

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOODS)

WEDNESDAY, 21ST NOVEMBER, 2007

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors C Beverley, A Blackburn,
D Coupar, Mrs R Feldman, A Gabriel,
D Hollingsworth, G Hyde and F Robinson

46 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair formally welcomed Steven Courtney, the newly appointed Principal Scrutiny Adviser who has joined Leeds City Council from Bradford City Council and is an experienced Scrutiny Adviser.

The Chair also welcomed students from Trinity and All Saints College who attended the meeting to observe a Scrutiny Board in operation. For the benefit of those students present, Members were asked to introduce themselves and to indicate the political party they represent.

47 Declarations of Interest

That the following personal interests were declared regarding Agenda Item 9 – Performance Report (Minute 53 refers) and Agenda Item 11 – Rodent Control in Leeds (Minute 55 refers):

- Councillor B Anderson in his capacity as Chair of West/North West Homes.
- Councillor A Blackburn in her capacity as a Director of West/North West Homes.
- Councillor D Coupar in her capacity as a Member of Belle Isle Tenants Management Organisation.
- Councillor D Hollingsworth in his capacity as a Director of East/North East Homes.
- Councillor G Hyde in his capacity as a Director of East/North East Homes.

48 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor R A Lewis and Councillor A Ogilvie.

49 Minutes of Previous Meeting - 24th October 2007

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the last Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) held on 24th October 2007 be confirmed as a correct record.

Minutes approved at the meeting
held on Wednesday, 19th December, 2007

50 Matters Arising from the Minutes

Minute 37 – Matters Arising

The Chair informed the Board that a list of the original sites considered for the proposed energy from waste plant would now be included on the December 2007 agenda.

Councillor Coupar expressed her disappointment that it was now the third meeting that this information had been requested for scrutiny purposes and it was felt that Members should have been provided with this information more speedily.

The Chair informed the meeting that he would make arrangements to send Members of the Board an electronic reference to allow them to access the information, which was now in the public domain.

Minute 40 – Voids and Empty Properties Update

Members confirmed that they were satisfied with the information they had received on void and empty properties relating to the Manor Farm, Cross Green and East End Park Estates.

51 Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 19th October 2007 be received and noted.

52 Minutes of the Executive Board

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the Executive Board meetings held on 11th September 2007 and 17th October 2007 be received and noted.

53 Performance Report Quarter 2 2007/08

The Head of Policy, Performance and Improvement submitted a report presenting the key areas of under performance at the end of Quarter 2 (1st July to 30th September 2007).

Neil Evans, Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods was in attendance and responded to Members' questions and comments.

In summary, specific reference was made to the following issues:-

- The need for assurances that the service provided by the Council with regard to abandoned vehicles will continue after NRA funding ceases in March 2008. *(In response, the Director informed the meeting that any opportunities to access external funding would be maximised. The Board*

was also informed that the Department's budget submission would include funding elements for this service area.)

- An explanation as to why the Council has problems with Police resources when dealing with abandoned vehicles and whether these resources will improve in the near future. *(In response, the Director informed the meeting that he would like to investigate this matter further and will supply Members with this information).*
- An explanation as to why the contract for the removal of abandoned vehicles had been awarded to a company based in Doncaster rather than a Leeds based contractor. *(In response the Director informed the meeting that the contract had been tendered through the Procurement Unit with contract conditions specifying response times. It was further highlighted to the Board that there had been a significant improvement in response times, which had reduced from eight days to 3½ hours).*
- Clarification on the various performance figures relating to decency standards. *(In response, the Director informed the meeting that, while the component (rather than the whole house) approach to undertake the works was generally regarded as being more efficient, this was likely to impact on the performance indicator – with performance seemingly remaining static, until the final components had been completed.)*
- Clarification on concerns around 'addressing domestic violence'. *(In response, the Director informed the meeting that the increased actions against perpetrators was expected to encourage more women to come forward but across West Yorkshire there had been a fall in reported incidents of domestic violence. The Director also informed the meeting that he would investigate this matter further and will supply Members with this information).*
- Concern was expressed that some households still do not have access to kerbside collection of recyclables and that Leeds' performance only ranked 4th when compared to other Core City comparators. Members also expressed some concern that households may eventually end up with a total of four bins for collection. *(In response, the Director informed the meeting of the Council's successful (brown bin) pilot scheme which will be extended to include other areas of the city, with an anticipated city-wide roll out during 2008/09 and 2009/10. The Director also highlighted that it was important to recognise that in some instances different solutions were needed to meet specific/ individual need.)*
- Members expressed concern at the lack of performance information in relation to dealing with anti-social behaviour. *(In response, the Director informed the meeting that there were no national figures on anti-social behaviour but that the department does keep records of the figures on how many inquiries the Council receives and what action is taken. It was indicated that these figures could be made available to Members).*

The Chair thanked the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods for his attendance.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the contents of the report and appendices be noted.

- (b) That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods be requested to supply Board Members with the:
- (i) Performance information in relation to anti-social behaviour; and,
 - (ii) Outcome of the further investigation into the level of Police resources dealing with abandoned vehicles.

(Note: Councillor C Beverley arrived at the meeting at approximately 10.20 a.m. during consideration of the above item.)

54 Outcomes of Research into the Housing Market in Leeds

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods submitted a report on the outcomes of research into the housing market in Leeds, together with a detailed presentation document on the New Housing Market in Leeds which sets out:

- An overview of the research
- The current Leeds Housing Markets – key issues across the housing market zones.
- Emerging demand for both owner occupied and social housing.
- The change in the size of properties across the city.
- Entry level salaries for buyers across the city.
- An overall assessment of the targets to increase affordable housing and current delivery.
- The effects of the changes to the levels of affordable housing on a scheme.

Paul Langford, Chief Housing Services Officer presented the report and gave detailed responses to Members' questions and comments.

In brief, specific reference was made to the following issues:-

- The need for a ward-by-ward breakdown of those households surveyed as part of the Housing Market Assessment project.
- The need to provide Members with affordability information for the south side of Leeds.
- Clarification on the proportion of the 77 acres of land identified for development where clearance/ demolition was needed.
- Point of clarification that it was 'Beeston Hill' and not 'Beeston' that had been identified as an area for development.
- Clarification on the distinction between the various housing market zones .
- The supply of rented social housing and clarification on the number of Council properties to be demolished and replaced.
- The supply of housing for the elderly, such as flats and bungalows, for the scheme of 150 properties in Roundhay/ Moortown.
- The patterns of demand relating to households seeking to buy.
- How the Council proposes to ensure developers deliver the necessary levels of affordable housing in Leeds.

- Use of the Council's planning powers to address issues such as, further developments of apartments in the City Centre and multiple unit purchasing on developments.
- The Council's role in facilitating the development and availability of shared ownership mortgage products and the like.
- The need to increase the supply of housing in general, including number of affordable homes for families and others.
- The availability of land and the need to consider developing green and brown field sites.
- The need to translate and use government guidelines to develop an affordable homes strategy and delivery plan for Leeds. Members felt that the income levels shown in the statistics were not representative of the true level of earnings for many of the people of Leeds, especially the low income earners.
- Members requested regular updates following the Strategic Affordable Housing Partnership meetings and that a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Board, outlining the Future Housing Vision and the associated delivery plan.

Further discussions ensued relating to the history of the many back-to-back properties in Leeds, whether properties in multiple occupation usually reserved for the student population could be converted back into family homes and the Council's incentives to re-house the elderly who are over housed.

The Chair thanked Paul Langford for his attendance.

RESOLVED -

- (a) That the contents of the report and appendices be noted.
- (b) That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods submits a further report outlining the Future Housing Vision and the associated delivery plan.
- (c) That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods provides regular updates to the Board, following the Strategic Affordable Housing Partnership meetings.

55 Rodent Control in Leeds

The Chief Environmental Health Officer submitted a report on the incidence of rodents in Leeds, the Council's obligations under the prevention of Damage by Pets Act, the structure and performance of the Pest Control Service and further opportunities to develop the service and improve service standards.

Keith Gibson, Environmental Health Manager presented the report and responded to Members' questions and comments.

In brief, the main issues raised were:-

- The move towards a pest management rather than a pest control approach, which included a partnership arrangement that provided an

incentive to reduce the rat population in Leeds. It was outlined to the Board that one of the aims of the partnership arrangement was to address the rising number of rats and other pests on the streets and in people's homes.

- The need for more pro-active work to educate people on the proper disposal of food waste, such as takeaways, and the opportunities for new ways of working around prevention that the partnership arrangements would help to facilitate. It was suggested that pictorial messages could be used to get key messages across to the public.
- Clarification that the contractors are meeting the five working day target to respond to complaints of rodents in Leeds. (*The Officer informed the meeting that he would provide Board Members with this data via email*).
- Clarification of the charges for the removal of wasps' nests for the elderly.

The Chair thanked Keith Gibson for his attendance.

RESOLVED -

- (a) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (b) That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods submit an update report within the next six months detailing the progress of the partnership arrangement and outlining the preventative and educational work being undertaken.

56 CO2 Emissions

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report outlining details at Appendix 1 of the first meeting of the CO2 Emissions Working Group held on 1st November 2007. This presented a number of preliminary recommendations.

RESOLVED -

- (a) That the contents of the report and appendices be noted.
- (b) That the preliminary recommendations be endorsed.
- (c) To note that further meetings of the Working Group are to be held, the outcomes of which will be reported back to the Board.

57 Work Programme

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

A further Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period 1st December 2007 to 31st March 2008 was tabled at the meeting.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report and appendices be received and noted.
- (b) That a further 'Future Housing Vision' report and a six month update report on Rodent Control in Leeds (as discussed elsewhere on the agenda) be included in the work programme.

- (c) That the following reports, identified on the Forward Plan of Key Decisions (1 December 2007 to 31 March 2008) be actioned accordingly:
 - (i) Leeds Climate Change Strategy – to be considered by the CO2 Working Group, as appropriate;
 - (ii) Home Energy Conservation Act 11th Report – to be circulated to Members of the Board.
- (d) That the Principal Scrutiny Adviser review the outcomes from the Boards previous meeting during the current municipal year, to identify any outstanding issues.

58 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Wednesday, 19th December 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 11.50 a.m.