Visits asked if he could be supplied with a copy of the proforma used when undertaking annual home visits.

The Chair suggested that the contents of the proforma may be of interest to other Board Members and that it be circulated accordingly.

#### **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 meetings of the Board
- (iii) That Members be supplied with the additional performance information requested in order to give a more accurate assessment of performance across voids and repairs, and to better understand rent collection rates
- (iv) That an evaluation be undertaken of city-wide environmental schemes
- (v) That a copy of the proforma used in the Annual Home Visits be circulated to Board Members for information

#### **44 Effective Housing Management & Lettings Policies**

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which sought the Boards views on new approaches to housing management and the key principles for local lettings policies.

Appended to the report was a copy of the following document for the information/ comment of the meeting:

- List of Local Lettings policies (Appendix 1 referred)

Liz Cook, Chief Officer, Housing Management, presented the report and responded to Members comments and queries.

Detailed discussion ensued on the contents of the report which included:

- Housing Management Practice
- Lettings and Tenancy Management Practice
- Good Tenancy Record
- Transfer Policy



- Pre-Tenancy Training
- Case Conferencing
- Housing Pathways
- Sheltered Housing
- Age Designations
- Local Connections
- High Rise Housing
- New Build Homes
- Other Criteria
- Employment / Training

It was the generally opinion of the Board that they were supportive of the proposals.

Referring to section 3.9 Age Designation, Councillor Hamilton expressed a need for caution, with a view to discrimination issues.

In responding officers said there was an intention to provide pre-tenancy training which would include sessions on how to maintain a successful tenancy. The existing policy on age was to be modified to age/lifestyle related bands

In offering comment Councillor Bentley, referring to the transfer policy said there was an issue around competing needs, some people may be disadvantaged because they were not existing tenants.

Councillor Anderson also indicated his broad support, but highlighted a concern that the transfer policy might lead to increasing costs and needed some cost benefit analysis.

David Glew suggested that as part of the pre-tenancy training, tenants should receive instruction on how the ventilation system operates in new build properties.

Ted Wilson said that he welcomed the report especially the proposals around high rise housing.

The Chair thanked Members for their contributions suggesting some really useful comments had been made.

## **RESOLVED**

- (i) That the contents of the report be noted
- (ii) To support the new approach to developing Community Lettings Policies building on the success of new criteria used for new

build homes and delivered through the Council's Housing Growth Programme.

#### **45 Promoting Tenant Mobility**

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which provided an evaluation of tenant mobility incentive schemes operated in Leeds to date.

The report also sought the Boards views on other options available to encourage tenant mobility and to determine the options on spending the remainder of the budget.

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

- Mutual Exchanges (Appendix 1 refers)
- Tenant Mobility Incentive Scheme 2014 -15 (Appendix 2 refers)

Mandy Sawyer, Head of Neighbourhood Services, Environment and Housing, presented the report and responded to Members comments and queries.

Detailed discussion ensued on the contents of the report which included:

- The proposed new scheme
- Proposals for the marketing and communications for the scheme

Councillor Hamilton queried why in the past take up had been low and suggested that if work was completed on a property prior to occupation this may lead to better outcomes.

In responding officers said that tenants were not attracted to multi storey blocks and sheltered housing in unpopular parts of the city.

It was the general view of the Board that the report be welcomed and the suggested way forward be supported

**RESOLVED** – To support the introduction of a new financial incentive scheme to promote mobility and increase the number of transfer moves secured through mutual exchanges by Leeds City Council tenants

#### **46 High Rise Project Update**

The Director of Environment and Housing submitted a report which provided an update on progress made with the High Rise Project, including information on a number of projects deliveries.

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

- Example of Block Profile (Appendix 1 refers)
- Clyde's and Wortley's Improvement Plan (Appendix 2 refers)

Martyn Long, Service Manager Projects, Environment and Housing, presented the report and responded to Members comments and queries.

Detailed discussion ensued on the contents of the report which included:

- Housing Management - including extensive pilot project in Clyde's and Wortley's;
- Investment Strategy;
- Repairs and Maintenance;
- Enhanced Community Safety

Members welcomed the report and the work of the Project Board in developing the high rise strategy.

In offering comment the Chair said some important work had been carried out particularly in respect Clyde's and Wortley's high rise blocks, and that the high rise profiles were very useful for local Members.

The Chair suggested that the Board may wish to undertake a visit to this area in due course.

#### **RESOLVED –**

- (i) To welcome and note the progress to date with the high rise project
- (ii) That arrangement be made for the Board to visit the Clyde's and Wortley's high rise blocks, date to be determined at a later date

#### **47 Housing Advisory Board Forward Plan 2015/16**

The Board considered the contents of the Housing Advisory Board Forward Plan for 2015/16

Councillor Bentley requested if an item on “Repairs Performance” could be included on the agenda for the next meeting and could Mears (Repairs contractor) be invited to attend.

Members were supportive of Councillor Bentley’s suggestion

**RESOLVED** – That with the inclusion of an item on “Repairs Performance” on the next meeting, the contents of the Housing Advisory Board Forward Plan for 2015/16 be noted

**48 Date and Time of Next Meeting**

**RESOLVED** – To note that future meetings of the Board will take place as follows:

- Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2016
- Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2016

All meetings to take place in the Civic Hall, Leeds, commencing at 5.00pm.