

CITY OF DONCASTER COUNCIL

REGENERATION & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 19TH OCTOBER, 2023

A MEETING of the REGENERATION & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the , DONCASTER on THURSDAY, 19TH OCTOBER, 2023 at 10.00 AM

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Majid Khan

Councillors Sue Farmer, Iris Beech, Sophie Liu, Thomas Noon and Ian Pearson

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Richard Smith, Head of Sustainability

Adam Goldsmith, Service Manager, Place

Julie Crooke, Director of Corporate Services St Leger Homes

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Steve Cox, John Mounsey and Andrea Robinson

		<u>ACTION</u>
10	<u>TO CONSIDER THE EXTENT, IF ANY, TO WHICH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS ARE TO BE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEETING.</u>	
	There were no items on the agenda.	
11	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.</u>	
	There were no declarations made at the meeting.	
12	<u>MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9TH MARCH 2023 AND 17TH JULY 2023</u>	
	The Panel was informed that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 th March 2023 had previously been approved as a correct recorder at the meeting held on 17 th July 2023. The minutes of the meeting held on 17 th July 2023 were proposed and seconded subject to Councillor Sue Farmer being added to the	

	<p>attendance.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 17th July 2023, be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the addition of Councillor Sue Farmer being added to the attendance.</p>	
13	<p><u>PUBLIC STATEMENTS - [A PERIOD NOT EXCEEDING 20 MINUTES FOR STATEMENTS FROM UP TO 5 MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON MATTERS WITHIN THE COMMITTEES REMIT, PROPOSING ACTION(S) WHICH MAY BE CONSIDERED OR CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMITTEES WORK PROGRAMME].</u></p>	
	<p>There were no member of the public in attendance at the meeting and no statements made.</p>	
14	<p><u>HOUSING RETRO FIT PROGRESS SINCE 2021</u></p>	
	<p>The Head of Sustainability gave a presentation to the Panel entitled Housing Retrofit – Moving to Net Zero. Members were provided with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A brief history of Retrofit in Doncaster; • How homes meet Net Zero; • What programmes were available for council and privately owned homes; and • Recent progress and next steps. <p>The following areas were addressed by the Panel during discussion:</p> <p><u>Insulation</u> – when an assessment was undertaken and a property with solid walls was found to have only 100mm of loft insulation then that would be replaced initially rather than undertaking wall insulation.</p> <p><u>Gas boiler installation</u> – It was explained that no decision had been taken on when to stop fitting gas boilers and that it would be unfair to fit any system that could cost four or five times that of a gas boiler, and stressed that the correct technology was required to support moving forward with green energy.</p> <p><u>Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)</u> – It was reported that St Leger Homes was aiming to achieve an EPC Level C for all Council homes by 2030 and was on track to achieve this target. Members noted that there were a small number of properties where this could be difficult to achieve, for example, the Swedish timber properties.</p> <p><u>Heat pumps</u> – the Panel noted the general debate on use of heat pumps across many properties, for example, questioning “were they possible to install on small terraced properties?” Therefore, it was acknowledged that a ‘one size fits all’ heat pump would not be a way forward. With regard to their efficiency, it was necessary for properties</p>	

to be correctly insulted and user knowledge was essential, otherwise they were not effective. Therefore education for both fitters and users was vital.

In response to a question relating to green hydrogen in domestic properties it was explained that the cost for this would be vast and the production process was well in excess of electricity generation. A suitable network would also be required to transport the substance, which was not currently in place.

Property type and repair records – It was explained that under the Right to Buy scheme it was the responsibility of the purchaser to have a survey undertaken that would detail the style of construction. With regard to Council properties it was St Leger Homes responsibility to retain this information.

It was confirmed that St Leger Homes held records of all build and renovation works to properties it managed.

Retro fit delivery – It was explained that work had not yet commenced but funding had recently been approved with properties yet to be identified. It was noted that the works would be intrusive so willing participants would be sought due to disruption required for rewiring and floor insulation. Tenants would not be decanted during the works. It was confirmed that HRA money amounting to £200,000 was being used to undertake the 21 whole property retrofit scheme.

It was noted that at this point it was too early to demonstrate comparisons for whole house retrofit across Yorkshire and Humber.

In response to a Member stating there were a number of assumptions relating to retrofit, it was explained that there was a need for long term programmes to provide certainty for skill providers, households being clear about the financial offer and manufacturers being able to project product delivery. The risks of short term funding streams were being highlighted but if there were national long term mechanisms and strategic plans in place then real potential would be realised.

With regard to understanding the impact following whole retrofit, an evaluation would be undertaken before and after works with the data monitoring shared with the South Yorkshire investment centre to assist with evaluation. The only air of caution highlighted was, if people could not afford to, for example use lights before improvement work but regularly used them afterward, data would not be able to capture this, only qualitative information provided could be registered.

Major challenges – The Panel was informed that pressure from increased costs to undertake programmes would be a challenge, as was being reported across the board. However, there were many issues to give consideration to with large scale programmes, for

example using a single contractor to deliver, but for them and all other providers the same supply chains were being used therefore there was competition with short delivery times.

With regard to cost savings if local authority and St Leger Homes staff were used rather than contractors, it was explained that the Council's labour provision was limited and focused on heating works and repairs delivery.

Schemes to address capacity to deliver on retrofits – It was acknowledged that local authorities or private home owners could not continue to fund net zero schemes and the Panel was informed that 3Ci (Cities Commission for Climate Investment) was undertaking a study to address how schemes could be financed in future. Business cases were currently being developed for long term opportunities.

Beneficiaries of energy generation from solar panels – The feeding tariff was explained to Members with the approach taken by the Local Authority being that the Council benefitted by receiving the tariff and the Council tenant received free electricity within the scheme guidelines. It was noted that each solar panel provider was different.

It was noted that regular maintenance of solar panel's was required, including cleaning, and that this would be undertaken as part of the supplier's contract.

LA Flex Scheme – It was explained that this scheme was an extension of the UK Government's Energy Company Obligation (ECO) to reduce bills and carbon footprint. It was a voluntary scheme but required local authority participation, who sets qualifying criteria and approves work to be undertaken, for people to benefit from heating and insulation grants. Money was set aside by energy companies with private sector contractors undertaking the work. It was noted that some households had accessed £40k of grant money.

Moving forward – it was stressed that the Local Authority had not changed its response to the declaration made by Central Government and had recently installed 70 EV charging bays and acquired 50 electric fleet vehicles with the fleet replacement programme on track.

It was noted that the Local Authority was currently recruiting a growth sector specialist to work with inward providers to identify opportunities for green technology and how manufacturing would advance from a net zero perspective.

Local solar farms to feed the Council's electrical requirement - this type of venture had been explored however it would not have met half of the Council's requirements at the time of investigation.

RESOLVED: That the discussion, be noted.

15	<p><u>THE NEW REGULATORY REGIME FOR SOCIAL HOUSING AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL</u></p>	
	<p>To accompany the report provided with the agenda, the Service Manager for Strategic Housing, City of Doncaster Council and the Director of Corporate Services St Leger Homes of Doncaster presented further information relating to the new regulatory regime for social housing and implications for the Council.</p> <p>The following areas were addressed in detail:</p> <p><u>Attendance by the regulatory body</u> - It was reported that it was unclear when the inspections would be undertaken but it was essential all parties were aware of the new regime. It was noted that future quarterly performance information provided to the Council would now include the tenant satisfaction survey details. In response to a query it was confirmed that the inspection would be undertaken on the Local Authority. It was noted that there was no clarity as to whether inspections would be undertaken on all social landlords in Doncaster in the same time period. Members acknowledged that it was the Local Authority's responsibility to ensure that St Leger Homes of Doncaster was providing a good service.</p> <p><u>Regulatory body fees</u> – in response to concern with regard to the regulatory body fees, it was noted that it was currently estimated to be equivalent to £7 or £8 per property, but it was stressed by the Panel funding should be available for this and not be a burden on tenants. In response to consultation it was confirmed that if a body was awarded a lower rating then they should be visited more frequently and if a higher rating given they be visited less frequently.</p> <p><u>Stock condition surveys</u> – it was reported that condition surveys were in place for approximately 50 percent of St Leger Homes properties but it was estimated that a rolling programme of 4000 properties per annum would be required. It may be that surveyors could be employed to undertake the work but be recognised that every social housing company would need the same service and costs for this could increase. Work was therefore required on how to undertake the surveys and how costs would be met.</p> <p>It was noted that St Leger Homes and the Local Authority would always prefer to use their own staff to undertake work. It was recognised that there had been an increase in work required following the national damp and condensation issues experienced last autumn and winter.</p> <p><u>Lettings Policy</u> – in response to a question relating to behaviour of tenants, Members were reminded of the Lettings Policy and conditions that tenants must adhere to. New tenants were imposed with an introductory tenancy and if for any reason in that introductory period</p>	

	<p>they were not adhering to the policy a letting would be terminated. If the same behaviour appeared after a longer period of time into a tenancy then their tenancy would cease after following the tenancy termination procedure.</p> <p><u>Register of work on property</u> – it was noted that not all properties managed by St Leger Homes had an up to date property data set, eg. when a boiler was last serviced. This was an area that was being progressed.</p> <p><u>Houses in multiple occupation (HMO)</u> – It was confirmed that the Council did not have any properties that were let as an HMO. Sometimes if there were people who had special education needs then it may be two live together for safeguarding purposes.</p> <p><u>Numbers of properties to class as a social landlord</u> – it was confirmed that a company was classed as being a social landlord when it owned upwards of 1000 properties.</p> <p>RESOLVED: that the discussion, be noted.</p>	
16	<p><u>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN AND COUNCIL'S FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS</u></p>	
	<p>The Senior Governance Officer presented the Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan and Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the Panel's attention.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Work Plan and Forward Plan, be noted.</p>	