

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

**13<sup>th</sup> March 2013**

Scrutiny Board (6) and  
Substitute Members

Present:-

Councillor Hammon  
Councillor Howells (Chair)  
Councillor Lancaster  
Councillor Mulhall  
Councillor Noonan  
Councillor Sandy (Deputy Chair)

By Invitation:

Councillor Maton (for the consideration of the matter in Minute 48 below)

Cabinet Member Present:-Councillor Duggins (Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance and Resources) (for the consideration of the matter in Minute 47 below)

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

Employees Present:-

G. Holmes (Chief Executive's Directorate)  
D. O'Shaughnessy (Chief Executive's Directorate)  
M. Rossi (Customer and Workforce Services)  
A. Smith (Community Services Directorate)  
C. West (Finance and Legal Services)

Honorary

Alderman Present:

J. Gazey

Others Present:-

P. Deeley (Deeleys)  
C. Murray (Whitefriars Housing)  
G. O'Neill (Whitefriars Housing)  
M. Park (WM Housing Group)  
D. Penn (Shortland Penn and Moore)  
D. Shortland (Shortland Horne and Shortland Penn and Moore)

Apologies:-

Councillor B Singh

**45. Declaration of Interests**

There were no Disclosable Pecuniary Interests declared.

**46. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> January were signed as a true record.

#### 47. **Support to Home Buyers**

The Scrutiny Board received a presentation from the Director of Finance and Legal Services in relation to support to home buyers. The Board were asked to consider whether there was anything the Council could do to support people unable to buy homes, how they could stimulate housing development and whether it was possible to offer Council mortgages.

The Board noted that a variety of schemes already existed such as Shared Ownership, Shared Equity and New Buy. Some on the shelf products were also noted, which included “top up” mortgages from 75% to 95%.

Some of the issues facing the Council included risk, funding, reaching the right people and not duplicating what was already on offer. Targeting a mortgage scheme to the “right” people would include using specific criteria such as postcode, income range or percentage of mortgage required. It would be dangerous for the Council to lend more than 100% mortgages and it was noted that this would not happen.

A mortgage scheme would be targeted geographically to areas where developments had started and where other offerings had not worked. The schemes would be done in partnership with a developer and aligned to wider strategies on growth, such as City Deal or Whitefriars Developments.

The Scrutiny Board noted that it was recommended to aim any new schemes to new build houses, in order to stimulate development which would lead to more council tax payers, business rates and create more jobs. Other local authorities were running similar schemes, using their reserves as a source of funding.

The Board were in favour of the deposit scheme, where the Council would assist buyers with their deposit to buy a property. The timescale to set this up would be six to nine months.

**RESOLVED, that the Transport and Infrastructure Development Scrutiny Board (6), requested that the Support to Home Buyers be considered by the appropriate Scrutiny Board in the next Municipal Year.**

#### 48. **Improving the Conditions for Development and House Building in Coventry**

The Scrutiny Board received a briefing from a number of local housing developers detailing how they could contribute to delivering the Housing Strategy for Coventry. Councillor Maton, the Chair of the Council’s Planning Committee, also attended the meeting and contributed to the discussions on this matter.

The Board noted the difficulties that developers faced when creating housing developments in Coventry and the reasons for them choosing to develop outside of the City.

The Scrutiny Board discussed the housing targets in Coventry, which had reduced from 33,500 to fewer than 12,000 in the recent submission of the Core Strategy.

The developers raised their concern relating to the high Section 106 contributions, in particular for Education. It was noted that small sites were unviable to develop as the contributions were set too high. These small sites had been identified in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA).

The Board noted that working with neighbouring authorities was vital to delivering housing targets in the City and that more work needed to be done to achieve this. It was further noted that more retailers would be attracted to Coventry if they could see development potential.

The developers were questioned about affordable housing in the North of the City, in particular, whether they would be attracted to develop if the social housing requirement was reduced below 25%.

The developers discussed "land swaps" in Coventry and Members were of the view that this was a good idea and should be explored in more detail.

The developers further suggested a requirement for more aspirational housing to attract high earners to live in Coventry, which would allow the City to grow economically. The developers were also of the view that developing on green field sites would further increase the supply of aspirational housing and therefore support economic growth.

Members suggested that new housing developments should have a mix of types and sizes of properties which would enable residents wanting to move to either a smaller or larger property, to stay in the same vicinity.

**RESOLVED, that the Transport and Infrastructure Development Scrutiny Board (6) requested to add the following items to the work programme for the next municipal year: -**

- **Affordable Housing in the North of the City**
- **Land Swap**
- **Cross working agreement with neighbouring authorities on housing need**

#### **49. Report back from Coventry Homefinder Task and Finish Group**

The Scrutiny Board considered a Briefing Note from the Homefinder Task and Finish Group looking at options for Homefinder so they could be presented to the Cabinet Member (Neighbourhood Action, Housing, Leisure and Culture) on 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2013.

At their meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2012, the Scrutiny Board established a task and finish group to assist in a comprehensive examination and review of the Homefinder System and the Coventry Homefinder Nominations and Lettings Policy (Minute 19/12 refers).

The group met four times between 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012 and 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013 and heard evidence from Council officers from Housing, three housing associations in the City and two advice and support agencies that support Coventry residents in their housing needs.

The group heard views and questioned the witnesses on the effectiveness of the current system, whether there were any areas of weakness, and how the system could be improved. Following analysis of the evidence that had been presented, the members of the task and finish group identified recommendations.

The key issues identified as a result of the discussions were:

- The current Homefinder system in Coventry was functioning well and everyone who gave evidence said that it was operating effectively and efficiently within its current guise.
- The issues with the 25:75 split for housing allocations. This is where 75% of the housing was allocated to those with a housing need (bands 1 and 2) and 25% were allocated according to time on the waiting list. This could lead to houses with high demand are allocated to those people without a current housing need (band 3)
- Access to registration on Homefinder.
- Ensuring the Council meet their statutory duties, including new legislation
- Links with the private rented sector.
- Transparency regarding housing associations criteria for accepting new tenants, specifically around rent arrears. This was not always clear when people were bidding on properties.
- How to deal with people who repeatedly turned down successful bids.
- The use of 7 bands for identifying priorities.
- The armed forces covenant.

**RESOLVED, that the Transport and Infrastructure Development Scrutiny Board agreed to submit the following recommendations to the Cabinet Member (Neighbourhood Action, Housing, Leisure and Culture): -**

- 1) **The current Coventry Homefinder Nominations and Lettings policy be re-written and named Coventry Homefinder Choice Based Lettings Policy.**
- 2) **The policy should retain:**
  - a. **The current banding system.**
  - b. **The current policy on dealing with customers who turn down successful bids.**
  - c. **The current annual review of registration to ensure those on the list still require housing.**
- 3) **All information in the policy should be available to customers in a user-friendly summary document on the website.**
- 4) **The new policy should ensure the Council is meeting its statutory duties, including those regarding the military covenant.**
- 5) **The current 75:25 split for allocation is changed to 100% of the properties on Homefinder are prioritised to those with a housing need (bands 1 and 2).**
- 6) **Access to registration should remain open to enable those without a housing need to register should they wish to.**

- 7) **There should be links on the website to information about Housing Associations other properties out of city, to increase choice.**
- 8) **There should be clear and easy to find information on the website about the different partner Housing Associations policies for accepting or refusing tenants, such as rent arrears or anti-social behaviour.**
- 9) **The Cabinet Member should also consider including links on the Homefinder website to a Council endorsed website providing information about private tenancies, such as the Kirklees model [www.letshelpyou.co.uk](http://www.letshelpyou.co.uk) to increase choice for the customer.**

50. **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.

51. **Outstanding Issues**

Outstanding Issues have been picked up in the Work Programme.

52. **Meeting Evaluation**

The Scrutiny Board commented that it was very useful to have a developers perspective on improving the conditions for development and house building in Coventry.

(The meeting concluded at 12.00pm)