

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOODS)

WEDNESDAY, 24TH OCTOBER, 2007

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors C Beverley, A Blackburn,
D Coupar, Mrs R Feldman, R Lewis,
A Ogilvie and F Robinson

34 Declarations of Interest

That the following personal interests were declared under Agenda Items 9, 10 and 11 (Minutes 40, 41 and 42 refers) – Voids and Empty Properties Update, Street Cleansing and Britain's Cleanest City Award Update and Housing Letting Pressures:

- Councillor B Anderson in his capacity as Chair of West/North West Homes (Agenda Items 9, 10 & 11 – Minutes 40, 41 & 42 refers)
- Councillor A Blackburn in her capacity as a Director of West/North West Homes and a Director of Leeds Groundwork (Agenda Items 9, 10 & 11 – Minutes 40, 41 & 42 refers).
- Councillor D Coupar in her capacity as a Member of Belle Isle Tenants Management Organisation . (Agenda Items 9, 10 & 11 – Minutes 40, 41 & 42 refers).
- Councillor D Hollingsworth in his capacity as a Director of East/North East Homes (Agenda Items 9, 10 & 11 – Minutes 40, 41 & 42 refers).
- Councillor C Beverley in his capacity as a Member of Clean Morley Campaign (Agenda Item 10 – Minute 41 refers).

35 Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor A Gabriel.

36 Minutes of the Previous Meeting - 19th September 2007

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the last Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) held on 19th September 2007 be confirmed as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of the word 'proposed' in one of the bullet points on Minute 26 as follows:

- The Board requested the original full list of proposed sites for the **proposed energy from waste plant.**

37 Matters Arising from the Minutes

Members expressed concern that they had still not received a list of the original sites considered for the proposed energy from waste plant as requested at the last meeting of this Board.

RESOLVED:- That the Principal Scrutiny Adviser pursue this matter with the Executive Board Member for Environmental Services.

38 Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Minutes

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 11th September 2007 be received and noted.

39 Consultation on Strategic Outcomes and Improvement Priorities for the Leeds Strategic Plan

The Board considered a report and presentation by the Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement) on the strategic outcomes and improvement priorities for the Leeds Strategic Plan.

At Appendix 1 to the report a draft strategic outcomes and improvement Priorities for the Leeds Strategic Plan was also submitted.

Dylan Griffiths, Project Manager (Policy) gave an overview of the Strategic Plan and, together with Neil Evans, Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods responded to Members' questions and comments.

The following issues were raised:

- The need for more green spaces and floral work especially in the City Centre.
- The need to concentrate on the educational needs of those children in deprived areas who often leave school being unable to read or write.
- The need to concentrate more on narrowing the gap and how the Council intends to promote the regeneration of the inner city areas.

The Chair thanked Dylan Griffiths for the informative presentation.

RESOLVED – That the report and presentation be noted and that the Board's comments be incorporated into the report to be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

(Note: Councillor A Ogilvie arrived at the meeting at approximately 10.10 a.m. during consideration of the above item).

40 Voids and Empty Properties Update

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development and the Director of Environment and Housing submitted reports describing the current position with void properties within the ALMOs and empty properties within the private sector.

Mandy Dove, ALMO Monitoring and Support Officer presented the Voids report and, together with Neil Evans, Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods, responded to Members' questions and comments.

In brief, the main issues raised were:-

- Members were informed that the void figures in the report were a snapshot of the current position .
- Members were informed that the **average re-let time** for void ALMO properties was approximately 38 days and that this figure had been much higher in 2006 as the average re-let time had then been 53 days.
- Members were informed that the **531 void properties** included in the planned regeneration scheme including Little London Private Finance Initiative (PFI) did not include tower block properties that are down for demolition.

Members thanked officers for the information on the amount of void properties in the Middleton area and requested further details of the void properties on the Manor Farm estate.

The Chair thanked Mandy Dove for her presentation.

Andy Beattie, Deputy Chief Environmental Health Officer presented the report on the Empty Property Strategy – position update and, together with Neil Evans, Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods, responded to Members' questions and comments.

The following issues were raised:

- The **changing housing market** and the effect this had on the incidence of empty properties in the private sector.
- The need to lobby Central Government to encourage planning applications for bringing **commercial buildings** such as empty factories etc back into **residential use**.
- The need for the **Local Empty Property Forum** to look at planning legislation.
- The response from private landlords when asked to bring empty properties back into use.
- **Multiple occupation accommodation and buy to let properties** that are currently affected by the changes in student accommodation provision.
- The need to investigate how the Council might assist those needing bonds for private rented accommodation.
- Pro-active work on empty properties in super output areas.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the reports be received and the contents noted.
- (b) That Members be furnished with the figures for void properties in the Manor Farm Estate.
- (c) That further information on the schemes for the empty properties in the Cross Green and East End Park areas be circulated to Members.

41 Street Cleansing and Britain's Cleanest City Award Update

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods submitted a report outlining the progress being made with Streetscene Services and the progress on the Britain's Cleanest City Awards.

Graham Hollings, Streetscene Services, presented the report and, together with Neil Evans, Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods responded to Members' questions and comments.

In summary, the main issues raised were:

- The need for more **Enforcement** action on people dropping litter to increase people's awareness of on the spot fines.
- The need for teaching about the **dangers of dropping litter** and the effect this has on animals.
- The need for a co-ordinated and clear **action plan** to be developed for the cleaner city in the run up to the awards in 2009.
- An explanation of the Council's bid for the **European Cleaner City Award** and an indication of which areas of the City are to be considered for the next round of awards.
- The Department's current position with regard to the problem of **dog fouling** and what was being done with regard to enforcement issues to combat this problem.
- The need to recognise from the experience gained during the Britain in Bloom competition where the City won a silver award for City in Bloom.
- The Board requested an explanation of the **core services** and what changes are to be put in place in delivering those core services.
- Members questioned the Department's timetable for **street gully cleansing** as it seems to be an ongoing problem in every area of the city.
- The need for both Streetscene and the ALMOs to work together in developing smaller cleaning teams to be responsible for their own area.

The Chair thanked Graham Hollings for presenting this report at short notice.

RESOLVED - That the contents of the report be noted.

42 Housing Letting Pressures - Terms of Reference

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report on the Inquiry into Housing Letting Pressures Draft Terms of Reference.

Sharon Winfield, Principal Scrutiny Adviser presented the report and responded to Members' questions and comments.

The Chair informed the meeting that following discussions at the small working group it was agreed that the inquiry should take into account factors that are wider than the Choice Based Lettings system, particularly the links

between issues around affordable housing, the pressures on council-provided housing and the lettings process in general.

RESOLVED -

- (a) That approval be given to the Terms of Reference for the Housing Letting Pressures inquiry.
- (b) To agree that an invitation be extended to Yvette Cooper, Minister for Housing.
- (c) That the following Members be appointed to the Working Group:

Councillors B Anderson, A Gabriel, A Blackburn, D Hollingsworth and R Lewis.

43 Work Programme

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report on the Board's current work programme and the Forward Plan of Key Decisions for October 2007 to January 2008.

RESOLVED – That the report and appendices be received and noted.

44 Chair's Closing Remarks

The Chair announced that this will be the last meeting of this Scrutiny Board for Sharon Winfield, Principal Scrutiny Adviser as she will leaving the employ of the Authority at the end of October.

45 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Wednesday, 21st November 2007 at 10.00 a.m. in the Civic Hall, Leeds (Pre-meeting for Board Members at 9.30 a.m.).

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance. The meeting concluded at approximately 11.45 a.m.