

PLACE SCRUTINY BOARD, Thursday, 24th March, 2022

PRESENT: Councillor A Smith, Deputy Chair (In the Chair)

Councillors: Clarke, Dickenson, Fazal and Young

SUBSTITUTES PRESENT

Councillors: Benton substitute for Councillor Caffrey

58 SUBSTITUTES NOMINATED FOR THIS MEETING AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Bellenger, Caffrey and B Smith.

(The meeting closed at 19.57 hours.)

59 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

(Councillor A Smith declared an interest in the Social Housing Review item as she is a tenant of Together Housing).

60 MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 24TH FEBRUARY 2022 AND 3RD MARCH 2022 TO BE AGREED AS A CORRECT RECORD AND SIGNED BY THE CHAIR.

The Chair advised that this would be the last meeting for the Clerk, Dianne Chapman, and the Scrutiny Support Officer, Farzana Hussain. She gave her thanks to them both for all their hard work and support to this Board and wished them all the best for their futures.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meetings held on 24th February and 3rd March 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

61 SOCIAL HOUSING REVIEW

The Assistant Director for Economy, Housing and Investment and the Housing Strategy and Growth Manager submitted a written report and provided a presentation outlining the social housing providers covering waiting lists, energy performance in housing, the social value impact of social housing, tenant engagement and what were tenants saying. The Place Scrutiny Board had previously undertaken a detailed review of some aspects of social housing in Calderdale. This item was a follow up from that work.

Five registered social landlords had agreed to attend this meeting to discuss the different types of services they currently provided and to discuss current issues for social housing providers and their tenants. Appended to the report were brief summaries of the service from the five registered social landlords.

Representatives from Calder Valley Community Land Trust, Together Housing, Yorkshire Housing and Horton House attended the meeting and gave a brief outline of the services they provided.

Councillor Lynn, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Public Services and Communities attended the meeting and addressed the Board. She advised that people could be on a waiting list two, three or four years, in unsuitable private rented housing, before they could move into social housing. It was important to do more and to get more provision of suitable social housing.

Members commented on the following issues.

- Reference was made to gold, silver, and bronze, was that the status of housing or people on the waiting lists for housing? In response, Officers advised that gold related to urgent housing need, silver to medical needs and bronze was for general need.
- With regards to financial problems for people around heating and lighting in social housing, were there any schemes in place to help reduce running costs in these houses? In response, Officers advised that there were schemes for solar panels and ground source heat pumps that were being done to help reduce the costs of living.
- The representative from Calder Valley Community Land Trust advised that they had a positive relationship with the Council and gave examples of joint projects. He referred to having to pay council tax as soon as they take on an empty property even though it may be some time before a property was brought back into use. He asked if it was possible for the Council to help with the costs of council tax for empty properties during the process of getting properties back into use.
- The work with community college and apprenticeships was fantastic, do other housing associations offer apprenticeships? In response, Officers advised that there was a holistic approach to apprenticeships, and this was still being worked on.
- The representative from Together Housing advised that they had been part of the “Kick Start” programme, that had access to funding outside of their organisation and this provided opportunities for people to get jobs. There were a lot of opportunities in their area to support the entry level of apprentices and they had placed 245 people into work this year.
- What was the turnaround of properties for rent? In response, Officers advised that there were 37,000 properties with a turnaround of about 7% with an average of 45 at any one time with natural turnover. There were many reasons for the waiting lists, for example, not everyone wants a flat. Evictions were at an all-time low.
- How many apprenticeships were there within social housing in Calderdale? In response, Officers advised that they did not have those figures to hand but they would investigate and circulate the figures.
- The representative from Yorkshire Housing advised that they did not have a high level of stock and only had four empty homes at present. They were proud of their homes provision in Rastrick and the number of apprenticeships they had. They were always trying to acquire more land to put more properties

on. She explained the process for tenants and the difficulties they faced and highlighted that anything to support tenants would be welcomed.

- The representative from Calder Valley Community Land Trust advised that it was important to work together and pool resources to help tenants. He suggested that Calderdale could look at sourcing items from community organisations rather than high street stores. In response, Officers outlined the work they were doing with various housing associations and advised that they had seen a good increase in new-build sites, and they were always trying to meet demand. There were 500 new homes in the programme and there should be a different picture in meeting demand going forward.
- Councillor Lynn advised that she was a great believer in getting housing onto some of the derelict or brown field sites, although it could be more expensive to sort these sites. She asked if there was any way to obtain any additional Brown Field Sites funding. In response, Officers advised that brown field sites were difficult to get a development going on them as there were technical processes to get through that were very difficult and it takes perseverance. The team supported where they could with the application processes. The Brownfield Housing Fund was the only funding available at the moment, and Officers explained the process of a couple of proposals they were dealing with.
- The representative from Horton Housing referred to the waiting times and felt that as a temporary housing provider it was difficult to find sustainable properties to move into. She worked across West Yorkshire and North Yorkshire and Calderdale were doing well compared to others. She was proud of the successes working with people on recovery and the connections with a good and dedicated group of people. She agreed it was important to expand the programme to apprentices.
- Were the “homes in the sky” above the Borough Market going to be brought back into use? In response, Officers advised that they were not certain if the “homes in the sky” properties were included in the future high streets funding. These properties had not been forgotten and the site was being made investment ready.
- What was the main demand on Together Housing for what people were looking for and how much funding was needed to bring maisonettes up to date? In response, the representative from Together Housing advised that they were looking at about 14 days to turnaround a property and empty homes cost about £4,000. With empty homes across the board, people want houses not flats. They had a significant amount of high-rise stock, and it was important to build the right property for sustainability with lots to do going forward.
- With regards to the 20 homes on the high street in Hebden Bridge that cost £225k per house, how do you make them affordable? In response, the representative from the Housing Association (CVCLT) advised that there was a package of funding, and they would be working in partnership with Connect Housing and Connell Building. The housing association would get 10 of the homes and they would be for affordable rent.

- Within the future high street funding, there were a lot of empty shops, could we make use of the empty places above the shops as short-term accommodation? In response, Officers advised that there was no existing funding at present to support development of the spaces above shops.

IT WAS AGREED that the:

(a) Representatives from Calder Valley Community Land Trust, Together Housing, Yorkshire Housing and Horton House be thanked for attending the meeting and responding to Members questions and concerns;

(b) Assistant Director, Economy, Housing, and Investment be requested to investigate the process and costs of council tax for empty homes to see whether the Council could help with the costs of council tax for empty properties during the process of getting properties back into use; and

(c) Senior Scrutiny Support Officer be requested to include a report item on “Private Sector Rented Housing” on the Board’s Work Programme for the new municipal year.

62 TRANSPORT SERVICES

The Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods submitted a written report which provided the details of Transport Services located at the Battinson Road Depot. Transport Services provided services to the public, internal Council Services, and commercial customers. It had two main elements: Transport Operations that managed all aspects of home to school transport; and Vehicle Services that managed, maintained, and procured the Council’s fleet of vehicles.

The views of the Scrutiny Board were sought to help Officers to continue to deliver an efficient, customer-focused service that provided support for vulnerable children and adults, and which ensured that the Council’s fleet of vehicles were both safe and reliable and had the minimum possible environmental impact.

Members commented on the following issues:

- There were concerns raised with the number of out of Calderdale schools, were these specialised schools? In response, Officers advised that they were specialised schools. Transport was not responsible for placing children in these schools, that was the remit of the Children and Young People Service (C&YPS). The challenge was, is there another school closer that a child could go to. This was ongoing work with the C&YPS and was part of the “Education Health and Care Plan”.
- With regards to MOTs how many quarterly, 6 monthly or yearly MOTs do you carry out and do you do private MOTs on private vehicles? In response, Officers advised that private vehicles were not something they did routinely as it would take technicians away from our own fleet.
- There was mention of bursaries, were these available now and how could they be promoted? In response, Officers advised that their statutory duty was pre-16 pupils. Post-16 pupils were non-statutory, but they were giving free transport to some. Members were advised that there was a report to be

considered at the next meeting of Cabinet regarding changes to the Post-16 Policy.

- Battinson Road was a small compact site, but there was no room to expand it, would more space be needed? In response, Officers advised that they were exploring in more detail what would be needed for the charging infrastructure with possibly an electric station, like a petrol station, with electric rapid chargers.
- Does the “vehicle to grid” device on trial work well? In response, Officers advised that it does charge well, and they only had one on trial to see how much electricity it used. The trial will be able to outline any benefits or not. They were working with Energy Saving Trust to look at how to get the right balance of keeping costs down, space and operationally keeping vehicles charged and out on the road.
- Was there a possibility of renting vehicles for the fleet, giving more flexibility, and reducing space needed for maintenance. There was a lot of discussion about vehicles, but there was a need to consider the needs of the people using the fleet. In response, Officers advised that in the last procurement round they looked at purchase, versus lease and had moved more to purchase as the economics worked better. The Team do lease sweepers and Officers explained the process for currently dealing with third party leasing and the challenges of maintenance.

IT WAS AGREED that the report be noted.

(Councillor Clarke declared an interest in the above item as a family member worked on school transport).

63 WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22

The Senior Scrutiny Support Officer submitted the Work Programme 2021/22 for consideration by the Board.

The Chair thanked all Members for the work done through this Board this year.

The Senior Scrutiny Support Officer advised that the Planning Peer Review would submit regular updates to this Board and advised that an informal briefing would be provided to any new Members of the Board to bring them up to date, in the new municipal year.

IT WAS AGREED that the Work Programme 2021/22 be approved.