



Environment, Housing & Communities Scrutiny Board

Working group Summary: Housing Strategy Review

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7 February 2022

In November 2021 the Head of Housing and Homelessness updated the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities) on the proposed approach to the Council's Housing Strategy review.

The Scrutiny Board agreed to hold a working group in February 2022 to consult in detail on key themes of the strategy, with specific reference to:

- Improving Housing Quality
- Reducing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping
- Age Friendly Housing

ATTENDEES

BOARD MEMBERS

Cllr B Anderson	Cllr T Smith
Cllr K Brooks	Cllr M Midgley
Cllr J Akhtar	Cllr Gabriel
Cllr K Ritchie	

ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES

Cllr M Rafique	Mandy Sawyer	Simon Baker
Nahim Ruhi-Khan	George Munson	Peter Shovlin
Gerard Tinsdale	Adam Crampton	



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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Members were supportive of two key asks of Government with regard to improving housing quality: <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Social housing sector to co-ordinate area-based investment to tackle disrepair, energy efficiency and social issues.b. Sector and city to speak with 'one voice' to government to make case for longer term sources of finance being made available to assist with the delivery of retrofit.
2	Members recommended stronger emphasis be placed on energy efficiency within the planning process, particularly with regards to insulation and efficient heating systems.
3	Members supported lobbying government to introduce a national register of landlords to provide a further mechanism for engagement on standards.
4	Members supported ongoing engagement with private sector landlords and the potential expansion of selective licensing.
5	It was agreed that addressing "hidden homelessness" should be a key priority within the housing strategy.
6	Members supported closer partnership working with housing associations to explore ways in which to deliver better outcomes for people sleeping rough.
7	Members advocated a partnership approach between care, housing and health services to improve access to advice about independent living for older people, to encourage long-term planning rather than housing decisions being taken at the point of crisis.
8	It was suggested communication be sent to all 99 elected members encouraging them to identify ways in which the Housing Strategy Review could be promoted to stakeholders in their local areas.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

1. The Chair introduced the session, highlighting the Scrutiny Board's engagement with the previous housing strategy and noting the importance of ensuring the new strategy reflects the priorities set out in the Best City Ambition.
2. Mandy Sawyer outlined the progress with the Housing Strategy review since November 2021, providing an overview of stakeholder engagement and confirming that the final strategy is being designed to align with the 'Best City Ambition' and other strategies within the organisation.
3. Mandy noted that many priorities from the Housing Strategy 2016-21 are still relevant. However, some changes will be proposed in response to the feedback from engagement sessions.
4. Engagement activity since November 2021 has included workshops with partners and council officers, online consultation, discussion with the equality hubs and attendance at the Health and Well-Being Board.



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5. It was noted that the final Housing Strategy document is scheduled to be taken to Executive Board in April 2022.

Improving Housing Quality

6. George Munson introduced the Housing Strategy Review within the context of the Council's declared climate emergency and the aspiration to tackle affordable warmth.
7. Members were informed that housing accounts for 27% of CO2 emissions in Leeds, 63% of homes have a SAP rating of D or worse, and 13-14% of people living in fuel poverty.
8. Members discussed the likelihood of fuel poverty increasing as a result of increases in the cost-of-living and the impact of fuel poverty on health and well-being.
9. It is estimated that it could cost £5.5bn to make all homes in Leeds net zero by 2040, with most of that relating to properties that are not owned by the Council. A step change in the scale of retrofitting will be required to deliver carbon savings.
10. Government funding has, however, been inconsistent since the closure of the Green Deal and is often limited in terms of the scope of investment and time within which works must be completed. This does not easily enable the delivery of transformational – but often costly - area based investment.
11. Members were supportive of two key asks of Government:
 - a. Social housing sector to co-ordinate area-based investment to tackle disrepair, energy efficiency and social issues.
 - b. Sector and city to speak with 'one voice' to government to make case for longer-term sources of finance to assist with the delivery of retrofit.
12. Gerard Tinsdale provided an overview of the private rented sector in Leeds, noting that standards are driven by the needs and expectations of different markets. A key aim for the Housing Strategy will be for everyone to have a good quality home regardless of tenure.
13. The Council is committed to continuing its work with private sector landlords to improve standards and is supporting the ongoing development of the Leeds rental standard.
14. Enforcement activity was discussed including the work of the rogue landlord unit.
15. The Board welcomed the success of selective licensing in Beeston and Holbeck. It was noted that there is ongoing lobbying of Government to secure a national landlord register, which would provide an additional mechanism for engagement on standards.
16. Board members sought clarification about how selective licensing might be expanded.
17. Nahim Ruhi-Khan provided an overview of the ongoing programme of investment in council housing stock. Members sought clarification about work taking place in high rise buildings.
18. The Council has secured decarbonisation funding from Government for work in council homes and the Board noted the wider economic impact of this work.
19. The scale and pace of this investment programme is unprecedented. However, officers reiterated the need to ensure that essential work - e.g. roof repairs, replacement bathrooms, fire safety measures – also still takes place.



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20. The Board discussed opportunities for the Council to benefit from economies of scales in procurement and to wrap decarbonisation work around other projects. Members also discussed challenges including supply chain problems, the availability of contractors and time limits on funding.
21. The Board sought reassurance that engagement is taking place with communities to address concerns about decarbonisation measures and to ensure that new technologies such as heating systems can be used effectively.

Reducing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

22. Peter Shovlin set out the Council's legal requirement to have an active homelessness and rough sleeping strategy. He provided an overview of work being carried out to update the Leeds Homeless Charter alongside the Housing Strategy. Whereas in previous years the key priorities for the city have been preventing homelessness and minimising the use of temporary accommodation, there is a view that this good practice is now embedded and that other areas in need of further development should be focused upon.
23. Leeds has had a good record of preventing homelessness and temporary accommodation is used much less frequently than in many other cities. Looking to the future it is important to look at the minority of people for whom the response from the council to homelessness has not delivered a positive outcome and to consider "hidden homelessness," which can disproportionately impact certain groups such as young people and people who are LGBT+.
24. The Board discussed how to ensure the right services are available in the right areas of the city. Officers highlighted the need to focus on collaboration, cooperation and efficiency across service providers.
25. Health and well-being were agreed to be central priorities and members acknowledged the very complex needs of some rough sleepers. In response to member queries, it was confirmed that where wider services are wrapped around an individual to support their move into new accommodation, longer term outcomes for that person improve.

Age and Child Friendly Housing:

26. Mandy Sawyer introduced the ambition to bring together work on both child friendly and age friendly priorities.
27. Care leavers were identified as a priority group who should be supported to ensure they can take on and maintain a tenancy.
28. A partnership approach is required to ensure properties promote independence into older age.
29. Decisions about housing for older people are often taken at a time of crisis. It was recommended that advice services are improved so that older people can make well informed decisions about future housing options earlier. The success of such work will rely upon the housing, care and health sectors working more closely together to signpost people to the right information.
30. Members discussed the need for more extra care housing schemes. They also considered how intergenerational communities could be strengthened through better use of communal space in many complexes for older people.



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31. Members explored how planning services could support the delivery of more accessible homes.

ADDITIONAL ISSUES RAISED BY BOARD MEMBERS

32. **Engagement response:** members expressed concern at the level of response to the online consultation. While it was acknowledged that a variety of channels have been used for regular communication, members recommended that further engagement would add value to the review.
33. There was particular concern that very few tenants appeared to have engaged in the consultation. With this in mind, it was suggested that further communication could be provided to elected members with a request that they suggest ways in which the review could be promoted to tenants, residents and other stakeholders in their own localities.
34. **Larger properties:** Members welcomed the proposed expansion of carbon reduction strategies to incorporate areas of the city with typically larger properties, which are often energy inefficient.
35. **Skills:** Members explored the availability of skilled contractors to carry out retrofitting and the potential to develop a regional retrofit hub. Concern was expressed that a lack of availability of contractors could impact on the Council's ability to fulfill its ambitions to retrofit at scale in the city.
36. **Data:** Members sought clarification about the data available to indicate what work needs to take place across the city to bring properties up to a 'carbon efficiency standard.' It was confirmed that the foundation data for council properties comes from regular stock reviews. Members were also updated on work by the University of Leeds to develop an algorithm to indicate which properties should be targeted with investment to deliver the biggest gains. Information about energy efficiency city-wide is also available through analysis of EPCs.
37. Using varied sources of data, a net zero housing plan is being developed to sit beneath the broad Housing Strategy.
38. Members sought and received reassurance that where tenants have previously refused energy efficiency measures such as improved heating systems, new tenants would have the opportunity to request that work is now carried out. It was also noted that low efficiency systems would be addressed as part of the void property upgrade.
39. **Neighbourhood approach:** the positive impact of a neighbourhood approach to investment in disrepair, energy efficiency and social issues was discussed. The transformative impact of this model was acknowledged but as was the high cost per property. Government policy does not currently encourage an area-based approach and as such funding is often sector specific – e.g. decarbonisation funding is only available for social housing.
40. **Private Rented Sector:** Concern was expressed about the impact of the rising cost of living on areas of the city with a disproportionately high number of private rented properties.
41. **Planning:** Members advocated using the planning process to place stronger emphasis on prioritising the importance of energy efficiency measures, including insulation and efficient heating systems, in new developments. Members were keen to 'future proof' new properties by avoiding the need for future retrofitting.
42. Members further agreed that national targets for accessible living would encourage the delivery of more accessible housing, which could promote independent living for longer.
43. **Hydrogen ready boilers:** Members sought and received assurance that hydrogen ready



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boilers are installed in new council properties.

44. **Hidden homelessness:** This is an issue that is appearing in member casework. Members reiterated the need to ensure wrap around services support people in new accommodation. New provision such as that being delivered through St Anne's in Holbeck was welcomed.
45. **Security of tenure:** It was confirmed that mediation is used to try and resolve disputes between private landlords and tenants. It was acknowledged that instability of tenure creates anxiety for tenants.
46. **Empty Homes:** Members queried whether better use could be made of empty properties in the city. Officers confirmed CPOs have been used in some cases where empty properties have been identified.
47. **Housing associations:** it was recommended that closer partnership working could be used to explore ways in which to improve outcomes for people sleeping rough.