

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOODS)

MONDAY, 17TH JANUARY, 2011

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors G Driver, P Ewens,
R Grahame, G Hyde, M Iqbal, L Mulherin
and P Wadsworth

Apologies Councillor J Marjoram

81 Late Items

In accordance with his powers under Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair agreed to accept the following as late items of urgent business:-

- Agenda Item 6 (Minute No. 84 refers) – Minutes of the meeting held on 6th January 2011.
- Agenda Item 7 (Minute No. 87 refers) – Report of the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods on interruptions to the refuse collection service.
- Agenda Item 9 (Minute No. 85 refers) – Copy of the Board's proposed final report of its Inquiry into gypsy and traveller site provision in Leeds.

None of the documents had been available at the time of agenda despatch.

82 Declarations of Interest

The following personal declarations of interest were made:-

- Agenda Item 8 (Minute No.86 refers – Development of a rent to mortgage model – Councillors G Driver, R Grahame, G Hyde and P Wadsworth in their capacity as ALMO Directors.

83 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor J Marjoram (no substitute).

84 Minutes - 6th January 2011

With reference to Minute No. 72, Councillor Ewens indicated that she had voted against the Board's decision to conduct an Inquiry in respect of acquisitive crime, with the focus on domestic burglary but, unfortunately, had

not requested that her dissent be recorded, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 16.5.

RESOLVED – That, subject to the above comment, the minutes of the meeting held on 6th January 2011 be confirmed as a correct record.

85 Scrutiny Inquiry into Gypsy and Traveller Site Provision in Leeds

Further to Minute No. 66, 2nd December 2010, the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted the Board's proposed final report of its Inquiry into gypsy and traveller site provision in Leeds.

In attendance at the meeting, and responding to Members' queries and comments, were:-

- Councillor P Gruen, Executive Member, Neighbourhoods and Housing.
- Neil Evans, Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods,
- Bridget Emery, Head of Housing Strategy and Solutions.
- Ian Spafford, Head of Community Services and Litigation, Legal Services.
- Karen Blackmore, Team Leader, General Litigation, Legal Services.

In brief summary, the main points of discussion were:-

- Recommendation 1 – The Board agreed to delete the reference to transit sites and also to add 'Any proposals relating to negotiated stopping sites to be the subject of consultation with the local Ward Members in those Wards'.
- Recommendation 3 – It was acknowledged that in seeking to develop the possible provision of negotiated stopping sites in a City Region context, the existing provisions contained in the Regional Spatial Strategy would have to be taken into account.
- Paragraph 80 – The Chair made reference to comments received from Councillor Marjoram regarding the affordability of any possible provision for gypsies and travellers in the current economic climate, and the need to balance priorities.

The Board agreed to add the word 'affordable', so that the paragraph now reads - 'As with all policy decisions, the allocation of limited financial resources will need to be considered. The Executive Board will need to balance the demand for social, affordable housing and a growing waiting list against the needs of a small, transient gypsy and traveller community'.

- Reference was made to comments in the media over the week-end regarding possible Government measures in respect of gypsy and traveller sites. These might be relevant to the Board's work, although it was believed that they related to the issue of retrospective planning applications in respect of private land owned by gypsies or travellers, so may not be relevant.
- On a similar theme, the comment was made that the solution perhaps did not lie solely in the hands of the Council, as there was nothing to prevent the development of suitable private sites subject to the normal planning considerations.

Councillor Gruen thanked the Board and its officers for all the hard work that had gone into the Inquiry, and also for how quickly it had been completed. The Board's Inquiry report would now be considered by the Executive Board, possibly on 11th February, although this may only be an interim consideration, pending further investigation of the Board's recommendations and a report back. He made reference to the earlier discussion regarding Paragraph 80, and emphasised that in considering the Scrutiny Board's recommendations, the Executive Board would, indeed, have to consider its priorities and the affordability of any proposals in the current economic climate.

RESOLVED –

- a) That, subject to the above agreed amendments, the Board's final Inquiry report be approved and forwarded to the Executive Board for consideration.
- b) That the Board places on record its appreciation for the role played and the hard work of Richard Mills, the Board's Principal Scrutiny Adviser, in conducting the Inquiry and producing the Board's final report.

86 Development of a Rent to Mortgage Model

The Board considered a report submitted by the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods regarding the development of a rent to mortgage model housing scheme, which it was proposed to pilot in the East Leeds EASEL regeneration area, initially involving 10 properties. The scheme was aimed at assisting local residents to get onto the housing ladder at a time when mortgage shortages and high deposit requirements were preventing this.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the report be noted, and the initiative be supported.
- b) That a progress report be submitted to the Board in due course.

87 Interruptions in the Refuse Collection Service

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods submitted a report regarding recent interruptions to the refuse collection service, and responded to Members' queries and comments.

In brief summary, the main points of discussion were:-

- The use of external consultants and their role in the re-design of the collection routes and in assessing productivity rates.
- The exacerbation of the initial backlog problems caused by the bad weather in December, followed by Christmas collection arrangements.
- The current situation, which was much improved, with a sharp decline in the number of complaints.
- The historic lack of detailed records relating to routes, hard to access properties and assisted wheel-outs for elderly and disabled residents, the extent of which had not been recognised until the revised arrangements were being implemented, and the knock-on effect of this lack of information in terms of service disruption. This historic lack of detailed information was now being addressed.
- The role of the unions in implementing the revised rounds, current productivity levels and agreed changes to the revised arrangements being made in the light of experience, which was now likely to result in a final reduction of 9 collection rounds, rather than the originally anticipated 11.
- The decision, for economic reasons, not currently to roll-out across the City the food waste recycling project successfully piloted in Rothwell, and the alternatives available to residents, e.g. composting.
- It was noted that refuse collection issues were likely to be the subject of extensive discussion at the full Council meeting on 19th January.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

(NB: Councillor Gruen left the meeting at 10.50 am, during the consideration of this item.)

88 Dates and Times of Future Meetings

Monday, 14th February 2011.

Monday, 14th March 2011.

Monday, 11th April 2011.

All at 10.00 am (Pre-Meetings at 9.30 am).