

HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

TUESDAY, 20TH JUNE, 2017

PRESENT: Councillor D Coupar in the Chair

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

1 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations.

2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Timothy Woods.

3 Minutes - 2 May 2017

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 May 2017 be confirmed as a correct record.

4 Matters Arising/Outstanding Actions

In response to a question regarding the previous discussion in relation to rent free weeks and whether monthly payments could be made in line with changes to universal credits, it was reported that was an ongoing review and there would be a further update at the September Board meeting.

5 Update on High Rise Block Fire Safety

Neil Evans, Director of Resources and Housing gave the Board an update following the recent fire at Grenfell Towers in London. There was an understandable concern from high rise residents and the Board was informed of actions and responses to reassure residents.

Of the 116 high rise blocks across the City, 23 have had cladding installed. None of these cladding systems were similar in style to that of Grenfell Towers and materials used were of higher specification and fire retardant. Samples would be taken from each block that had for cladding for further fire testing but there was no belief that any of the cladding systems used in Leeds were a fire hazard.

All tenants had been written to and informed of the situation and fire safety leaflets had also been sent. Fire procedures were explained and though there had been fires in high rise blocks in Leeds, these had not spread. Fire procedures involved getting the fire service to the source of the fire as quickly as possible and there would not be instruction for mass evacuation.

In relation to investment on fire safety, over £12 million had been spent over the past three years. This was mainly works with regard to improvements to ducting and insulation which supported compartmentation in case of fire. There had also been a program of retrospectively fitting sprinkler systems in sheltered blocks where residents were felt to be more vulnerable. There would be discussion at a national level as to whether sprinkler systems should be retrospectively fitted to all tower blocks.

It was further reported that daily checks were carried out by cleaners to ensure that there were no fire hazards or obstructions and that quarterly checks of fire doors and fire safety equipment were carried out by housing officers. Annual checks were carried out by qualified health and safety professionals and the fire service and these checks would inform any improvements that were required.

In response to comments and questions, the following was discussed:

- Emergency Planning – it was felt that Leeds had the capacity to cope for a similar scale incident with contingency plans to set up respite centres in the event of an emergency.
- Concern regarding mobility scooters and electric wheelchairs being charged in communal areas which could cause an obstruction. Part of the daily inspections carried out by cleaners involved making sure passageways and corridors were clear.
- Smoke alarms – some concern that these should be hard-wired. It was reported that smoke alarms were checked on annual home visits and tenants were reminded to check batteries.
- Further discussion and meetings would be held with tenants and residents groups.
- Frequency of testing of fire equipment - dry riser systems are used in the tower blocks so there wasn't any equipment as such to test. Quarterly tests were felt adequate for this.
- Subject to approval, the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities) was going to carry out an inquiry of fire safety in high rise blocks.

On behalf of the Board, the Chair thanked all officers involved for their responses following the Grenfell Towers fire and asked that these thanks be cascaded to all staff.

6 Update from the Tenants Representative

The Chair invited Tenant's representatives to provide any updates of feedback on issues affecting Council House Tenants.

Mick Dodds and Tracey McGarry addressed the Board. Issues highlighted included the following:

- VITAL had been carrying out a review of the Star Survey Action Plan to measure areas of success and implementation of actions.
- Links had been created with the Disability Hub for issues relating to housing.
- At the last VOLT meeting, the Active Age Project was presented with Leeds Beckett University and Samsung. This would involve the issue of phones to 300 tenants for medical monitoring.
- Community payback scheme has been completed – there had been over 300 referrals and this had also provided a financial return.
- 30 tenants were due to attend the Chartered Institute of Housing conference.
- Social media training had been provided by Voluntary Action Leeds.
- Committee skills training had taken place to support tenants and those involved in community groups.
- There had been engagement at the Middleton Funding Fayre which had signposted access to funding and support.
- The repairs and investment group had been working with the Properties and Contracts team regarding procurement for kitchens and bathrooms.
- VITAL would be attending over 20 fetes and galas during the summer months to engage with residents.

The Chair thanked Mick and Tracey for their input.

7 Council House Growth

The Board received a presentation which gave an update on the Council House Growth Programme.

Lorraine Wright, Service Manager, Housing Growth made the presentation.

The following issues were highlighted:

- The programme would deliver 1,000 new homes via new builds, re-use of long term empty properties and acquisition of properties.
- All new builds would be carried out to meet requirements of the Leeds Standard.
- There was £108 million available for the programme.
- 620 units had been delivered to date which included 522 newly built units.
- An update on completed schemes at Railway Close and The Plantation. These had now had or had ongoing 12 month inspections

which would identify any defects or necessary works before contracts were completed.

- Positive responses regarding the Wharfedale View extra care scheme including the provision of local employment opportunities; provision of community activities and nominations for various awards.
- Progress on other new build schemes at Garnets (Beeston Hill), Broadleas (Bramley) and the Whinmoor Pub Site.
- Forthcoming new build at the Beeches, Gipton & Nevilles, Osmondthorpe and Meynell Approach, Holbeck
- Extra Care - £30 million had been made available for provision and a report would go to Executive Board in July 2017.
- 100 long term empty properties had been acquired to be brought back into use. The average cost of this was £93k per unit.

In response to comments and questions, the following was discussed:

- Proposals for a pilot using modern construction methods at Meynell Approach – it was reported that the methods to be used were still being considered but would provide a quicker and more cost effective delivery.
- Eligibility for right to buy – Tenants who were eligible could apply for right to buy on new build properties. There was however a cap for 15 years where the full cost of the building would have to be met. Further information was requested regarding right to buy on empty properties that had been acquired.

RESOLVED – That the presentation and discussion be noted.

8 Disrepair Progress Report

The report of the Chief Officer, Property and Contracts provided the Board with the following:

- An update on progress made in preparing and implementing an Action Plan following the previous report to the Board in February 2017.
- A noted decrease in the open cases from 365 to 266 achieved since the start of the financial year.
- Progress made in drafting and implementing the action plan to enable focussed application of resources and training to address both the causes of claims and the case management process.
- The Board is asked to note the progress made in developing the Action Plan.

Simon Costigan, Chief Officer, Property and Contracts presented the report. Issues highlighted included the following:

- As of 19 June 2017 the number of open cases had been reduced to 217.

- Additional legal services had been resourced and surveying capacity increased.
- There was investment in preventative work.
- Ongoing work to educate tenants and inform of the causes which lead to disrepair claims.
- A number of cases were being refuted and would be challenged in court.

In response to Members comments and questions, the following was discussed:

- Regarding refuted claims, Counsel had been engaged and external legal advice sought. It was felt that with these claims, the Council did have a good case and there was possibility of claims being withdrawn before reaching court.
- Thanks were expressed to David Glew for his advice on how to prevent disrepair claims.

RESOLVED – That the progress made by Housing Leeds in implementing the Action Plan and the reduction in open cases achieved be noted.

9 Housing Leeds (HRA) Revenue Outturn Position - 2016/17

The report of the Head of Finance, Resources and Housing informed the Housing Advisory Board of the outturn position for the 2016/17 financial year in respect of the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

Richard Ellis, Head of Finance, Environment and Housing presented the report.

The following issues were highlighted:

- There was a surplus of £3.61 million. This would be used for digitalising paper files (£0.26 million), Changing the Workplace costs (£0.35 million) and the balance of £3 million to the HRA Capital reserve to fund expenditure on multi-storey buildings.
- Right to Buy – Total sales for the year had generated receipts of approximately £21.6 million of which £19.75 million could be retained by the Council.
- There had been an improvement in rent collections and in the reduction of arrears.
- There had been a decrease in arrears due to under occupation.

In response to comments and questions, the following was discussed:

- There had been a small rise in the number of tenants who used direct debits to pay rents. Tenants were encouraged to do this and there was a possibility of introducing mandatory direct debit payments for those

on universal credits. There would be a further report to the Board in September regarding this.

- Analysis had been done to identify demographic trends in relation to those with arrears. There was no clear correlation but figures of arrears for younger tenants were slightly higher.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

10 HRA Capital Financial Position Outturn 2016/17

The report of the Head of Finance, Environments and Housing provided a financial position statement on the HRA Housing Leeds Capital Programme for the financial year 2016/17.

The following information was included in the report for the Board's consideration:

- Housing Leeds & BITMO refurbishment programme
- Housing Leeds Council House Growth programme

Richard Ellis, Head of Finance, Environment and Housing presented the report.

Issues highlighted from the report included the following:

- Actual spending at the end of the year was £74 million against a revised program of £77 million.
- Planned works spend totalled £54 million and this was detailed in an appendix to the report.
- Responsive works spend was £18.8 million.
- £1.1 million was spent on the Environmental Improvement programme which left a balance of £2.2 million to spend.
- BITMO capital spend was £2.6 million which equated to 96% of the budget.
- There had been £16 million spending on the Council House Growth Programme bringing the total spend to £31.9 million against available resources of £108.3 million.

In response to comments and questions, the following was discussed:

- Remaining funds for the Environmental Improvement Programme had been allocated.
- Asbestos removal – this was responsive and removed where discovered during capital works.
- Annual servicing of boilers and was there a need to factor in additional costs in the new build programme where Mechanical Ventilation and Heat Recycling Systems were used.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the Housing Leeds and BITMO refurbishment programmes position at outturn and detailed summary headings at Appendix A be noted.
- (2) That the Housing Leeds Council Growth Programme financial position at outturn, 2016/17 be noted.

11 Progress in Delivering the Housing Strategy 2016-2021

The report of the Chief Officer, Housing Management provided the Board with a progress report at the end of 2016/17 in relation to the delivery of the Housing Strategy themes, including 2016/17 performance against strategy targets.

The report also highlighted the key priorities for 2017/18, including any changes to priorities or targets from the original strategy, and the reasons for these changes.

Also included within the report are some initial proposals to strengthen arrangements with key partners to ensure collaborative ownership and leadership of the delivery of the housing strategy themes.

Mandy Sawyer, Head of Neighbourhood Services presented the report.

Issues highlighted included the following:

- The governance structure that was developed to support the delivery of the previous Housing Strategy. It was not felt that this provided the collaborative leadership to take the strategy forward.
- The role of the Housing Advisory Board in providing leadership for the strategy.
- There would be a review of the governance structure for the strategy during the summer which would include strengthening the role of the Housing Advisory Board, making use of the forums to ensure all partners are involved.
- It was proposed that a further report be brought to the September Board with some further proposals on the governance structure.

In response to comments and questions, the following was discussed:

- That officers meet with Councillor Anderson in his role as Chair of the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities).
- The partnership approach was welcomed and the need to get housing associations on board.
- Improved health through housing and prevention of bed blocking – there were connections through Housing and Adult Social Care to do

work around hospital discharges. There was also extra care housing which was supported by social and health services.

- Work with homeless people was welcomed. It was reported that time people spent in emergency accommodation was limited to as short as possible and each individual case was carefully monitored.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the development of arrangements for the collaborative ownership and deliver of the Housing Strategy priorities be supported.
- (2) That a further report be brought to the September meeting of the Housing Advisory Board with further proposals for the governance structure for the Housing Strategy 2016-21.

12 Tenant Scrutiny Inquiry of Estate Environment - Progress Report

The report of the Chief Officer, Housing Management updated the Board of the progress with addressing the recommendations of the Tenant Scrutiny Board inquiry into the Environment of Estates and the joint response from Housing Leeds, Waste, Cleaner Neighbourhoods and Parks & Countryside to the Tenant Scrutiny Board Inquiry.

David Longthorpe, Head of Housing Management presented the report.

Issues Highlighted included the following:

- There was a common theme throughout the inquiry for the need for improved communications.
- Estate walkabouts – more information was requested when these were planned and more feedback to be provided to residents and Ward Members.
- There had been close work with Waste Management to improve services including landscaping and providing bespoke services where necessary.
- There was an ongoing review regarding garage provision and this would be reported back to the Tenant Scrutiny Board when completed.
- The recommendations of the inquiry were being address and here was continued work to bring environmental improvements.

In response to comments and questions, the following was discussed:

- Tool banks – these had not been previously successful and a major factor was not being able to transport tools to people's homes. A more ideal model may involve volunteers who actually carried out the work for more vulnerable or unable residents.
- The need for feedback from walkabouts to inform Ward Members and ensure tenants benefit.

- Housing staff worked closely with the Cleaner Neighbourhoods Team.
- How to ensure that the whole estate/environment was considered and to include owner occupiers as well as council tenants.

RESOLVED – That the actions taken by Housing, Waste, Cleaner Neighbourhoods and Parks & Countryside in response to recommendations received regarding the environment of the estates inquiry be noted.

13 Performance Report

The report of the Director of Resources and Housing provided a summary of the most recent performance data against the six Housing Leeds priorities. It provided performance data, supporting commentary and contextual information as well as signposting to relevant information contained in other reports on the HAB agenda.

Claire Keightley, Service Manager, Intelligence and Improvement presented the report.

The following issues were highlighted:

- Environmental Improvements – a summary of HAP funded schemes was detailed in the report. The Board was informed that funding provided through the HAPs for Community Payback was to be returned as Housing Services would be picking up the cost. An update was also given on the Environmental Improvement Programme.
- Rent and Benefits – This had been covered in the financial reports.
- Housing People – Numbers in temporary accommodation remained low and average re-let days for properties were at the lowest level for 5 years. There had also been improvement on the completion of adaptations within timescale.
- Repairs – There had been improvements in getting repairs right first time and within target. Overall satisfaction with repairs had also improved.
- Capital Programme – This had been covered in the financial reports.
- Knowing our Tenants – There had been a slight drop in the number of home visits but improved ways of collecting data from these visits was being implemented.

In response to comments and questions, the following was discussed:

- Smart meters were fitted to void properties where possible. Ongoing discussions were being held with energy providers.
- There had been a slight increase in turning around voids for certain tenancies due to enhanced pre tenancy checks. This was aimed at getting the right tenants in and leading to more sustainable tenancies.

- Although there had been a rise in the numbers in temporary accommodation, numbers were remarkably low in comparison to similar sized cities.

RESOLVED – That the most recent performance information relating to the six Housing Leeds priorities be noted.

14 Housing Advisory Board - Forward Plan

The report of the Service Manager, Intelligence and Improvement presented the Board's Forward Plan.

Claire Keightley, Service Manager, Intelligence and Improvement presented the report.

Members' attention was brought to the updated forward plan which was appended to the report and it was reported that there was a visit to be arranged to Armley multi storey flats.

Further to previous discussion regarding the involvement of other housing related forums and partners, it was suggested that the membership of the Housing Advisory Board could be reviewed and whether a move towards themed discussions at meetings should be explored. It was suggested that further options could be discussed at the next meeting.

RESOLVED – That the content of the Forward Plan be noted and amended as appropriate.

15 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Monday, 26 September 2017 at 5.00 p.m.