

Minutes of a meeting of the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 7 November 2019 in Committee Room 1 - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 5.30 pm
Concluded 6.35 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT	GREEN
Jamil Dodds Berry Choudhry	Heseltine Herd	Stubbs	Love

Observers: Councillor Alex Ross-Shaw (Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Regeneration, Planning and Transport)

Apologies: Councillor Nussrat Mohammed, Councillor Kamran Hussain, Councillor Riaz Ahmed

Councillor Jamil in the Chair

9. ALTERNATE MEMBERS (Standing Order 34)

Cllr Choudhry attended for Cllr K Hussain, Cllr Stubbs attended for Cllr Ahmed.

10. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

In the interests of transparency, Cllr Choudhry disclosed an interest in agenda item 5 and 6:- The Council's Affordable Housing Programme and the Draft Housing and Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategies (Minute numbers 13 and 14).

11. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

There were no appeals submitted by the public to review decisions to restrict documents.

12. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals to the Committee.

13. THE COUNCIL'S AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAMME

The report of the Strategic Director, Place (**Document "V"**) provided an update on progress in relation to the delivery of the Council's Affordable Housing programme, and recent developments influencing the governance of the housing stock.

Officers explained that in 2010, a time when the housing delivery in the district was relatively low in terms of affordable housing, the Council started delivering new Council housing and was demonstrating leadership in the sector by taking a role in increasing the supply. The table at paragraph 2.6 of the report summarised the affordable housing delivery to date.

In March of this year the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published guidance that placed a requirement on Local Authorities to open Housing Revenue accounts (HRAs) where their stock exceeds 200 units. Bradford Council will be setting up an HRA in the next financial year.

The HRA is a ring fenced account. Rental payments are ring fenced to pay for services that are of benefit to tenants such as repairs, maintenance of the properties and also providing new housing stock.

Questions were asked in relation to the affordable housing targets. Officers replied that the targets were Core Strategy targets and were minimum targets. At present the Council is struggling to meet these targets, although this is a problem experienced by many other local authorities.

A member raised concerns that he was aware of a number of major developments where the developers have come back with a deed of variation often asking for the affordable housing element to be moved or reduced in number. They questioned if this was a growing problem, and what policies are in place to address this?

Officers responded that the s106 standard position is that developers should deliver the affordable housing units at the percentage agreed. The default position is that they provide the housing within the development itself. However, this is subject to viability. If developers can demonstrate (through a lengthy process) that it is not viable to deliver that percentage of affordable housing, then the target can be reviewed. If the developer is not delivering s106 on site they can be required to provide a commuted sum to the Council so that monies can be used to pay for the affordable housing at an alternative site.

The Housing team are part of the consultation team with regard to planning applications, using documentation such as the Strategic Housing Need Assessment to show what the level of need is across the district.

A member asked if the figure shown in paragraph 3.3 was a net figure, and does that also include Right to Buy figures?

Officers explained that the figure was a net figure. Returns are submitted to Government each year. A variety of statistics are reported including, net new homes figures, net new affordable homes figure and also figures for demolitions. The figures are only net new for affordable housing, although the team also report to government of homes lost through the right to buy scheme. Currently, the Authority has not sold any properties through the Right to Buy scheme.

In relation to paragraph 2.10 a member asked for further clarity. Were officers still having difficulty in identifying a suitable site, and was the Homes England funding still available.

It was explained that the Council had received an allocation of funding through the 2016-21 programme on the basis that sites were to be determined. At the time the allocation was secured there was no affordable housing for rent, so it was not part of the funding regime. This has now changed and affordable housing for rent is “back on the table”.

There is still funding available, the current funded programme is to 2021 and this will either be extended, or a new programme will be launched. The Council can still submit bids to Home England on a site by site basis, when an opportunity arises.

A query was raised regarding the delivery of market sale houses, why had this proved to be challenging, why didn't people want to buy them?

Officers responded that the initial schemes had seen a great deal of demand. Part of the issue was around layout of the properties, which were built accessible standards and as homes for life. The layout was different from private sector homes, and was slightly more open plan, which made the properties were less attractive on the purchase market. The upside to this was that the Council has been able to secure additional grant from Homes England, to convert them into rental units and let them as affordable housing to local people.

A member queried whether the revised target of 400 properties was enough. It was felt that Bradford may have a higher need for social housing allocation.

The response was that this is the proposed figure arrived at as part of the Core Strategy partial review where there was a strategic housing market assessment looking at social and affordable housing. It is a minimum figure, but not necessarily the final figure, as part of this process planning have been consulting with local teams who will take feedback from them.

Resolved –

That a further report be presented in 12 months to include details of how the Housing Revenue Account is operating.

ACTION: Strategic Director, Place

14. DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY AND THE HOMELESSNESS & ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY

The report of the Strategic Director, Place (**Document “W”**) provided the draft Housing Strategy and the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Members to consider.

Officers circulated an updated draft of both strategies, explaining that since the Committee papers had been published, further comments had been received from Council Management Team which had been incorporated in to the current draft. Officers explained that Members comments from this meeting will also be incorporated into the final document.

Partners from Incommunities attended the meeting, explaining to members their role in the drafting of the strategies.

A Member asked, if when approaching rough sleepers, they were asked if they had ever served in the armed forces, and if they were aware of where to go for further help. Officers responded that yes, this question was put to the rough sleepers, and they were referred to specialist charities, it was also something that was monitored by them. They added that a new post had been established within Leeds city Council dealing with housing and Homelessness across the Yorkshire region.

A Member asked for further information about the role undertaken by this post, as the details would be helpful for the staff working on the Armed Forces Covenant within Bradford Council.

In addition, a query was raised in relation to Empty Homes as to whether the higher rate of Council Tax applied to these properties had resulted in more properties back into use. Officers replied that the current figure was 4079, and that a report on Empty Homes was to be presented to this Committee in April 2020.

Members welcomed the amendments and inclusions to the strategy since they last saw the document, and commended staff on producing a very good document.

Resolved –

- (1) That officers and partners be commended for their work in drafting the strategies.**
- (2) That members comments be fed into the final drafts of the strategies.**

ACTION: Strategic Director, Place

15. THE COUNCIL'S INVOLVEMENT IN RESIDENTIAL HIGH RISE BUILDINGS FOLLOWING THE GRENFELL TOWER DISASTER

The Strategic Director, Place submitted a report (**Document "X"**) updating members on the Council's involvement in high rise residential buildings.

A report was brought to this Committee a year ago. At that time officers had identified those high rise buildings with aluminium composite materials that were considered a threat to life. There are two within the district, and officers are working with the owners to get buildings remedied. There is a delay in this process due to financing, the considerable cost of replacing the cladding and the complex nature of the application. The Government have recently established a fund (managed by Housing England) that private landlords can apply to assist with the cost of remedying buildings. Officers understand that applications for the two buildings are currently in progress.

Officers explained that the Government have now widened their request for information, and are now asking about insulation materials and certain other types of cladding, as they perceive there may be some level of risk. Data collection is taking place in the authority, although this task is quite complex as many of the buildings had building regulation compliance overseen by private companies, so we don't have details in relation to these. In addition to this, there are different types of cladding that all look the same, but have different performances when tested.

The future of these high rise buildings and the way they will be dealt with is uncertain at the moment. The Government has stated its intention to undertake a substantial rewriting of the fire standards side of the building regulations, but no date has been set for this.

Officers further explained that the way to ensure safety in high rise buildings is to have a regulatory body that oversees them from inception to demolition, through the entire lifetime of the building and to oversee maintenance of the existing properties.

A member asked how the issues of concern were flagged up. Officers responded that the Fire Service is a consultee as part of the process. Joint visits are undertaken with the Fire Service to look at completed schemes.

A question was raised as to whether the requirements around fire safety had been strengthened as a result of the Grenfell disaster. Officers explained that all high rise buildings in the District had been closely looked at since the Grenfell disaster and where risks have been identified, officers have worked with the building owners to try to alleviate the problems. Aluminium cladding has been identified in other properties, although as they are not over 18 metres tall they are not currently being addressed. The focus is on the priority buildings, which present the highest risk.

Resolved –

That an update report be presented in 12 months to include details of any request for information from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and

Local Government (MHCLG) regarding further data collection in relation to High Rise Residential Buildings.

ACTION: Strategic Director, Place

16. REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2019-20

The report of the Chair of the Regeneration & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee (**Document “Y”**) invited Members to consider the Committee’s Work Programme for the 2019-20 municipal year.

Members had a general discussion regarding the prioritisation of certain issues.

Resolved –

That the Work Programme 2019-20 continues to be amended throughout the year.

ACTION: Scrutiny Lead

Chair

Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a correct record at the next meeting of the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

THESE MINUTES HAVE BEEN PRODUCED, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ON RECYCLED PAPER