

HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

TUESDAY, 29TH NOVEMBER, 2016

PRESENT: Councillor D Coupar in the Chair

Councillors B Anderson, S Hamilton and
K Ritchie

Tenant/Leaseholder

Ted Wilson
Tracey McGarry

Independent Representatives

Matthew Walker
Andrew Feldhaus

Co-opted Member

David Glew

36 Nomination of Chair

Due to the late arrival of the Councillor Coupar, a nomination was sought for a Chair to open the meeting.

RESOLVED – That Councillor S Hamilton be appointed as Chair.

37 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

38 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor A Gabriel, Councillor J Bentley, Jo Hourigan, Timothy Woods and Chris Simpson.

39 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2016 be confirmed as a correct record.

40 Matters arising from the Minutes

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Tuesday, 28th February, 2017

The Board received an update report on matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting of the Board, and actions outstanding from previous minutes, including matters that had been concluded and were being recommended to close.

RESOLVED – That the updates be noted and the relevant items be agreed as closed.

41 Update from the Tenants Representative

The Chair invited Tenants representatives to provide any updates or feedback on issues affecting Council House Tenants.

Tracey McGarry gave the Board an update on the Housing Leeds Annual Report and VITAL's input. It had been aimed to produce a report for tenants from tenants and develop a more user friendly report. The report had been made available online and via social media with interactive links. There had been a lot of positive feedback and a large increase in views of the report compared to 2015. It had been a good joint production with Housing Leeds and a nomination had been submitted for the category of excellence for Annual Housing reports in the Northern TPAS awards.

Ted Wilson updated the Board on the Parenting Program. This involved the Parent Champion Project which was an 8 week course provided in conjunction with other partners. It was aimed to achieve an improvement in parenting skills as well as provide access to nursery places. There was a focus on providing a safe and friendly environment for children and themes covered would include domestic violence, mental health, child protection, learning opportunities and community involvement. The project had already been carried out in 10 areas across Leeds and was bespoke to meet an area's needs. It was hoped that those who took part in the project would stay on as parent champions. The Leeds Parents Champions project had received national recognition and awards and the Board was asked to support congratulations to all involved.

The Board was given an update on the work of VITAL. This included the following:

- There had been a number of meetings regarding tenant involvement and a future strategy was being developed which would be brought to the Board.
- Multi-storey flats – thanks were passed to David Glew who had introduced VITAL to someone who was working to source money for the cladding of a building. There would be further consultation in January 2017.
- Repairs Group – VITAL were still trying to formulate a city wide group and it was hoping that this would be achieved by the next Board meeting.

- In response to a question regarding VITAL's busy schedule of meetings, it was reported that terms of reference that would enable all tenants in Leeds to have an involvement were being considered.

The Chair thanked Tracey and Ted for their updates and all the work carried out by VITAL.

42 Housing Leeds (HRA) Revenue Financial Position Period 6 - 2016/17

The report of the Head of Finance, Environment & Neighbourhoods updated the Housing Advisory Board on the revenue financial position for the Housing Leeds (HRA) service as at the end of September 2016 (Period 6).

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

The following issues were highlighted:

- At the end of Period 6 the HRA was projecting surplus of £350k against the 2016/17 budget.
- There was a projected reduction in rental income of £62k due to lower stock numbers following right to buy sales.
- Due to vacant posts savings of £801k were projected.
- There was a projected overspend on Supplies and Services due to large insurance claims.
- Right to buy sales were projected to generate receipts of £20.7m. It was anticipated that the Council could retain receipts of £14.2m of which £5.8m could be used for replacement stock, £6m to repay debt and £2.3m on other capital expenditure.

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

- There had been an increase in rents collected by direct debit and more flexibility for collection days. This had contributed to the reduction in arrears.
- The spending on insurance claims had been due to a couple of larger claims that were considered to be one offs.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

43 HRA Capital Financial Position Period 6 2016/17

The report of the Head of Finance, Environments and Housing provided a financial position statement on the HRA Housing Leeds Capital Programme at period 6 for the financial year 2016/17.

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

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Tuesday, 28th February, 2017

- 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:

- The current spending of Housing Leeds at the end of period 6 was £36.6m which equated to 44% of available resources.
- Further to the request at the previous meeting that more detailed project costs were provided, these were appended to the report.
- Adaptations – There had been a significant increase due to complex cases and the need for major works.
- BITMO spending was slightly below estimated projections.
- In the overall program of funding of £112 million there was currently £9 million that was not allocated.

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

- There had been an increase in the disrepair budget to provide a further £500k of capital works.
- Environmental programme – it was anticipated that 100% of spending would be reached – there was delay in the delivery of some projects due to issues such as weather conditions.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the Housing Leeds and BITMO refurbishment programmes at period 6 be noted.
- (2) That the Housing Leeds Council House Growth programme financial position at period 6 be noted.

At this stage of the meeting Councillor Coupar arrived and assumed the Chair

44 HRA Budget 2017/18 - Key Issues Influencing the Determination of the 2017/18 Revenue Budget

The report of the Head of Finance, Environment & Neighbourhoods considered the factors which were influencing the determination of the HRA budget for 2017/18. It referred to the impact of Government legislation in respect of rent reductions, Right to Buy policy and the roll out of Universal Credits. It also highlighted the potential financial implications of new legislation such as the Housing and Planning Act 2016.

The Council was still in the process of considering what options were available to address these issues. Once the options had been finalised these would be shared with Board Members for comment.

Richard Ellis, Head of Finance, Environment & Neighbourhoods presented the report.

Members' attention was brought to policy changes already implemented by Government which would have a significant impact on the HRA budgets from 2017/18 to 2019/20, particularly in respect of rental incomes.

It was reported that options would be considered at the Executive Board meeting in December 2016. These would then be submitted to the VITAL Board meeting on 14 December 2016. Following further consultation these options would then be presented to the Executive Board in February 2017.

Further issues highlighted from the report included the following:

- The reduction in rents gave a projected loss of £2.1m for 2016/17.
- The roll out of Universal Credit and implications on collection of rents.
- It was projected that 415 properties would be sold during the financial year.
- Receipts from sale of higher value homes – legislation regarding this had not yet been confirmed and would possibly not be done until 2018/19.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted, and the Board to receive details and be invited to comment on the options that were being considered by Executive Board.

45 Council House Growth Programme

The Board received a presentation on the Council House Growth Programme.

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

Issues highlighted included the following:

- This was the largest new build programme since the 1980s and there were 3 main strands:
 - New builds – this was the largest part of the programme
 - Re-use of long term empty homes
 - Acquisition of properties
- Standards – Introduction of the Leeds Standard, ensuring quality design, properties that were flexible and adaptable through the lifetime of a tenancy and reduced running costs for tenants.
- Finance - £112 million was available for the programme.
- The programme would deliver approximately 1,000 new homes of which over half had already been completed. Priorities included Extra Care housing and specialist housing along with general needs housing.
- Schemes delivered to date – these included East Park Road, the Squinting Cat site at Swarcliffe and West End View which was the first

Council run Extra Care scheme. Ten properties at the West End View site would be available for sale.

- Sites that were currently being developed or at the planning/feasibility stage.
- Long term empty properties – it was aimed to acquire 100 properties by March 2018. These would be refurbished and let as council housing. 58 properties had been acquired to date and the average cost of each acquisition was just below £90k.

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

- It was suggested that Members of the Board visit Wharfedale View prior to a future meeting.
- The Housing Growth team were thanked for their commitment to deliver the programme within time.
- What were the average costs for acquisitions and new builds? This was difficult to equate to a unit cost as there were other costs involved in the regeneration of sites. Costs of new builds were high due to the standards and affordability would be a future consideration.
- Would Natural Ventilation and Heat Recycling (NVHR) systems be used in new properties? This was felt to be something that could contribute to high maintenance costs. It was reported that NVHR systems had been welcomed by tenants in the East End Park scheme and positive feedback had been received. It was acknowledged that some tenants would need advising and educating on the use and maintenance of the systems and there would also be annual maintenance checks.
- Modern methods of construction and how these would fit in with provision of standards – it was reported that these methods had benefits which included the speed of delivery which brought cost savings whilst delivering the required standards.
- Would the Leeds Standard be adopted by the private sector? – It was reported that this was an issue that Plans Panels were aware of and were keen to work with developers to achieve.
- Risk management in relation to Right to Buy and relaxation of Right to Buy rules – the Council was protected for 16 years on capital spent on this programme. After that period there could potentially be a position where the discount was greater than the debt. As the programme was largely funded without borrowing it was not seen as a risk to this programme.
- In response to questions regarding the Wharfedale View development, it was reported that all 35 units available to let had been allocated following a special assessment process by Adult Social Care. Sales for 2 of the shared ownership units were proceeding with another 3 also at an advanced stage. Money received from sales would go towards reducing the cost of the scheme.
- Evaluation of new build schemes – it was reported that post occupancy questionnaires would be sent to tenants after 12 months and it was

suggested that the outcomes could be incorporated into future update reports to the Board as appropriate.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the presentation and discussion be noted.
- (2) That a Board visit be arranged to view the new Wharfedale View development.
- (3) That evaluations of new build schemes be incorporated into future update reports.

46 Lettings Policy Review - Consultation Update

The report of the Director of Environment and Housing updated the Board on progress with the Lettings Policy Review consultation.

Mandy Sawyer, Head of Neighbourhood Services, Environment and Housing presented the report.

Members were given an update on the progress with consultation; the survey had taken place from April to August 2016 and had included the involvement of Tenants Groups and Ward Members.

There had been a lot of positive feedback with overwhelming support for the Tenant Transfer Policy proposals and positive support for home visits and the introduction of a local connection policy. There was a low level of support for pre-tenancy training

Further issues highlighted from the report included the following:

- Use of and alternatives to Age Related Local Lettings Policy – there was support for under occupiers to move.
- Guidance was still awaited on introducing fixed term tenancies.
- Pilot scheme for the Clydes and Wortley Blocks which would include pre-tenancy training.
- Inclusion of home visits prior to lettings.
- Development of Ward Based Community Letting Plans.

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

- Provision for armed forces personnel.
- Breaches in tenancy agreements – reference was made to tenancy rights but issues such as arrears and tenancy records would be considered.
- Ward Based Community Letting Plans – development would be carried out by local housing officers and the input of Local Ward Members. The intention was that the Standard Lettings Policy would still apply but the Ward based plans would address local needs and issues.

RESOLVED – That progress to date with the lettings policy review consultation be noted.

47 Digital Inclusion

The report of the Chief Officer, Housing Management provided an overview of the current ambitions to make Leeds 100% digital, where everyone in the city has the opportunity to get online and to develop their digital skills and confidence.

It also informed the Board of an outline of the Digital Inclusion work of Housing Leeds to date and to explore collaborative working between Housing Leeds, Libraries and Information Services and others.

Mandy Sawyer, Head of Neighbourhood Services, Environment and Housing presented the report. Issues highlighted included the following:

- The need to develop digital skills, experience and improve digital access for tenants.
- Barriers to getting online – these included cost, lack of skills/confidence and motivation.
- Next steps – Smart Cities Programme – tasked with improving, digital literacy; tablet lending scheme, development of Digital Leeds Map.
- Promotion of online access to tenants – free facilities were available in libraries and community hubs and there was a project which had seen free wi-fi made available in some tower blocks.
- Support from Housing Advisory Panel funded projects.
- Use of the HUGO bus
- Development of self-service portal

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

- Concern that people would not benefit from free tower block wi-fi as they were already contracted to their own providers – it was reported that an analysis of take up needed to be carried out and there was also scope for renegotiation of contracts.
- In relation to availability of the HUGO bus, it was noted that it was possible to book additional mobile facilities via the Libraries Service.
- Concern regarding complaints over noise generated by transmitting equipment installed in tower blocks.
- Concern regarding online reporting and the lack of acknowledgement – it was reported that there were some faults with the existing system but once rectified acknowledgements and receipts would be sent.

RESOLVED – That the current Digital Inclusion Activities be noted and the collaborative approach to achieving the Council's digital ambitions be supported.

48 Performance Update

The report of the Director of Environment and Housing provided a summary of latest available performance against measures relating to the six Housing Leeds priorities agreed by the Housing Advisory Board. It reflected the feedback given at a previous Board meeting in relation to the format and content of performance reports and signposted the Board to performance information that was being provided in other reports on the agenda in order to avoid duplication.

Debra Scott, Head of Resources, Environment and Housing presented the report.

The following issues were highlighted:

- Environmental Improvements – a summary of HAP funded schemes was detailed and an update was given on the Environmental Improvement Programme.
- Rent and Benefits – This had been covered in the financial reports.
- Housing People – Temporary accommodation placements, re-letting of properties and void properties all remained low and well within target.
- Repairs – A detailed report had been submitted to the last meeting and there had been improvement since then. Terms of Reference and minutes of the Tenant's Scrutiny Board into repairs were appended to the report. Repairs right first time and overall satisfaction both remained above target.
- Capital Programme – This had been covered in the financial reports
- Knowing our Tenants – Annual home visits were ahead of target; Disrepairs – there had been improvements towards meeting targets but a higher number of cases than anticipated had been received; The 2 yearly survey of tenants had commenced, there had been changes to how this was carried out to allow digital access and it was hoped to be able to provide the Board with headline outcomes at its February meeting.

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

- Disrepair claims – in response to questions regarding what work was being carried out to prevent these and what mediation was undertaken, it was reported that changes had been made to the way the service was delivered to provide a fast track resolution and mediation was offered in an attempt to prevent claims. It was reiterated that there had been a larger number than anticipated but the fast track service aimed to resolve issues within 28 days which would meet targets and avoid legal costs and compensation.
- A request was made for a breakdown of what disrepair complaints were about to see if patterns could be identified. It was reported that work was ongoing to analyse complaints with regard to areas, types of property and types of disrepair. A more pro-active approach could then

be used along with capital investment to prevent any identified recurring issues. It was requested that any feedback regarding this analysis be brought back to the Board.

- Letting Standards – extraction fans for bathrooms and kitchens were not included. It was felt that an issue such as this could prevent future disrepair claims. It was suggested that further information on lettings standards with a breakdown of disrepair issues be brought to the Board. A link was also made to the Housing Standards discussion held earlier.
- Homeless preventions and follow up on cases that aren't prevented. The Director clarified the actions that are taken by the service where prevention has not been possible.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the most recent performance information relating to the six Housing Leeds priorities be noted.
- (2) That a report on the analysis of disrepair claim types and preventative measures, including links to the Lettings Standard and Leeds Housing Standard be brought to the next meeting of the Board.

49 Housing Advisory Board Forward Plan 2016/17

The Board considered the contents of the Housing Advisory Board Forward Plan for 2016/17.

Amendments to/additional items for the Forward Plan were discussed:

- Visit to Wharfedale View to take place prior to the next meeting with the proposed MSF visit to be deferred to a future date).
- Work on adaptations process and performance – a report to be brought to a future meeting.
- A report on the outcomes of Disrepair Analysis and the links to the Lettings Standard and Housing Standard to be brought to the next meeting.

In relation to the Tenant's Scrutiny Board, thanks were passed to Simon Costigan for his attendance. The work of the Scrutiny Board was considered useful to avoid duplication and influence the work of the Board.

RESOLVED – that the contents of the Housing Advisory Board Forward Plan for 2016/17 be noted and the above additions/amendments be incorporated.

50 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Tuesday, 28th February 2017 at 5.00 p.m.

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Tuesday, 28th February, 2017