

SCRUTINY BOARD (NEIGHBOURHOODS AND HOUSING)

WEDNESDAY, 7TH MARCH, 2007

PRESENT: Councillor R Pryke in the Chair

Councillors D Atkinson, P Ewens,
A Gabriel, G Hyde, M Phillips and
D Schofield

93 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Members declared personal / prejudicial interests for the purpose of Section 81 (3) of the Local Government Act 2000 and paragraphs 8 to 13 of the Members Code of Conduct:

Councillor Gabriel – declared a personal interest in agenda item 12 (Supporting People Programme) as a relative was receiving support from the service (Minute No. 101 refers.)

Councillor Hyde – declared a personal interest as a Director of East Leeds Homes ALMO (Minute No. 98 and 100 refers.)

94 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Armitage, Finnigan and Rafique.

95 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 7TH FEBRUARY 2007

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 7th February 2007 be approved as a correct record.

96 MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 5TH FEBRUARY 2007

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 5th February 2007 be noted.

97 MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD - 24TH JANUARY 2007

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Executive Board meeting held on 24th January 2007 be noted.

98 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which afforded Scrutiny Board Members the opportunity to put questions to the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Housing, Councillor J L Carter, and the Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing, Neil Evans.

To summarise, the discussion focussed on the following topics:

- The recent relocation of the Homelessness Advice Service to new offices on Great George Street and the hope that any disruption would be kept to a minimum;

- Short staffing / vacancies in the Homelessness Service and moves being made to alleviate these pressures and the affect on service provision;
- Whether recent publicity surrounding successful prosecutions for anti-social behaviour in Bramley was reported wholly accurately;
- The effect of the implementation of the new licensing laws upon crime statistics;
- Whether the performance indicator target for reducing crime in Leeds by 35% was achievable given that West Yorkshire Police had now reduced their target to 25%, and the possibility for altering the figure;
- The moves being made to tackle the displacement of criminal activity in East Leeds caused by the crackdown on known criminals;
- The scope of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders in preventing youths from simply moving from one area to another to cause disturbance;
- The need for ASBO's to be widely publicised to the local community in order to maximise their effectiveness and the accompanying restrictions on this;
- The importance of Police attendance at Neighbourhood Watch meetings in order to increase community confidence;
- The possibilities for scrutiny of the Police arising out of the forthcoming Crime and Disorder Act;
- Forthcoming plans to reduce the number of Area Managers from five to three in line with the recent restructure of the ALMOs and disappointment that this news had not been more widely disseminated more quickly, particularly to Area Committee Chairs;
- Assurances that there was to be no change to the funding set aside for decency works by the Authority.

With reference to the discussions surrounding the target to reduce crime by 35%, whilst recognising that the high target was unlikely to be met, the Executive Member stated that the Board was ideally placed to investigate the performance against this target to assist the Executive Board and Safer Leeds in identifying ways of maximising the progress in reducing crime. Executive Board would welcome the conclusions and recommendations from the Board around this crucial area of performance.

The Chair thanked Officers for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the discussion be noted.

(Councillor Gabriel joined the meeting at 10:15 am during consideration of this item.)

99 DEMOS REPORT ON BRINGING IT HOME - COMMUNITY BASED APPROACHES TO COUNTER-TERRORISM

The Chair sought Members permission to defer consideration of this item until the next meeting.

RESOLVED – That consideration of the report be deferred.

100 THE LEEDS HOUSING INVESTMENT PROGRAMMES

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing submitted a report concerning the Housing Investment Programme (HIP.) The report sought to improve Members understanding of the HIP and identified the key pressures and challenges facing the authority and its partners in sustaining investment in the programme that responded to corporate objectives.

The Board heard that the report gave a summary of the history of the programme in Leeds, including how practices and funding have changed over recent years. The current spending programmes centred around the ALMO decency scheme, three separate PFI schemes in Swarcliffe and Little London (which had been granted funding) and Holbeck and Beeston Hill (currently on a first reserve list having failed in the first bid in late 2006) and work around the Single Regional Housing Pot and the Housing Market Renewal Fund (involving acquisitions / demolitions, private sector decent homes standard and group repair schemes.)

Neil Evans, Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing, and Ernie Gray, Housing Strategy Manager, Neighbourhoods and Housing, attended the meeting to present the report and respond to Members questions and comments.

The Board discussed the following issues arising out of the report:

- Whether the target for achieving the decent homes standard was still 2010 in Leeds, despite a recent shift by the Government;
- The need to distinguish between the separate areas of Beeston and Beeston Hill when discussing regeneration initiatives;
- The issue of whether private owner-occupiers in areas targeted for housing market renewal works should be compelled to participate in decency works.

The Chair thanked Officers for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED –

- a.) That the contents of the report be noted;
- b.) That a further report be submitted to the Board in December 2007 to review progress in terms of delivering the various programme schemes and obtaining further investment.

101 THE LEEDS SUPPORTING PEOPLE PROGRAMME

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing presented a report briefing Members on the Supporting People programme in Leeds. The Board heard that the programme was established in 2003 as part of a national plan to provide commissioning and funding for supported housing services for vulnerable people to enable them to continue to live independently in the community. The programme took the form of a wide range of services, from

providing wardens in sheltered accommodation to staff for temporary hostel accommodation.

Members were informed that the programme had a limited cash budget and had been subject to significant cuts in grant allocation in recent years. However, Officers were keen to highlight the success and achievements of the scheme, despite these financial constraints.

Neil Evans, Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing, and Bridget Emery, Head of Strategic Commissioning, Neighbourhoods and Housing, attended the meeting to present the report and respond to Members questions and comments.

The Board briefly discussed the following issues in relation to the report:

- Whether current staffing levels within the team were affected by sick leave and whether this had any affect on service provision;
- The progress being made on the recently launched pilot scheme to provide floating units of housing support aimed at vulnerable older home owners;
- The fact that services provided by the Supporting People team had actually increased following the withdrawal of the use of Council-owned temporary hostel accommodation in favour of privately owned facilities;
- The improved services provided at the new Housing Advice Centre which had recently opened on Great George Street.

The Chair thanked Officers for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report be noted.

102 MONITORING REPORT

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which provided Members with monitoring information in relation to the previous Inquiry into Housing Conditions. The inquiry had been undertaken during the previous Municipal Year by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Board.

Members were reminded that provision was made for the Board to monitor the implementation of any agreed actions and recommendations on a six-monthly basis.

The Board requested that Neil Evans, Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing, ask the department to give serious consideration to granting Priority Extra status to tenants in larger properties who wished to downsize, so as to free up more family housing.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report be noted.

103 WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which detailed the current work programme of the Board, including scheduled and unscheduled items.

Appended to the report for Members' information was a copy of the Forward Plan for March to June 2007

It was agreed that the DEMOS report would be reported to the next meeting for consideration.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report and the revisions to the Work Programme be noted.

104 DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 11th April 2007 at 10:00 am (pre-meeting for Board Members at 9:30 am.)