

Coventry Partnership Housing Theme Group Minutes 25th November 2008

Attendees (members)

Richard Monk (RM)- Chair	Whitefriars Housing Group
Stewart Fergusson (SF)	Orbit Housing Association
Mark Andrews (MA) (on behalf of Niall McChesney)	City Development, CCC
Sue Green (SG)	Deeley Homes
Ayaz Maqsood (AM)	Housing Strategy, CCC
Stephen Rudge (SR)	Housing Policy and Services, CCC
Nigel Wain (NW)	Coventry Partnership
Joan Allen (JA)	Community Empowerment Network
Eleanor Roberts (ER)	Housing Strategy, CCC

Attendees (guests)

Jane Malbasa (JM)	Job Centre Plus and ELSE Theme Group
Dave Sternberg (DS)	NDC and ELSE Theme Group (CCC)
Caron McKenna (CM)	Coventry University Students' Union

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Lynda Bull, Tim Brown, Niall McChesney, John Payne & Carole Bray

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved

SF informed the group that the Concerto III bid had been submitted on time. Eon is now a partner. The bid now goes to the EU for deliberation, and the outcome should be known in January 2009. If successful, there will then be a phase of negotiation.

3. Employment Training/ Worklessness

Jane Malbasa from Job Centre Plus and the Economy, Learning, Skills and Employment Theme Group gave a presentation on training for the workless and those in employment:

A recent household survey showed that:

- A disproportionately high percentage of those who live in social housing receive workless benefits.
- A household survey showed that 55% of people in private housing were in paid employment. Only approximately 40% of people in social housing were employed.

There is therefore a strong link between the work of the HTG and the ELSE TG.

Aims: In order to meet the LAA indicators on skills and employment, the aims are to get the workless back into the labour market, give them transitional support to keep them there, and reduce the flow of people becoming workless.

Jane distributed a booklet detailing the Employer Offer for the West Midlands, and the Coventry Offer. These are based upon both provision that is available nationally through the LSC and Job Centre Plus, and localised support, using funds such as ESF, LEI and the Deprived Area Fund.

There are two aspects to the Coventry Offer; Supporting People and Supporting Employers.

Supporting People includes:

- skills screening and careers advice
- NVTP (National Voluntary Training Pathfinder) giving certain people the chance to do full time training and continue to receive benefits.
- Specialist help and neighbourhood based-delivery for people with needs such as health problems.

Supporting Employers includes:

- incentives such as giving an employer a higher level of services, through Local Employment Partnerships, if they agree to consider employing people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

An option that is being explored is to fund the dissemination of information through Whitefriars staff.

Lack of secure accommodation is one of the biggest barriers experienced by certain groups (e.g. ex-offenders) looking for work.

There followed a discussion on training and development opportunities, and support needed to maintain or expand the workforce, from the points of view of the organisations represented at the meeting:

SF:

- There are currently few employment opportunities within Orbit.
- However, he would strongly support the use of RSLs to disseminate information on training and employment opportunities. This would be especially useful in accessing families.
- Housing Associations could also create enterprise opportunities, such as work-live units
- There needs to be an initial audit of what training is being done and where.

CM:

- The Union received over 3,500 enquiries in 2007 from students in financial difficulty, either unable to pay their rent or their tuition fees.
- International students were told when recruited from other countries that they could easily find a job in Coventry.
- Home students are assumed to earn £500 per year, and not all are able to have a job. Financial help is based on this assumption.
- Those doing a second degree are charged higher tuition fees (£5,000 in 2008)
- Therefore about 7,000 of the 15,000 students at the university are looking for work, and really need the income.
- The university has a Job Shop, but it is small and does not cater for international students.

DS:

- More than half of people living in the NDC who are seeking work do not receive benefits. They may be students, or relatives of claimants for example.
- The biggest challenge is to get people to seek help voluntarily.

JA: The main issues raised through the CEN are:

- The lack of availability of childcare
- Proximity of venues to reduce travel times and costs
- Lack of accreditation of training, meaning that people did not have transferable qualifications
- Courses not being fit for the work world- not teaching relevant skills.
- Voluntary work could be accredited to give people a qualification to transfer to obtaining employment. **This is to be considered by the ELSE Group, which includes representatives from the voluntary sector**
- Employers should take responsibility for re-training of people they are making redundant
- (JM stated that efforts are always made to negotiate this.)
- Course times are very rigid- they would be easier to fit around other commitments if they were not just 9-5, but perhaps run on half days or in the evening.

SG:

- inevitably, there are no opportunities at Deeleys at present
- when the market picks up, the industry will be seriously weakened. There will be a severe skills shortage, since people will leave the industry to take up other jobs, and not return.

SR:

- outlined the plans to fly an aeroplane over the city to record which homes are leaking the most heat, and cross-reference this data with council tax and housing benefit records. This will find poorer people, and offer them insulation for their homes.
- There could be potential to require the contractor to provide training. However, this would probably only involve a very small number of people.

Action: SR to look at getting a requirement put into the contract for the provision of home insulation. This would state either that the contractor must participate in, or provide, training schemes, or that they should restrict employment to Coventry citizens

Action: JM to provide NW with details of a contact at Job Centre Plus who can be involved in devising a clause in the contract

AM:

- 'Aspirations' of figures for house building have not changed
- Demand will be very high after the recession has passed, and it will take time to train people up in the skills that will be needed again
- Training will therefore need to be provided in advance, perhaps to start in 2009.

SR:

- Since lack of permanent housing can be one of the main barriers to securing employment, it would be worthwhile for employment advisors to understand the new CBL system, and that priority can be given to people in such need.

Action: JM to contact Sue Mills at Coventry City Council, to discuss officers from CBL providing training to employment advisors.

4. LDF and RSS

MA told the group that the RSS was submitted to the government. The GOWM was asked to look at putting in more housing, but Coventry was not one of the areas highlighted as needing to increase its supply.

LDF: The core strategy has been delayed due to the issues with the RSS, and a change of national guidance.

An emerging strategy has been produced, and is currently out for consultation until the 9th December. It is available for reading and comment on the council's website (www.coventry.gov.uk/ldf). The council's response will go to the government on the 2nd December. It will state the opinion that targets for Coventry should not increase.

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment is also out for consultation, and available on the website. A number of key regeneration areas have been identified. In total, land for approximately 21,000 additional dwellings has been identified within the existing built up area. The other 12,500 would need to be provided through urban extensions (to make up the total of 33,500 extra dwellings required in the RSS).

5. Merger of Whitefriars and West Mercia

Whitefriars Housing Group has become part of West Mercia Housing Group.

The reason for this merger is to promote growth. It this will help Whitefriars to maximise its opportunities to be involved in bigger projects. Whitefriars will continue to provide things like neighbourhood services. There are no redundancies planned.

The Chief Executive will be Howard Farrand; Pat Brandum will be his deputy.

There will be a transitional structure in place until April 2010.

6. Feedback from the Housing Summit

AM reported that the Housing Summit was very well attended. People who would not normally attend council events, such as estate agents and lettings agents were there. There were several presentations, including one by the Chief Executive of the Coventry Building Society, and one from Sue Green.

The Summit provided a better understanding of the credit crunch from a variety of perspectives. The main consensus was that the biggest problem for the market is the difficulty people experience in trying to obtain a mortgage.

The Housing Strategy team are working with the Coventry Building Society and Deeleys, to develop a pilot project around mortgage funding.

The creation of the HCA may provide opportunities to obtain more public sector finance. However, this will not overcome the fact that people are still struggling to get mortgages.

8.Any Other Business

Caron McKenna from the Coventry University Students' Union Advice Centre reported to the group that a growing number of students have been experiencing problems with private landlords. Issues include landlords who try to change the terms of their tenants' contracts after they have been signed, and international students who sign contracts and pay for housing, before they come to the country, and find that in some cases the accommodation does not even exist.

Action: A representative from the Council's Enforcement Team to meet with somebody from the Students' Union to see how they can help with this problem.

9.Dates of Next Meetings (Spire House 2-4pm)

Tuesday 20th January 2009
Tuesday 24th March 2009

Tuesday 23rd June 2009
Tuesday 22nd September 2009