

# **Scrutiny Board (Regeneration) Working Group's Submission to the Consultation on Proposed Major Changes in Housing Policy**

**Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2012 at 4pm in Committee Room 5, Civic Hall**

## **Present:**

Councillor J Procter (Chair)

Councillor B P Atha

Councillor D Collins

Councillor C Towler

Councillor G Wilkinson

Mr George Hall, Co-opted Member

## **Others in Attendance:**

Ms K Bramall, Leeds Homes Policy Manager, Environment & Neighbourhoods Directorate

Ms M Godsell Housing Policy Manager, Environment and Neighbourhoods Directorate

Mr R McCartney, Head of Housing Support, Environment and Neighbourhoods Directorate

Mr R Mills (RM), Principal Scrutiny Adviser, Resources Directorate

## **Apologies:**

Apologies were reported from Councillors Iqbal, Lay, Morgan and Nagle

### **1.0 Welcome, Introductions and Chair's Comments**

1.1 The Chair invited everyone to introduce themselves and stated that the purpose of the meeting was for the Scrutiny Board to make a formal submission to the Directorate's consultation on proposed major changes to housing policy.

### **2.0 Consultation on Major Changes in Housing Policy**

2.1 Officers introduced the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods reports on the Tenancy Strategy 2013 -15 and the Lettings Policy Review and briefly highlighted the main issues set out in the papers submitted.

### **3.0 Issues and Comments**

3.1 The Working Group considered a range of issues and made the following comments for submission to the consultation:

- a) To strongly support the principle that whatever the outcome of the consultation any proposals put forward to the Executive Board are based on fairness and transparency.
- b) To strongly support the default position proposed in the draft tenancy strategy that new tenants would normally be offered the most secure form of tenancy.
- c) The Localism Act gives new powers to change the way the Council manages its housing stock if it wishes and Members were generally supportive of the Council
  - Determining what classes of persons are or are not 'qualifying persons' who can appear on the housing register and be allocated housing. Members referred to a number of examples of individuals with highly paid jobs with Council tenancies which were considered to be morally wrong.

- Being able to discharge the main homelessness duty with an offer of suitable accommodation from a private landlord without requiring the applicants agreement, provided the tenancy is for a minimum fixed term of 12 months.
- Giving flexible tenancies where appropriate to new social tenants provided that any new tenancy arrangements provide adequate safeguards for dealing with tenants who misbehave and cause nuisance to others.
- In respect to new tenants removing the current statutory right of succession to a secure tenancy to people other than spouses, civil partners and partners to succeed to a secure tenancy. Members expressed concerns about individuals looking after elderly relatives (and other groups) and the need for suitable safeguards and exemptions.

3.2 Some members supported the view that rents should be tied to income but it was acknowledged that the current legislation does not allow this.

3.3 Members discussed the under occupation of Council houses and the 7,000 tenants that will be affected by changes to the housing benefit rules. Members asked what arrangements are in place to provide support to these tenants? Officers responded and stated that 500 tenants to date had been given help and support and are on the housing register. Members discussed the incentives that can be offered to tenants to move and officers responded.

3.4 Members referred to the large number of people in multi story blocks of flats who will not be able to afford to stay in their current home and yet there is no cheaper accommodation elsewhere. It was acknowledged that this is going to develop into a serious and costly issue for the Council with increasing use of bed and breakfast accommodation, private housing and increasing rent arrears. Members were also extremely concerned that that the Council's current policy of not allowing children to be placed at height was threatened.

3.5 Members asked if the reclassification of some properties were on the ALMOs radar and officers confirmed that this may be appropriate in certain circumstances but any reduction in the number of bedrooms would result in a loss of income to the ALMO.

3.6 Members were concerned that the shorter the tenancy the less likely tenants would look after their homes resulting in a decline in the quality of the housing stock. Officers acknowledged that there was some evidence from Housing Associations that supported this view.

3.7 Reference was made to paragraphs 3.7.3 and 3.7.4 of the Directors report which states that it is the Government's intention that the additional rental income Registered Providers receive will contribute to the provision of affordable homes. It has confirmed that affordable rent products will be eligible for housing benefit. Officers confirmed these arrangements and stated that Sanctuary Housing and Yorkshire Housing had already entered into development contracts with the Homes and Community Agency to build new homes with affordable rents.

3.8 It was noted that a report will be brought back to the Scrutiny Board on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2012 which will provide an overview of the outcome of the consultation with stakeholders.

#### **4.0 Update following Inquiry on Affordable Housing by Private Developers**

4.1 It was noted that the Executive Board on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2012 agreed to defer consideration of the former Scrutiny Board (Regeneration) final report and recommendations on affordable housing by private developers and requested an update for its meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2012. The Chair reported that he had met with the Executive Board Member (Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services) on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2012 to

discuss a way forward and it was agreed that a further meeting was necessary with the Chief Planning Officer on his return to work in early September 2012 to discuss in detail the three recommendations of concern. As a consequence it had been agreed to take the item off the September Executive Board agenda.

Meeting ended at 5pm