

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOODS)

FRIDAY, 9TH OCTOBER, 2009

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors A Blackburn, J Dowson,
D Hollingsworth, G Hyde, J Jarosz and
M Rafique

43 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed everyone at today's Scrutiny Board (Environment & Neighbourhoods) meeting.

44 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Castle, Downes, Marjoram and Mulherin.

45 Declarations of Interest

The following personal interests were declared:

- Councillor B Anderson in his capacity as a Director of West North West Homes (Agenda Item 10 – Minute 50 refers).
- Councillor A Blackburn in her capacity as a Director of West North West Homes (Agenda Item 10 – Minute 50 refers).
- Councillor G Hyde in his capacity as a Director of East North East Homes (Agenda Item 10 – Minute 50 refers).
- Councillor D Hollingsworth in his capacity as a Director of East North East Homes (Agenda Item 10 – Minute 50 refers).

46 Minutes and Matters Arising - 14th September 2009

The Chair confirmed that the additional information regarding unemployment figures requested by the Board at the last meeting, as detailed in Minute 36, was being collated and would be circulated shortly. The Chair also confirmed that the requests made by the Board as detailed in Minutes 40 and 41 had been actioned.

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14th September 2009 be approved as a correct record.

47 Executive Board Minutes

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Executive Board meeting held on 17th September 2009 be received and noted.

48 Statement on Enforcement of Dog Fouling - Dog Warden Service Strategy

Pursuant to Minute 27, 13th July 2009 the Director of Environment & Neighbourhoods submitted a further report presenting a draft Dog Warden Service Strategy.

Appended to the report was a copy of the draft Dog Warden Service Strategy, Responsible Dog Ownership Scheme for Members' information/comments.

The following representatives were in attendance and responded to Members' queries and comments.

- Paul Langford, Chief Housing Services Officer
- Graham Wilson, Head of Environmental Action and Parking
- Stacey Campbell, Service Manager, Highways & Environmental Enforcement.

In brief, the issues raised were:

- Clarification of how much a fixed penalty notice fine is.
(In response, Stacey Campbell informed the meeting that a fixed penalty notice fine is currently £75, with a reduction for early payment).
- Clarification on whether a figure for the maximum number of dogs one person could walk at any one time had yet been determined for Leeds.
(In response, Stacey Campbell informed the meeting that general advice from Dog Walking Associations and Charities suggested a figure of five dogs, however, the National Association of Pet-sitters recommends a maximum of four. The guidance figure for Leeds still has to be confirmed).
- Clarification of Leeds City Council's policy regarding pets in Council housing, and particularly flats, and how close the Dog Warden Service works with ALMOs to enforce this policy.
(In response, Stacey Campbell informed the meeting that the policy is set out within the Tenancy Agreement that it was up to individual ALMOs to enforce this policy. Paul Langford, Chief Housing Services Officer, announced that Leeds City Council had recently received a bronze 'Community Animal Welfare – Housing Footprint' annual award from the RSPCA for its policy on pets in council housing. Stacey Campbell added that the dog wardens had also received this award for their work with animals).
- Clarification of what role the new Community Environmental Officers will play in helping to deliver this Strategy.
(In response, Graham Wilson informed the meeting that with the introduction of 23 new Community Environmental Officer posts, it is envisaged that they will be able to assist the Dog Wardens in providing better local knowledge to target the right type of work in the right places).
- Clarification on the policy concerning dangerous dogs and at what point would the Dog Warden service intervene and take a dog away from its owner for the safety of the public?
(In response, Stacey Campbell informed the meeting that the Dog Warden Service would intervene if the incident was reported to them).

Although the Police still undertake Dangerous Dogs offences reported directly to them, the Council continues to work in partnership with the Police and will follow up complaints with legal action where appropriate).

- The role of the Council as the Primary Authority in consulting and supporting local Parish and Town Councils to enforce any Dog Control Orders.

The Chair thanked officers for their attendance.

RESOLVED - That the contents of the report, its appendices and the comments now made be noted.

49 Inquiry into Private Rented Sector Housing - Formal Response

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report to present the formal response to the Board's earlier inquiry into Private Rented Sector Housing.

Appended to the report were copies of the following documents for the information/comment of the meeting:-

- Private Rented Sector Housing - Scrutiny Inquiry Report.
- Executive Board report dated 26th August 2009.

The following representatives were in attendance and responded to Members' queries and comments:

- Paul Langford, Chief Housing Services Officer
- Andy Beattie, Head of Services, Pollution Control and Housing

The main issue raised was around the response provided to the Board's recommendation to conduct a review of resources within the HMO Licensing Team to determine whether it is adequate enough to administer and regulate the HMO Mandatory Licensing Scheme. It was noted that the Director had not agreed with this particular recommendation as operational costs are met by licence fees and therefore any additional resources would either need to be subsidised through revenue budget or by increasing licence fees, which was not considered appropriate. The Board was assured that the current fee level provides sufficient resources of approx £1.5m to administer the scheme in Leeds, which has been one of the most successful in the country.

The Chair thanked officers for their attendance.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the contents of the report and its appendices be noted.
- (b) That the Board will receive a further update in March 2010 as part of its recommendation tracking report.

50 **Inquiry into Older People's Housing - Formal Response**

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report to present the formal response to the Board's earlier inquiry into Older People's Housing.

Appended to the report were copies of the following documents for the information/comment of the meeting:

- Older People's Housing – Scrutiny Inquiry Report
- Executive Board report dated 26th August 2009

The following representatives were in attendance and responded to Members' queries and comments:

- Paul Langford, Chief Housing Services Officer
- Rob McCartney, Housing Strategy and Commissioning Manager
- Tom Knowland, Head of Sustainable Development
- Phil Charlton, Project Manager, City Projects
- Tim O'Shea, Head of Adult Social Care Commissioning

The Board acknowledged that a more robust response provided by the Director of City Development was needed in relation to recommendation 9 following the request made by the Scrutiny Board's Chair at the Executive Board meeting in August.

The Board specifically asked Officers for an update on the Round 6 PFI funding bid after acknowledging that the Council had been successful with the PFI Expression of Interest and £183m had provisionally been allocated to the city.

The main issues raised were:

- the importance of consulting older people about their housing needs as part of the preparation for the outline business case. It was noted that such consultations had taken place as part of the recent Housing Market Assessment.
- that the Housing Market Assessment showed that there was a preference amongst older people for two bedroom accommodation.
- the need to explore different models of best practice both from the public and private sector, of which Brunswick Gardens in Sheffield is only one example.

Members thanked officers for their attendance.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the contents of the report, its appendices and the concerns of this Scrutiny Board be noted.
- (b) That the Board will continue to monitor progress as part of its quarterly recommendation tracking reports.

- (c) That, once developed, the proposed model for Leeds is brought back to the Scrutiny Board for consideration.

51 Housing Solutions/Mortgage Rescue

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods submitted a progress report On the development of the Housing Solutions Programme and the Mortgage Rescue initiatives being delivered in the City.

The following representatives were in attendance and responded to Members' queries and comments:

- Paul Langford, Chief Housing Services Officer
- Rob McCartney, Housing Strategy and Commissioning Manager

Particular reference was made to the homeless prevention opportunities now in place, including the establishment of a Homeless Prevention Fund, which has contributed towards the reduction in temporary accommodation placements made in the last year.

The Board also discussed the possible reasons for the low uptake of mortgage rescue schemes, particularly in the current economic climate. It was highlighted that the Financial Services Authority is encouraging lenders to focus more on supporting people to stay within their own homes. It was also acknowledged that the qualifying criteria for such schemes are very robust with an emphasis on all other options being exhausted first. Members noted that the Council continues to monitor the numbers of referrals made.

The Chair thanked officers for their attendance.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report be received and noted.

52 Crime and Disorder Scrutiny - Inquiry into Integrated Offender Management - Draft Terms of Reference

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report presenting the draft terms of reference for the Board's forthcoming inquiry into Integrated Offender Management.

Angela Brogden, Principal Scrutiny Advisor presented the report and responded to Members' questions and comments.

The Board requested that the Probation Service be identified separately in the list of potential witnesses during the review and agreed to also include the Director of Commissioning for Priority Groups at NHS Leeds to this list.

RESOLVED - That, subject to the inclusion of the above, approval be given to the draft terms of reference for the Board's forthcoming inquiry into Integrated Offender Management.

Note: Councillor J Jarosz declared a personal interest in this item due to her capacity as an employee of the Probation Service.

53 Work Programme

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report on the Board's current work programme.

Appended to the report were copies of the following documents for the information/comment of the meeting:

- Appendix 1 – Current work programme, including an update on the reviews being conducted by the Board's working groups.
- Appendix 2 – Briefing paper setting out the proposed approach and timetable for the Scrutiny review into Lettings.
- Appendix 3 - Schedule of Planned Working Group meetings.
- Appendix 4 – Relevant extract of the Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period 1st October 2009 to 31st January 2010.

The Chair gave a brief update on the work programme and any changes made to the work programme.

Members sought clarification on when the results of the ALMO Reviews were being submitted to the Executive Board and requested that these also be brought to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Board for consideration.

Further to the request made last month for unemployment figures for each ward area, the Board requested that this information be brought to the November meeting and considered as a formal agenda item.

Members also requested that a progress report around the Board's Worklessness Review be brought to the December meeting.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the contents of the report, its appendices and the comments now made be noted.
- (b) That the proposed approach for the Review of the Housing Lettings Process, as outlined in Appendix 2 attached to the submitted report, be approved.
- (c) That the unemployment figures requested by the Board be considered as a formal agenda item in November;
- (d) That a progress report around the Board's Worklessness Review be brought to the December meeting.

54 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Monday, 9th November 2009 at 10.00 a.m. (Pre-Meeting at 9.30 a.m.)

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance.

(The meeting concluded at 11.30 a.m.)