

SCRUTINY BOARD (NEIGHBOURHOODS AND HOUSING)

WEDNESDAY, 6TH SEPTEMBER, 2006

PRESENT: Councillor R Pryke in the Chair

Councillors S Armitage, P Ewens,
R Finnigan, A Gabriel, M Phillips,
M Rafique and D Schofield

17 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The following Members declared personal / prejudicial interests for the purpose of Section 81 (3) of the Local Government Act 2000 and paragraphs 8 to 13 of the Members Code of Conduct:

Councillor P Ewens – Declared a personal interest as a Member of Leeds North West ALMO Board.

Councillor A Gabriel – Declared a personal interest as the Chair of the Beeston Hill and Holbeck Regeneration Board.

Councillor D Schofield – Declared a personal interest as a Director of South East Leeds ALMO Board.

18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Akhtar and Atkinson.

19 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 20th July 2006 be agreed as a correct record.

20 MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the two Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings held on 3rd July 2006 be received and noted.

21 MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Executive Board meetings held on 5th July 2006 and 16th August 2006 be received and noted.

22 MINUTES OF THE THRIVING COMMUNITIES CORPORATE PRIORITIES BOARD

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Thriving Communities Corporate Priority Board meeting held on 22nd July 2006 be received and noted.

23 QUESTIONS TO THE DIRECTOR

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which afforded Scrutiny Board Members the opportunity to raise questions and issues with the Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing.

Paul Langford, Chief Housing Services Officer, Neighbourhoods and Housing, attended the meeting in place of the Director, Neil Evans who was unable to attend.

The main areas of the ensuing discussion are detailed below:

- Whether any liaison had taken place between Glendale and the ALMOs regarding who is responsible for certain areas of land across the city;
- Whether the Council currently advertises tenders for construction work to a European-wide market and the possible financial benefits this could have;
- If any evidence of construction cartels had been identified through the tendering process;
- The positive work of the Leeds Construction Partnership in promoting a fair and open market for work in the city;
- The need for the Council and private companies to consider taking on more school leavers as apprentices in order to acquire and retain more skilled trades people;
- The work of Renew in promoting skilled trades among the 14 – 16 years age range;
- The status of the ALMO review and the predicted make-up of any future Boards following the outcome of the review, particularly as regards current independent members;
- The importance of the work provided by the Outreach Service and the negative effect of sickness levels upon this service;
- Whether it was the intention of East Leeds ALMO to ring-fence current tenant vacancies from the Seacroft area;
- The problems encountered by Ward Members in relation to various local lettings policies;
- The allocation of Decency money, its allocation and the policies in place which govern expenditure in relation to the scheme;
- The issue of overcrowded housing across the city.

The Board discussed the issues raised in a letter sent by Ward Members to tenants of Leeds South Homes in April in order to clarify the situation regarding decency money and its allocation, alleged diversion and its expenditure. The Board noted that a letter of clarification was sent to tenants by Leeds South Homes. Representatives from the department explained to the Board that the procedures for allocating and spending decency money were transparent and audited. The Executive Board Member with responsibility for Neighbourhoods and Housing commented that under no circumstances could money be diverted from this fund.

The Chair thanked Officers for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the discussion be noted.

(Councillor Gabriel left the meeting at 11:55 am at the conclusion of consideration of this item.)

24 NEIGHBOURHOOD TASKING IN INNER EAST LEEDS

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing presented a report updating Members on the Neighbourhood Tasking Teams in Inner East Leeds. The Board heard that five teams had been established in areas in Inner East Leeds with the aim of bringing professional agencies together in order to share intelligence, expertise and undertake problem solving. The Teams, which were linked to Neighbourhood Management, meet monthly to discuss a range of community issues.

The Teams consisted of a core membership of the Police (including PCSOs) Wardens, Community Staff, (including the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit) ALMO estate management staff, Area Management, Streetscene and the Fire Service. Members were informed that a budget of £10,000 had been allocated to each Tasking Team through the relevant Area Committee.

The following Officers attended the meeting to present the report and respond to Members' questions:

John Woolmer, Area Coordinator, Neighbourhoods and Housing;
Beverley Yearwood, Area Community Safety Coordinator, Neighbourhoods and Housing.

Members discussed the following issues in relation to the report:

- The role of Ward Members in relation to the work of the Tasking Teams;
- Data protection issues in relation to the sharing of information between agencies;
- The improvement in working relationships between departments;
- The need for all agencies to attend meetings in order to maximise the effectiveness of the Teams;
- The difference between the work of the Tasking Teams in relation to Area Management Teams.

Members praised the work undertaken by the Tasking Teams in the Inner East Area to date. The Chair thanked Officers for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report be noted.

25 THE RESPECT ACTION PLAN AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION IN LEEDS

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing submitted a report providing Members with information on the Respect Action Plan and updating the Board on the latest position regarding implementation of the plan in Leeds. Members were informed that a report was due to be considered shortly by the Corporate Management Team. This would then form part of the package to be submitted to the Home Office as part of the Authority's drive to attain Respect 'Action Area' status.

The meeting heard that the plan had been split into six target areas in order to tackle the Government initiative; young people, schools, support for parents and families, housing, neighbourhoods, and enforcement against anti-social behaviour. Whilst the agenda was considered positive in its prevention-focused approach, there were issues surrounding funding for the programme. However, whilst work to implement the scheme was still ongoing, it was felt that the direction of the agenda did coincide with the work of the Authority to date, with its commitment to seek to prevent anti-social behaviour in the first instance but to act decisively when it does occur.

Gillian Mayfield, Public Safety Manager, Neighbourhoods and Housing, attended the meeting to present the report and respond to any queries from Members.

The Board discussed the following issues in relation to the report:

- The need for the Police to be seen as accountable to the community and the moves to implement this through 'Face The People' sessions;
- The resource implications on the Authority of implementing a central Government agenda;
- The potential overlap between projects and the associated need for agencies to communicate with one another.

The Chair thanked Officers for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the progress made to date to implement the Respect Action Plan in Leeds be noted.

(Councillor Finnegan left the meeting at 12:25 pm following the conclusion of consideration of this item.)

26 TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing submitted a report to the Board detailing information in relation to the legal duties owed by the Council to homeless young people and how the Authority carries out these duties in terms of securing suitable temporary accommodation.

Members heard that the Council has a legal requirement to secure suitable accommodation on a temporary basis for those individuals or households who can be identified as having a priority need under homeless legislation. Whilst the authority defines young people as those aged under 25 years, the Board were informed that only young homeless persons aged 16 or 17 would automatically be classed as in priority need. Those aged 18 or over would have to be assessed to determine their eligibility. However it was stressed that having dependent children or being pregnant would automatically mean an applicant would be classed as in priority need.

The meeting heard that as the Council has a duty to secure but not provide accommodation, there was considerable flexibility afforded to the Strategic

Housing Service in terms of the range and quality of private accommodation that could be utilised.

Bridget Emery, Head of Strategic Commissioning, Neighbourhoods and Housing, attended the meeting to present the report and respond to any questions from Members.

The Board discussed the following issues in relation to the report:

- The concentration of temporary accommodation provision within a small geographical area of Leeds, notably LS7, 8 and 9;
- What support was available to homeless young people who were particularly vulnerable, such as those with disabilities or leaving care;
- Assistance offered through the Supporting People programme;
- The fact that young people aged between 16 – 18 years would also come under legislation contained within the Children's Act.

The Chair thanked Officers for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report be noted.

27 INQUIRY INTO REGENERATION IN BEESTON HILL AND HOLBECK

Following the site visit that Board Members had undertaken to the area prior to the meeting, the Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing presented a report which provided information for Members for the inquiry regarding the ongoing regeneration work taking place in Beeston Hill and Holbeck. Members heard that the current and planned work in the area was part of an integrated strategy which hoped to bring transformational change to both properties and residents. The need for partnership with private sector companies in order to deliver high quality work at competitive prices was highlighted as a key objective.

Officers spoke of the problem the city faced in relation to the proliferation of back-to-back housing in many areas. This type of housing was particularly common around Beeston Hill and earlier in the day during the site visit Members had inspected a derelict back-to-back property. The visit had also taken in many other key sites in the regeneration scheme as a whole including the Holbeck Urban Village, an area that had benefited from the 'group repair' strategy and Tempest Road, which had undergone a £1 million facelift in order to provide an uplift to one of the main routes through the area.

The following Officers attended the meeting in order to present the report and answer Members' queries:

John Bracewell, Neighbourhood Renewal Manager, Neighbourhoods and Housing;

Mark Ireland, Service Manager, Neighbourhoods and Housing

Andy Beattie, Deputy Chief Environmental Health Officer, Neighbourhoods and Housing.

Members discussed the following issues during consideration of the report:

- The lack of community facilities in the area caused by decades of chronic underinvestment and whether this could be remedied by PFI funds;
- The potential of the now empty Matthew Murray site as a community resource for the future;
- Whether there was any scope for assisting businesses in the area to improve the standard of their premises;
- The possibility of the authority undertaking a scheme to remodel back-to-back properties and the problems associated with any such initiative;
- The acknowledged need for larger houses in the area to comfortably accommodate bigger or extended families;
- Whether any further investment could be secured through Section 106 agreements in the area.

The Chair thanked Officers for their attendance at the site visit and the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report be noted.

(Councillors Armitage and Rafique both left the meeting during consideration of this item.)

28 WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which detailed the current work programme of the Board, including scheduled and unscheduled items. Members were invited to comment on and make amendments to the work programme, as appropriate.

The Board discussed the contents of the programme. It was agreed that the progress of the ongoing PFI bid in relation to the inquiry into regeneration in Beeston Hill and Holbeck be reported to the Board at the next meeting in October. Following further discussions it was also agreed to revisit the issue of empty properties in the City and to examine the success of local lettings policies in certain areas.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report and the revisions to the work programme be noted.

29 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 11th October 2006 at 10:00 am (pre-meeting for Board Members at 9:30 am.)

(The meeting concluded at 12:55 pm.)