

Coventry Partnership Housing Theme Group

Tuesday 3rd April 2007

6th Floor, Spire House, Conference Room

Attendees (members):

Richard Monk (RM) - Chair	Whitefriars Housing Association
Sara Roach (SRo)	Coventry Partnership
June Morley (JM)	Coventry Partnership
Stephen Rudge (SR)	Housing Policy and Services, CCC
Councillor Hazel Noonan (HN)	Community Services, CCC
Ayaz Maqsood (AM)	Housing Strategy, CCC
Pat Walsh (PW)	Community Advocate
John Payne (JP)	Area Co-ordination, CCC
Tim Brown (TB)	De Montfort University
Stewart Fergusson (SF)	Midland Heart Housing Association
Carole Bray (CB)	UHCW
Niall McChesney (NM)	City Development, CCC
John Bolton (JB)	Community Services, CCC
Catherine Ewing (CE)	Housing Policy and Services, CCC

Attendees (guests):

Simon Brooke (SB)	Choice Based Lettings Team, CCC
Roger Waterhouse (RW)	Housing Grants, CCC

1) Apologies

Joan Allen	Community Advocate
Sue Bent	Coventry Law Centre
Clive Benfield	Benfield Homes

2) Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 5th December 2006 were agreed as accurate.

SF noted that the Midlands United report 'The Benefits of Housing Investment in the Midlands' had been circulated with the minutes.

AM confirmed that the BME Housing Strategy was presented to the Equalities and Communities Theme Group in December. The document was approved and is now available to download from the Council's website.

AM informed the group that feedback on the Housing Summit, which was held in February 2007, has been very positive. The next step will be a feedback event around summer time. This will be an opportunity to illustrate Coventry's continued progress towards delivery of its housing vision.

RM noted that the much of the feedback he had received reflected how Coventry is in a unique situation with the City Council, RSL's and developers all speaking with one voice against a common aim.

3) Choice Based Lettings Project update

Simon Brooke, CBL Implementation Manager, updated members on recent progress:

- The Implementation Team have drawn up a data dictionary, which will form the basis of the Common Register. This has been issued to all Housing Associations for comment.
- The go-live date has been put back to August 2007 as a result of delays on the IT provider's side.
- All eleven Housing Associations in the city are signed up to the CBL project
- The first communication with applicants has been issued, explaining the service. Enquires stemming from this have been mainly positive although concerns have been raised about how vulnerable groups will access the system.
- The team are working with support and advice agencies to resolve these issues and two plenary sessions have taken place where agencies were able to provide feedback
- Frontdoor associates are also completing work aimed at addressing issues of access for vulnerable groups.
- Information on the scheme has also been released via local newspapers and radio
- Internal staff briefings have been completed and the team are in touch with trade unions.
- There are difficulties with Neighbourhood Renewal Funding going into next year, and discussions are ongoing to negotiate carrying forward last year's underspend.

It was noted that the system includes a good reporting tool. Data on demographics, housing demand and applicant behaviours will all be available, to inform future development plans.

RM suggested that this data might be of poor quality for the first 12 months until applicants become familiarised with the dynamics of the system.

4) Draft Private Sector Housing Strategy

SR introduced the document, noting that it is still in draft format and therefore any comments would be welcomed.

RW explained the strategy is split in two halves – the first describes private sector stock in the city and the second discusses the Housing Assistance Policy, which involves the provision of grants and loans for home improvements.

Factors covered by the document include:

- The Decent Homes Standard
- Fuel Poverty
- Adaptations to the homes of disabled people
- Equity Release Loans, administered by Orbit Care and Repair
- Empty Homes
- The Private Rented Sector
- The Landlords Forum and Accreditation Scheme
- Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation

The document will be reviewed on an annual basis once approved.

RM queried if Housing Benefits could be used as a lever to encourage private sector landlords to improve their properties to the Decent Homes Standard. SR explained that this has been explored, but there is currently no support for this in legislation.

SR stated that the Equity Release scheme is beginning to gain momentum but because of resource issues it is unlikely that the Decent Homes target will be met using this method. The private sector has been approached in relation to the scheme,

and one bank has come forward as willing to take on some of the work and financial burden.

JB highlighted Kim Dowsing's study which indicated that around half of older people who own their own properties would be willing to sell in exchange for an appropriate rented package with care. This would release properties back into the system and equity would be available to bring them up to standard. AM noted that models are being piloted in schemes such as the Belgrade Plaza.

SF stated that the Decent Homes Standard is one of the key targets for housing associations, but is relatively easy to both track and meet. In the private sector it is much more of a challenge, especially in terms of tracking properties.

SR explained that the council was working with Orbit Care and Repair and Warmfront (who provide grants from central government for thermal energy repairs) to identify non-decent homes. Every property visited by Care and Repair or Warmfront will receive a Decent Homes assessment.

JP noted that there was very little geographical analysis included in the document; despite the fact the most non-decent homes are likely to be concentrated in Priority Neighbourhoods. SR clarified that some areas of this work are neighbourhood based, such as Bill Johnson's energy efficiency work. However, other schemes, such as Warmfront are not able to do this because they gain custom by following individual leads.

Finally it was agreed that SF would take the document to the Leaders and Advisors Group.

Comments should be forwarded to roger.waterhouse@coventry.gov.uk before Friday 25th May 2007.

5) Regional Spatial Strategy

NM informed the group that the Issues and Options report was consulted on in January and February 2007. As a result of this process the City Council has endorsed the North - South corridor (Bedworth through to Kenilworth) as a focus for employment-led growth.

The consultation was based on 3 Options for housing growth. It was agreed that Option 2 is attainable, but there are concerns that aspirations of growth up to Option 3 in the future might be restricted if neighbouring authorities opt for significant growth. Option 3 would require significant joint working with adjoining local authorities.

The next stage of the planning process will be to move to the Preferred Options in the autumn.

SRO described the Partnership's disappointment at the lack of environmental considerations in phases 1 and 2.

AM noted that Central Government are pushing for Option 3 scale growth, particularly around the Eastern Corridor, and have expressed a desire for the larger authorities to play a key role in facilitating cooperation with other local authorities in the area.

In line with this, SF informed the group that it is an informal information-sharing group could be set-up with the Warwickshire authorities (Rugby, Nuneaton and Bedworth and North Warwickshire). This would be an extension of the C2 Sub-Regional Group, which consists of Housing Strategy managers from the four authorities, representatives from Government Office, West Midlands Regional Assembly and the Housing Corporation. The group would expand to include planning colleagues,

housing associations that operate across the four areas, politicians and other stakeholders.

AM clarified that the boundaries for this regional group have been set by Central Government, and do not relate to Coventry's housing market, which has a strong relationship with South Warwickshire.

SR suggested that because of this strong relationship it might be beneficial to follow the Planning Department's model and include Warwick and Solihull in the meeting.

6) Draft Regional Allocations Strategy 2008-2011

AM introduced the document, stating that its development has followed the production of the Regional Housing Strategy 2005.

In anticipation of the upcoming Housing Corporation funding round (for 2008-2011) local authorities have put forward joint investment plans for their sub-regional group. Six sub-regional groupings exist in the West Midlands area and Coventry belongs to the C2 group with Rugby, Nuneaton and Bedworth and North Warwickshire. The investment plans were then fed into the larger Regional Allocations Strategy document.

The strategy has now been opened up for consultation and AM asked the group to provide comments by **Friday 20th April 2007**.

Following the consultation process the document will be amended by the administering body, the West Midlands Regional Assembly, before being sent to the DCLG where funding will be allocated across the region.

TB noted that the process of creating such a document was problematic because the evidence base from each local authority would be different. Furthermore, the document does not draw on the Regional Spatial Strategy.

7) Local Development Framework Update

NM informed the group that the Issues and Options supplementary document should be available for consultation next month.

SRo noted it was likely that the Local Development Framework document and the Core Strategy document would in future be merged with the Community Plan to form the 'Sustainable Communities Strategy', setting out a 20 year vision for the city.

The Local Area Agreement is expected to be the delivery plan for the Sustainable Communities Strategy. Coventry have agreed to be a road tester for these new LAA processes, which will involve identifying critical success factors for the negotiation of LAA targets.

8) Coventry Partnership Self Assessment: Implications for Housing Theme Group

SRo introduced June Morley, the new Partnership Support Officer who will be supporting the Housing Theme Group. Part of her role will be to ensure the Improvement Plan is regularly updated and progress towards targets are monitored.

As part of the overall Partnership Board self-assessment, a Neighbourhood Renewal advisor was employed to look at involvement, added value and inclusively. The outcome of this was a report that highlighted the lack of clarity about how the different theme groups link into one another.

An Improvement Plan has been developed with the following objectives:

- Reviewing membership and structure of the Partnership Boards and associated groups
- Reviewing and strengthening performance management arrangements
- Encouraging participation from the private sector.
- Developing internal and external partnership communications

SRo also noted that the self-assessment demonstrated a lack of ownership felt by senior groups towards the delivery of the Community Plan and Local Area Agreement. The Chief Executive of the City Council is looking to develop a Public Service Board to address this; members would include representatives from the 16 groups identified by the White Paper as having a duty to cooperate. This would be a critical group in negotiating LAA targets.

9) Housing Theme Group Sub-Groups

SF stated that the membership and agenda framework of the Housing Theme Group needed to be reviewed to ensure the Theme Group could move forward effectively.

It was noted that in refreshing the Theme Group, key performance targets and cross-cutting themes should be considered.

10) Membership and Chairmanship of Housing Theme Group

SF reminded the group that at the last refresh it was agreed chairmanship would be shared between Whitefriars and Midland Heart, and therefore RM would now step into the role as chair.

Actions to refresh the membership were agreed as the following:

- Write to members who have not attended the last 6 meetings, asking why they have been unable to do so
- Write to existing members to confirm their continued involvement
- Invite representatives from the Housing Theme Group sub-groups, including the Housing Association Management Group, the Housing Association Development Group, the Core Strategy Group, the Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group and the Landlords Forum.
- Invite people from other agencies (potentially private developers, the Chamber, CBI, the universities and other theme groups)

It was agreed that these actions would be completed before the next meeting so that the new group can formulate the new agenda.

11) Major Housing Projects in the City – update on progress

NDC

RM stated that they would shortly be in position to sign the master document, but it will still be two years before they start on site.

Swanswell

- AM informed the group that he was to meet with Duncan Elliott regarding the housing element of the Swanswell Masterplan.
- The major Housing Associations in the city and the Housing Strategy team are encouraging the Swanswell Project Team to allow them increased involvement in the implementation of the Masterplan.
- This consortium is also hoping to take the lead on private developments on the site.

Canley

- The first consultation stage has now been completed, and has highlighted very little appetite for whole scale regeneration
- A framework has been put together around the middle option and will go out to consultation shortly.

Whitely Village

- This scheme will redevelop the Midland Heart and NTL offices into a mixed-tenure estate.
- The central aim of the project will be to demonstrate how far eco-homes can be developed, and at what cost.

12) Community Feedback

No feedback received.

13) Communications Issues

It was noted that the Partnership has recruited a Communications Officer who will begin to produce quarterly newsletters.

14) Any other business

There was no other business to discuss.

15) Dates and times of next meeting

5th June 10am - 12pm
SH/6 Conference Room.