

Minutes

Oldham Strategic Housing Board

29 July 2009

Room C, Oldham Business Centre

17.00- 19.00

Present:	Cllr McCann (Chair) Cllr Judge John Cockerham Mark Reynolds Andrew Brown John Rooney Nick Cumberland Bryonie Shaw	Councillor Councillor Northern Counties housing Association OMBC Housing Strategy Contour Housing Association OMBC Housing Strategy OMBC Housing Strategy OMBC Housing Strategy
Apologies:	Cllr Uddin Hugh Broadbent Mark Glynn	Councillor First Choice Homes Oldham Housing Market Renewal

A SECTION OF MINUTES

1 Welcomes and apologies

2 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as an accurate record.

LAA performance

JR explained that the performance report would be circulated electronically. The key aspects from the performance report include:

- Doing very well against our homelessness targets and
- Progressing well against the affordable housing targets

Gypsies and travellers

Cllr Judge asked for the latest position regarding gypsies and travellers and 4NW. NC advised that a formal AGMA response had been sent back to 4NW and they were going to take this on board and revise the figures. The Partial Review of the Regional Spatial Strategy has now been sent out for statutory consultation which is due to close on 19 October 2009.

Action: NC to circulate performance report to the group

3 **Sub Group Updates**

NC circulated a report containing updates from the sub groups of the Strategic Housing Board. The report was well received providing an overview of the work being delivered through the Partnership.

The mortgage rescue scheme and downsizing project were highlighted as projects doing very well. JC explained that OHIP are keen to stay involved with the downsizing project. All agreed that the Housing Partnership should submit the downsizing project for a housing award.

There was discussion around the success of worklessness schemes and how we can record and evidence outcomes from partners.

The sheltered housing review is ongoing and partners recognised the need to be involved in the process.

It was agreed by the Board to try and record tangible outcomes from all of the sub groups so that this information could be easily reported back to Boards.

Action: JR to speak to Michelle Carr about recording job outcomes/ achievements from the worklessness project

Action: JR to involve RSL partners in discussions around sheltered schemes

Action: BS/JC/AB to submit the downsizing project for a housing award

4 **Oldham Partnership Private Sector Housing Strategy 2009- 2012**

NC gave an overview of the new Private Sector Housing Strategy explaining the consultation and approval process. The strategy was well received and members had sent comments as requested.

JR said it is important to market the new strategy, and particularly regulatory reform order (RRO) highlighting the types of assistance available to homeowners, as well as the new partnership approach being taken and flexible yearly action plan.

Cllr McCann stated that we need to ensure that we target the most vulnerable people. Could we send letters to people on housing benefit?

MR explained there could be privacy issues getting a list of people on housing benefit, but there should be no reason why they (Housing Benefit) couldn't send information out on our behalf.

Action: NC to speak to Housing Benefit to explore the possibility of sending targeted letters to people on housing benefit

5 Oldham Partnership Affordable Housing Strategy 2009- 2012

JR informed the Board the new strategy had been approved by Cabinet. The strategy is seen as being a positive step forward reflecting partnership working, rather than being very Council focused. It will be important that all partners play a key role in delivering the actions over the coming years.

AB stated that active developing RSL's need to be encouraged to play a larger role in the steering group.

Cllr McCann explained the importance of RSL's engaging with planners at an early stage and the affordable housing steering group is a good place to start.

All agreed we need to ensure that affordable housing is provided on site in any new development.

Action: RSL's to be invited to affordable housing steering group (John Rooney)

6 Allocations discussion paper

BS presented the allocations discussion paper.

Re-housing young people aged under 18 years

Currently: tenancies are granted to 16 and 17 years olds if they have sufficient income to meet their housing and living costs. They will normally be expected to have support, either through Social Services, other agencies or informally through relatives, etc.

Recommendation: Oldham amends its allocations scheme to follow the example of neighbouring authorities and grant licences to applicants aged under 18 years. The licence would be linked to an obligation to accept support and the support worker would have right of entry to the property. If the support is rejected or young person engages in ASB / serious crime, steps would be taken to terminate the licence.

The licence would be reviewed periodically. It would be converted into a tenancy after the young person reaches 18 if they have been judged to have made sufficient progress in managing a home.

Housing Partnership: Agreed with the recommended option of issuing licences with a robust link to housing support – would also like to see what RSL's currently/would do and if possible ensure consistency. Questions raised on how/who would pay for the housing support – would it be Supporting People?

Re-housing owner occupiers

Currently: Not covered in the current scheme.

Recommendation: Guidance from the Board on this issue was requested.

Housing Partnership: Restricting capital would be preferred, need to allow for access for

medical/care/support needs. Need to explore alternative models such as intermediate housing for those with large amounts of capital.

Bids, offers and refusals

Currently: The existing scheme makes no reference to the number of bids / refusals that an applicant can make (with the exception of homeless people to whom the LA has a duty, where a refusal may affect priority status).

Recommendation: Limit number of bids that can be placed each week and limit number of refusals that can be made. It is also recommended to review priority banding if no bids are made

Housing Partnership: Would like to see a mixed approach– limit bids (no-one objected to 5), but also bring in consequences for refusals, such as downgrading for a period. Happy to downgrade homeless/reasonable preference if no bids made when suitable properties available.

Suspensions from the housing register

Currently: Oldham allocations scheme mainly suspends applicants for debts from former tenancies.

Recommendation: The allocations sub-group assesses the circumstances for which suspension/ exclusion may be appropriate and reports back to the Board. Reasons for suspension are likely to include former tenant arrears where the applicant has not made satisfactory arrangements to reduce it. Reasons for exclusion are likely to include ASB and violence / threats of violence towards housing staff / previous landlords.

Housing Partnership: Agreed with exclusion for identified issues such as violence etc. Happy with suspensions, but were interested in what happens to people who are suspended and suggested an I&GP grant application to do some work on this?

Reviews and appeals

Currently: Applicants have the right to:

- Request information on their application
- Be informed of decisions relating to banding, eligibility, etc. made by the local authority
- Request a review of a decision relating to banding, eligibility, etc.

Recommendation: The allocations sub-group reconsider the appeals mechanism and sets out proposals for an allocations appeals panel.

Housing Partnership: Did not think panel was needed but did agree that a different or senior officer not in the allocations team should look at case within FCHO – produce a list of identified officers that can review appeals. Also suggested an outside officer (Council

or RSL) could review particularly difficult or contentious case, or that tenants could be involved in appeals – with appeal officer.

Action: BS/Barbara Neville to use the feedback and comments from the Strategic Housing Board to help shape the revised policy.

Action: BS to investigate the possibility of getting an I&GP grant from the HCA to undertake research on what happens to suspended people.

7 **Good new stories**

NC explained the first quarterly newsletter had been well received and a new newsletter would be worked up.

Cllr McCann asked if we could do a joint press release regarding the success of the mortgage rescue scheme.

Action: NC to complete new Housing Partnership newsletter

Action: NC to speak to Carl Marsden about a joint press release on mortgage rescue

8 **OHIP update**

JC informed the group the OHIP Board agreed to option 1 (OHIP to move to the Oldham Business Centre). There are a few technical difficulties to be resolved and it is hoped that the move will take place in April 2010. The initial move will be for a 12 month period, before being made permanent subject to review.

JC is still to write to all CEO's to get formal agreement. It will be important that OHIP retains its independence as the partnerships work covers more than just housing issues.

AB explained a business plan is being developed for OHIP over the coming months.

Action: JC to write to OHIP's CEO's

9 **Any other business**

LAA funding allocation

JR summarised the LAA paper. The Housing Partnership now has much more flexibility to allocate funding (£150,000) to the areas in greatest need and to those which are delivering. Homelessness continues to be the key priority.

Greater Manchester Housing Strategy

JR explained the new GM housing strategy is being developed and there will be a sub regional consultation event in September.

Cllr McCann raised a concern that affordable house prices across Greater Manchester are often beyond the reach of people in Oldham due to the low wages. This is not always picked up at the sub regional level.

Kickstart

JR; 270 sites have been announced by the HCA for Kickstart funding. The only site put forward in Oldham is Lumb Mill, Delph. This was a surprise as it was not felt that this met the HCA's criteria.

10 **Date of next meetings**

All on Thursday's from 17.00- 19.00

- 22 October 2009, FCHO
- 28 January 2010, Room C, Oldham Business Centre
- 13 May 2010, FCHO
- 15 July 2010, Room C, Oldham Business Centre
- 21 October 2010, Room C, Oldham Business Centre