

Coventry Partnership Housing Theme Group Minutes
11th December 2009

Attendees

Richard Monk (RM) - Chair	Whitefriars Housing Group
Stephen Rudge (SR)	Head of Housing Policy & Services, CCC
Ayaz Maqsood (AM) – Advisor	Housing Strategy Manager, CCC
Cllr Nigel Lee (NL)	Cabinet Member – Climate Change, Housing & Sustainability
Sarah Perry (SP)	Coventry Partnership
Mark Andrews (MA)	City Development, CCC
Clive Benfield (CB)	Benfield Homes
Tim Brown (TB)	De Montford University
John Payne (JP)	Neighbourhood Management, CCC
Kim Fawcett (KF)	Housing Strategy, CCC

1. Apologies and Introductions.

Apologies were received from Brian Walsh, Stewart Fergusson, Carole Bray, Chris Carrington and Niall McChesney. As Niall McChesney will be leaving the Council in the new year, Mark Andrews was introduced as the new representative in the group for City Development – Planning.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

Clarity was sought on one point from agenda item 2 on the previous minutes:

- The Community Cohesion Strategy was launched on 3rd December and the document is available to view at www.coventrypartnership.com/equalitiesandcommunitiesdocuments
The previous minutes should have specified that consultation on the DRAFT version of the document ended on 13th October.

RM – Was there any feedback from the last meeting? (The September meeting was in a different format, with a tour of different developments in the city).

AM – feedback was positive and suggested that this should be done every year. Members would be interested in seeing different areas and more private developments in any future tours.

3. Housing Finance and Capital Funding - Presentation
(Ayaz Maqsood, Housing Strategy Manager)

- A large amount of capital funding has been made available for housing recently through the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).
- Coventry has secured approx £30m of funding from the HCA in the period 2008-11. Kickstart funding has also been allocated to one scheme in Coventry in Round 1, and several bids have been placed for Round 2.
- The Pre-Budget Report on 9th Dec 2009 contained mixed announcements for Housing. Notably, there is extra funding for the Warmfront scheme and a boiler scrappage scheme. The Stamp Duty 'holiday' will end on 31st December 2009 when the threshold for Stamp Duty will return to £125,000 from £175,000. There will be consultation on the contribution that the Private Rental Sector can make to addressing demand and increasing housing supply.
- The CLG capital budget is to be reduced and CLG will also need to contribute £500m in additional savings by 2012/13, through a £340m cut to regeneration spend and £160m crackdown on tenancy fraud.
- HCA funding post-2011 is uncertain but likely to be substantially reduced.
- A Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire (CSW) Sub-Regional Housing Growth Strategy is being developed with the other CSW authorities.

Main points of discussion included:

RM – It is important to consider the role that private sector landlords can play towards meeting housing need/demand and services to improve local neighbourhoods and support communities.

NL – The Private Landlords Forum would be interested in setting up a working group between themselves, the Council and RSLs. Some private landlords have a significant number of properties and could make a contribution in this area.

CB – the building industry is lobbying for SIPS (Self Invested Pension Schemes) to be allowed to invest in residential property.

TB – The Centre at DMU has a research contract from CLG to look at private rented sector initiatives, institutional funding, and lessons/examples from other Western European countries.

TB –TIF (Tax Increment Funding) and accelerated development was not included in the pre-budget report but these could provide an innovative way of developing more housing.

Action: Potential role of Private Rent Sector to be discussed at next meeting.

4. Housing Manifestos of the Main Political Parties - Presentation (Richard Monk, Whitefriars Housing Group)

- A recent Ipsos Mori poll showed that none of the people surveyed identified Housing as a "very important election issue".
- Issues that do not necessarily come under the heading of 'Housing' have a great impact on housing and the work of housing organisations – such as the economy, unemployment, deprivation and neighbourhood issues, cuts to council funding etc.
- Labour key policies include: Housing Revenue Account reform; housing allocations reform; council house building; all new homes to be zero-carbon by 2016; 'ambition' to build 3m new homes by 2020.
- Conservative key policies include: new housing and planning rules; the 'right to move' for social tenants; match funding of council tax for new homes; more local powers for planning, local housing trusts, regen etc; £6500 interest-free loans for 'greening' all households; abolition of regional planning system and development targets; reduction of quangos.
- Liberal Democrat key policies include: HRA reform, tackling empty homes, use of public land for family homes, scrap national targets, improve energy efficiency.
- Green Party key policies include: LAs to buy/convert/build new housing for rent and pay for 60,000 new low-carbon homes; insulation of 20m uninsulated homes; all new homes to be built to environmental standards.

Main points of discussion included:

NL – Housing growth is needed but properties must be of the right type to meet housing need and housing demand in the city - family houses etc.

RM – Whitefriars have around 17,000 properties, but only 213 of these have 4 or more bedrooms.

AM – there is a conflict between the government's aim to make it easier for social tenants to move to other areas, and their emphasis on 'local homes for local people'.

RM – Whilst it is not explicit in their housing manifesto, but there has been much rumour and debate over whether the Conservatives would review the tenancy for life in social housing.

SR – There were reports that the HCA may be scrapped if the Conservative Party is elected.

RM – this was a big issue 6 months ago, but the HCA are delivering results and the Conservatives are now looking more closely at the TSA. But, if the TSA is abolished, who would provide regulation of RSLs?

CB – the Conservative plans to scrap regional planning and housing growth targets would cause problems. It will lead to fewer planning approvals and fewer new properties as no-one will want additional housing near them.

RM – the Conservatives idea of 'Right to Move' is to allow social tenants to move more easily for employment etc. The proposal as it stands would be difficult to implement – a tenant would be able to ask the RSL to sell their current home and use the proceeds to purchase a property in another area.

5. Supporting People Update ***(Stephen Rudge, Head of Housing Policy and Services)***

- The Supporting People programme was set up in 2003 to provide housing related support to vulnerable groups, separating this element from Housing Benefit.
- The original budget for SP was £17m per year. This has decreased over the years and the budget for 2012/13 will be approx £11m.
- Over the last two years the SP services have been through a tendering process, defining the services needed and procuring them.
- Three service areas have not yet completed this process (Older People, Learning Disabilities and Mental Health) but these will be completed by April 2010.
- The new suite of services for Homeless people started in October this year and seems to be working well.
- Direct access accommodation is provided by Whitefriars (The Chace) and the Salvation Army. These will provide support to for people to move on to more suitable accommodation, which may be in the private sector. Cyrenians provide support for rough sleepers.
- The current Salvation Army hostel at Lincoln Street is no longer fit for purpose and funding has been secured for a new facility to be built nearby on Harnall Lane. The Planning Committee will consider the application at their meeting on 14th January 2010.

6. Coventry Homefinder – Choice Based Lettings ***(Stephen Rudge, Head of Housing Policy and Services)***

- A review is being carried out of the Homefinder register. All applicants were contacted by letter asking if they wished to remain on the system, and confirm their details etc.
- All replies where the applicant was not known or is deceased etc have now been processed. There have been approx 5,000 replies requesting to stay on the system, and the Homefinder team is processing any changes of details or circumstances.
- Around 20,000 applicants have not replied. It is planned that these applications on the register will be closed (made dormant, not completely removed) and will be re-activated if the applicant contacts the Homefinder team requesting this.
- The policy changes (including the new sub-bands) will be implemented in the new year once Abritas have updated the system.

NL – It is important to get an accurate picture of housing need in the city.

SR – agreed. Even though the total number of people on the register has increased dramatically, the number of households who are assessed as being in urgent or very urgent need has remained mostly steady compared to previous years.

RM – There needs to be sufficient resources to keep the register up to date and to deal with user queries in the times that HomeFinder has committed to. Concern was expressed that this review of the register did not restrict access to housing or create additional difficulties to people bidding.

SR – it is planned that once this review is completed, an automatic letter will be sent to each applicant on the anniversary of their registration. Some other authorities have set up arms-length organisations to run the CBL systems, others charge RSLs for their properties to be advertised.

7. Development Plans Update ***(Mark Andrews, City Development – Planning - Development Plans)***

- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)
Coventry was allocated funding this year from the Housing Planning Delivery Grant. Part of the eligibility criteria for this grant is that the Council has a robust SHLAA. This is reviewed regularly and the Theme Group are asked for their input. The current SHLAA report is available on the

Council website at: <http://www.coventry.gov.uk/ccm/content/city-development-directorate/planning-&-transportation/planning-and-transportation/strategic-housing-land-availability-assessment.en>

- Coventry's Core Strategy

The four week examination of the Core Strategy by the Independent Inspector has now finished and the inspector's decision should be known by next April. If the inspector issues a binding report, the council will have to adopt the strategy as soon as possible.

- City Centre Area Action Plan

The City Centre AAP is being prepared and consultation is taking place up until 14th January. Members are welcome to comment. The document is available on the website at:

<http://www.coventry.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/environment/planning/city-centre-area-action-plan/>

- National Indicator 154 (Net additional homes provided).

Govt Office of the West Midlands invited us to propose a revision of the target. Small alterations were requested to bring the targets in line with the panel report recommendations from the RSS.

Action: SHLAA report to be discussed at next meeting – members to consider responses before bringing these to the meeting.

8. Any Other Business

JP – There is a stewardship scheme that has been set up in Telford – this is a model that may have potential in Coventry and could be explored further.

JP – there is a neighbourhood management service review being carried out and results/actions can be fed back to a future meeting.

SP – The Coventry Partnership Environment Theme Group will be visiting the other theme groups during this year; I will be able to let you know which Housing Theme Group meeting they will attend at the next meeting.

RM – The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) are currently consulting on "A New Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England". There is a requirement in the draft for RSLs to develop local standards with their tenants. It is not clear how this will be coordinated in practice – there are many HAs working in each local authority area, and some HAs work over many local authority areas.

SR – The Housing Management Group would be best placed to discuss this issue in more detail but it has disbanded – this may be a good time to re-start the group.

Dates of meetings 2010:

- 25th February, 10am - 12noon
- 18th May, 2pm - 4pm
- 19th August, 10am - 12noon
- 17th November, 2pm - 4pm

(All in 6th Floor Conference Room, Spire House, New Union Street, Coventry CV1 2PW)