

SCRUTINY BOARD (NEIGHBOURHOODS AND HOUSING)

WEDNESDAY, 10TH JANUARY, 2007

PRESENT: Councillor R Pryke in the Chair

Councillors D Atkinson, P Ewens,
R Finnigan, G Hyde, M Phillips, M Rafique
and D Schofield

67 CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair opened the January meeting of the Scrutiny Board (Neighbourhoods and Housing) by wishing those present a Happy New Year.

68 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

69 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was reported that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Armitage and Gabriel.

70 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 6TH DECEMBER 2006

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 6th December 2006 be approved as a correct record.

71 MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 4TH DECEMBER 2006

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 4th December 2006 be noted.

72 MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD - 13TH DECEMBER 2006

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Executive Board meeting held on 13th December 2006 be noted.

73 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

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

Appended to the report for Members' information was performance monitoring information relating to BV212 (average time taken to re-let local authority housing) and BV66a (rent collected by the local authority as a proportion of rents owed on Housing Revenue Account (HRA) dwellings.) This information had been referred to the Board by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Neil Evans, Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing and Simeon Perry, Strategic Landlord Officer, Neighbourhoods and Housing, had been invited to attend the meeting to answer Members' questions.

To summarise, the discussion focussed on the following topics:

- The accuracy of recent press coverage regarding the number of people currently on the waiting list for council accommodation;
- Research into social housing which is currently ongoing to determine the extent of housing shortages in the city;
- The average time individuals can expect to be on the register whilst waiting to be re-housed, including the reduction in this figure for those in a priority category;
- The numbers of first-time tenants who are evicted from Council properties, and the issues surrounding these evictions, such as rent arrears and anti-social behaviour;
- What steps were being taken to tackle the problem of evicted Council tenants going into private accommodation in problem areas of the city to ensure that issues were resolved and not simply displaced;
- The latest update on the status of Leeds as a Respect Action Area;
- The projected costs of the extra support workers required to implement new schemes associated with the Respect Agenda;
- The need for the Authority to work in partnership with the Police to ensure that breaches of anti-social behaviour orders are effectively tackled.

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

RESOLVED – That the contents of the discussion be noted.

74 INQUIRY INTO REGENERATION IN BEESTON HILL AND HOLBECK

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing submitted a report updating Members on the progress of the Inquiry into Regeneration in Beeston Hill and Holbeck, focussing particularly on the role of the private rented and development sectors. In relation to this issue, Mr Frantzis, a private landlord who owned a substantial number of properties in the Beeston Hill area, was invited to the meeting to give his views on progress being made in the regeneration of the area.

The following Officers attended the meeting:
Neil Evans, Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing;
John Bracewell, Neighbourhood Renewal Manager;
Chris Kwasniewski, Regeneration Project Manager;
Mark Ireland, Environmental Health Service Manager.

Members were given a brief update on the PFI bid in relation to regeneration in the area, which had been submitted to the Secretary of State in early 2006. Officers confirmed that the Government had announced that the bid had been unsuccessful just prior to the Christmas period. However, it was reported that the Authority had been placed on a reserve list to be considered as a priority for any future monies and also allocated a case officer to assist with this. Whilst disappointed to have missed out on the first round of funding, Members

expressed satisfaction at the positive feedback received from the Government on the bid and the fact that discussions were ongoing with a view to securing funding in the next round, expected to be around July 2007.

The Chair then invited Mr Frantzis to address the meeting to give his view on the progress made in regenerating the area from the perspective as a private landlord. Members heard that Mr Frantzis had moved into the area in the mid 1980's when the area was in decline, however in the past few years he had noticed improvements in the area and made the following points:

- The feeling that progress in the area had been made by the efforts of both the Council and private landlords;
- The view that the population in the area was becoming less transient and the stabilising effect of this;
- The need to tackle empty properties and absentee landlords as a matter of urgency, as empty, run-down dwellings had a negative affect on the community as a whole;
- The noticeable improvement in some shop frontage standards, particularly where new businesses were emerging, and the impact this had upon the area.

Members noted the points made by Mr Frantzis and thanked him for his attendance at the meeting. The Board then went on to discuss issues arising from the report with Officers, where the following points were made:

- The need to target empty properties and encourage them back into use, despite the difficulties inherent in making a compulsory purchase;
- The benefits of encouraging smaller landlords with only one or two properties to join accreditation schemes as a part of the regeneration process;
- Whether street-cleansing in the area could be increased to add further impetus to the regeneration scheme and confidence of the local community;
- The future of several derelict sites in the area and moves to secure a housing development on the former Matthew Murray site;
- The news that money had been secured to improve shop frontages along the main Dewsbury Road, whilst investigation was ongoing as to whether traffic could be diverted away from this main route to make the area more attractive for local shoppers.

The Chair thanked Officers for their attendance at the meeting and contribution to the discussion. It was suggested by the Chair that the Board attend one of the area's community forums as part of the investigation to allow them to meet residents and assess the impact of the regeneration scheme upon local people.

RESOLVED –

- a.) That the contents of the report in relation to the role of the private rented sector in Beeston Hill and Holbeck be noted;

- b.) That the views and comments of Mr Frantzis, a private landlord in the area, be noted;
- c.) That the contents of the report in relation to the role of private developers and complementary improvements to service delivery and environmental factors be noted;
- d.) That a final report is drawn up to summarise the main conclusions from the scrutiny of the regeneration in Beeston Hill and Holbeck and to make any appropriate recommendations.

(Councillor Finnigan joined the meeting at 11:05 am during consideration of this item.)

75 AREA MANAGEMENT REVIEW

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing presented a report detailing the context and background to the current area management review, the initial findings and proposed next steps. Members were informed that the review had commenced in early 2006 with an external audit of area management by KPMG. This highlighted a number of issues to be considered as part of the review regarding the effectiveness of Area Committees, their impact upon local communities and whether their remit could be extended.

The Board heard that following the KPMG audit an Area Management Review Board was established to examine their findings and discuss how best to take the work forward. Whilst the progress made by Area Management in the past two years was praised by the Review Board, a number of issues were identified as potential shortcomings that needed to be addressed. These included the need to devise indicators to measure performance, the need to formally evaluate community engagement activities to determine the levels of success and the need to consider the adequacy of services provided by Streetscene and Youth Services in meeting local needs.

Neil Evans, the Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing, and Martyn Stenton, Partnerships Manager, Neighbourhoods and Housing, attended the meeting to present the report and respond to Members comments and questions.

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

- The benefits of devolving local issues to a local level via the Area Committee model;
- Acknowledgment of the positive role Area Committees have established in place of the old Community Involvement Teams (CITs);
- The direction of current discussions regarding delegating control of matters such as street cleansing and youth services to Area Committees;
- Whether the matter should be referred to Executive Board for further consideration.

Following the discussion, the Chair sought Members views on the possibility of referring the matter to Executive Board to ask that they consider further

delegation to Area Management. The Board agreed that this should be actioned.

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

RESOLVED –

- a.) That the contents of the report be noted;
- b.) That the work that has taken place to date be noted;
- c.) That the Executive Board be made aware of the Scrutiny Board's comments on the levels of delegation to Area Management.

76 SOCIAL ENTERPRISE FRAMEWORK AND ACTION PLAN

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing and the Director of Legal Services presented a joint report which set out the key drivers for the development of the Social Enterprise Framework and Action Plan and identified the benefits of developing a coherent corporate approach to promoting and supporting social enterprise. A copy of the Social Enterprise Framework and Action Plan was appended to the report for Members' information.

The Board heard that the plan had been devised in order to raise the profile of Social Enterprise in the city, devise a corporate approach to the issue and provide support to new and existing partners. Members were informed that the plan was the result of research and consultation undertaken by a working group representing a number of Council departments.

Sue Wynne, Regeneration Partnership Manager, Neighbourhoods and Housing, attended the meeting to present the report and respond to Members' comments.

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

- The need for more 'joined-up' thinking between council departments on the issue of Social Enterprise;
- The benefits of approaching the issues from a grassroots perspective in order to enable local people to gain the most from local opportunities;
- Ongoing work to address these issues by raising the profile of Social Enterprise, linking relevant organisations and developing a strategic corporate approach in conjunction with the Procurement department;
- The need for Social Enterprise ventures to operate as viable businesses;
- The practicality of utilising successful Social Enterprise initiatives to provide Council services.

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

RESOLVED –

- a.) That the contents of the report be noted;
- b.) That the approach outlined in the Framework and Action Plan be endorsed.

77 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.

Appended to the report for Members' information was a copy of the Forward Plan for January to April 2007.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report and the revisions to the Work Programme be noted.

78 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 7th February 2007 at 10:00 am (pre-meeting for Board Members at 9:30 am.)

(The meeting concluded at 12:25 pm.)