

**TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT**  
**SCRUTINY BOARD (6)**

**17<sup>th</sup> October 2012**

Scrutiny Board (6) and  
Substitute Members

Present:- Councillor Clifford (Substitute for Councillor Lancaster)  
Councillor Hammon  
Councillor Howells (Chair)  
Councillor Mulhall  
Councillor Noonan  
Councillor Sandy (Deputy Chair)  
Councillor B Singh  
Councillor Skipper

Cabinet Member Present:-Councillor Ruane (Cabinet Member (Neighbourhood Action  
Action, Housing, Leisure and Culture)

Employees Present:- P. Barnett (Chief Executive's Directorate)  
M. Checkley (City Services and Development Directorate)  
A. Hook (Chief Executive's Directorate)  
L. Knight (Customer and Workforce Services Directorate)  
A. Maqsood (Community Services Directorate)  
S. Roach (Community Services Directorate)

Apologies:- Councillor Lancaster

**24. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**25. Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings held on 5<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> September 2012, were agreed as true records. There were no matters arising.

**26. Fundamental Service Review of Sustainability and Low Carbon**

The Scrutiny Board considered a presentation and briefing note from the Director of City Service and Development on the Fundamental Service Review (FSR) of Sustainability and Low Carbon.

The Scrutiny Board noted that the FSR had concluded earlier in the year and had recommended a number of actions to achieve required savings in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Coventry was already recognised nationally as a leader in low carbon and the presentation and note outlined the guiding principles behind the FSR to further minimise the Council's environmental impact and embed sustainability into its culture. The FSR had not predicated on the decision on the 'Our Space' Review, the current energy and carbon prices and energy requirements, or achieving the Medium Term Financial Strategy savings of £298k to neutralise the cost of CRC liability.

The briefing note outlined the approach adopted in respect of operational buildings, ICT and behavioural change and the savings plan established for each area to assist in achieving the required savings. The note also outlined the projected savings between 2012/13 and 2013/15 in relation to 'green projects', which included building closures, Salix invest to save projects, other invest to save projects, behavioural changes, ICT, and streetlighting (carbon cost only), along with the investment required to assist with progressing metering and behavioural changes. These projected savings rose from £91k (2012/13) to £220k (2013/14) and £230k (2014/15). 'Amber projects' were also identified to achieve savings, although it was noted that some investment would be required in order to achieve these savings. The amber projects included draught proofing works to buildings, heating modifications, external lighting upgrades and the installation of a biomass boiler at Whitley Depot. It was anticipated that these amber projects could achieve further savings of £9k (2012/13), £71k (2013/14) and £108k (2014/15).

The outcome of the FSR was reported to the Transformation Programme Delivery Board, who approved the following recommendations:

- Note the means by which the MTFs savings target for this FSR will be achieved.
- Note the delivery of the energy and carbon reduction projects identified as 'green'
- Approve the upgrading of metering provision to allow improved monitoring, management and reporting of energy use & carbon emissions: a one-off cost of £12k.
- Approve an ongoing budget of £20k to undertake a behavioural change programme within the city council.
- Approve in principle the allocation of c.£240k of invest to save funding for further energy and carbon reduction projects subject to them complying with the proposed invest to save policy of a 12.5% rate of return over ten years.
- Allow the delivery of the above actions and those outlined in more detail on the tables above under a 'business as usual' approach and end the formal FSR process.
- Officers to investigate the feasibility of bolder carbon and energy saving ideas such as iconic renewables projects, restricting building opening times or closing for a day per week, hot desking at other public sector buildings in Coventry and Warwickshire or using under-utilised minibuses to provide transport between key council buildings.

The Director of City Services and Development reported that, in addition to those matters detailed, there were further ideas still to be explored that may achieve further savings in the future, which included Solar PV or thermal on City Council roofs; reduction/restriction of building opening times; closure of some buildings one day per week; completion of the 'Our Space' review; promotion of biomass boilers for schools; broader hot desking opportunities; and a shuttle bus between key Council sites.

Having considered the details raised, the Board acknowledged that there were a number of bold projects outlined within the FSR to achieve savings and, in particular, requested that additional information be provided on the potential reduction of carbon usage through the expansion of homeworking opportunities and increasing the use of solar panels through 'economy of scale' purchasing in the future.

**RESOLVED that the contents of the briefing note and presentation be noted and that further information be provided on the potential reduction of carbon usage through the expansion of homeworking opportunities and increasing the use of solar panels through 'economy of scale' purchasing.**

## **27. Coventry Tenancy Strategy - Consultation**

The Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note and presentation by the Director of Community Services on the development of the Coventry Tenancy Strategy.

The note indicated that the Government had introduced wide-ranging reforms to social housing legislation, regulation and policy. This marked a significant shift in the way that social housing was developed, let and managed. Changes had been made to the types of tenancies that social housing provider could offer, the rents they could charge and the way that the Council could meet its duties towards homeless households.

A requirement of the Localism Act 2011 was that the Council must produce a Tenancy Strategy, setting out the Council's views on how social housing providers should use these new flexibilities. Social housing providers must then consider the views in the Tenancy Strategy when they set their own Tenancy Policies.

The Scrutiny Board noted that registered providers must have regard to anything the Council sets out in its Tenancy Strategy when developing their own Policies, but were not required to comply with the Strategy.

A consultation document on the Tenancy Strategy had been produced, which summarised the key policy area and set out the possible issues and implication for Coventry. Whilst the Scrutiny Board were asked to provide their views in respect of 6 of the questions within the consultation document, the members were also encouraged to provide an individual response to the consultation if they had additional comments.

The 6 consultation questions on which the Scrutiny Board were asked to provide a view were:

- Q1. Should the Council support the use of Fixed Term Tenancies?
- Q3. Are there any particular groups of people that should only be offered lifetime tenancies?
- Q4. If Fixed Term Tenancies are to be used, do you think that a minimum 5 year fixed term tenancy is reasonable? Should a longer term tenancy (eg 7 years) be used?
- Q7. What factors should be taken into account when setting the level of 'Affordable Rent'?
- Q.9 Are there any types of properties that should NOT be converted to 'Affordable Rent' when they become available for re-letting?

Q.10 Should the Council use the option to discharge the main homelessness duty in the private rented sector without the applicant's consent, provided the accommodation is suitable and is available for a minimum of one year?

In respect of question 1, the Scrutiny Board's view was that the Coventry Tenancy Strategy should be consistent with the City Council's response to the recent Government White Paper on the subject, which was submitted in September 2011. This would be to object to and oppose registered providers offering anything less than the most secure tenancy for households in social and affordable rent properties. The Board felt that weakening the security of tenure for new tenants would damage social cohesion in the City and lead to a group of second class tenants.

In considering question 3, the Scrutiny Board reiterated that their view was as detailed in question 1, and that only lifetime tenancies should be offered. However should registered providers seek to restrict lifetime tenancies the Board felt that lifetime tenancies should definitely be made available to those whose housing needs are unlikely to change; the elderly / retired; people who require specialised, adapted or sheltered housing, extra care etc., and people with disabilities or long term / lifetime illnesses.

In response to question 4, the Scrutiny Board was firmly of the view that it did not support Fixed Term Tenancies. Should registered providers choose to introduce them the Scrutiny Board felt that as long a length of time as possible should be allowed before any review takes place, perhaps 7 years or longer. The Scrutiny Board also re-emphasised that reviews at the end of fixed term tenancies were a particularly vital part of the process and that there should be robust renewal criteria developed and assistance given to households if their tenancies were not renewed. The option should be investigated for shorter contract extensions to be available in circumstances where tenancies were not renewed to allow tenants some security whilst finding alternative accommodation. The Scrutiny Board felt that vulnerable tenants, in particular, should be supported in this process.

The Scrutiny Board considered carefully the issues around the introduction of 'affordable rents' which could be set up to 80% of comparable market rents, as raised in question 7. The introduction of this measure could have a particularly serious impact, particularly for those families in low paid work who pay their rent and are not dependent on benefits. The Scrutiny Board was concerned that the introduction of a measure to fund the increased availability of affordable rented properties was being funded inappropriately and was likely to contribute to further exacerbating housing problems in the City.

Should the measure be introduced, household incomes and housing as a part of universal Credit should be a fundamental consideration along with careful analysis of the mix of social and affordable housing in different parts of the City. There would also need to be protection to ensure that the introduction of 'affordable rent' particularly for tenants with longer term tenancies should have built in protection to ensure that subsequent rent increases do not take them above the 80% threshold.

In response to question 9, the Scrutiny Board had some concerns about the appropriateness of converting large family housing, specialist or adapted properties for disabled people and sheltered housing to 'Affordable Rent'. These properties were unlikely to be occupied by tenants who would be in a position to pay additional rent to fund additional affordable provision. In this regard however, the Scrutiny Board also was concerned that there should be some consideration of the individual circumstances of each tenant who was being asked to contribute more.

The Scrutiny Board was concerned by the report of the Head of Housing regarding the increased pressure on the Council to meet its homelessness obligations, and in particular the amount of time young families might be spending in short term accommodation which whilst adequate was not ideal for families. It concluded that, in fact, the move to looking more to the private rented sector may actually provide more opportunities for families to be placed in parts of the City with limited social and affordable housing availability. The Scrutiny Board agreed that the move proposed in question 10 of the consultation paper should be supported.

**RESOLVED that the responses detailed above be submitted as the Scrutiny Board's response to the Tenancy Strategy consultation.**

**28. Work Programme 2012/13**

The Scrutiny Board noted the current Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2012/13 and gave consideration to further items for inclusion.

**29. Outstanding Issues**

The Scrutiny Board noted that all outstanding issues had been incorporated into their work programme for the Municipal Year (Minute 28 above refers).

**30. Meeting Evaluation**

The Scrutiny Board noted feedback from Twitter, which had been taking place as part of the Local Democracy Week events.

The meeting concluded at 11.50 a.m.