

Housing Scrutiny Board

23 February, 2016

Summary of Matters Considered at the Board

Report of the Chair, Councillor P Hughes

The Scrutiny Board met on 23 February, 2016 and the following item was considered. I have selected the main points of the discussion which I feel members of the Council will be particularly interested to know more about. For more detail, a copy of the minutes is available on the Committee Management Information System (CMIS) via the Council's website at <http://cmis.sandwell.gov.uk/cmis5/>

Update on Sites Identified for Future Social Housing

The Director – Regeneration and the Economy and the Partnerships Programme Manager attended the meeting and provided the Board with an update on sites across the borough that were being used to deliver new social housing, extra care housing or where the Council intended to buy off-plan to add to its housing stock.

The Board was informed that the Council ensures that alongside site investigations (to identify any required remedial works), full financial viability analyses are carried out by the Strategic Investment Unit before any proposed developments come forward for agreement by the Cabinet.

The Director briefed members on recent changes that have affected registered social landlords. The Government's decision to reduce rents had impacted on the financial modelling used by such landlords for determining the viability of any new developments they planned to build. This had caused smaller registered social landlords to cease developments and even larger landlords had stopped developments for a time to allow them to revisit their viability analyses.

It was noted that the Combined Authority would have a key role to play in stimulating the development of housing in the region. The Devolution Deal included elements designed to support the remediation of land with issues due to the industrial heritage of the region.

Amongst the updates on development sites, an innovative approach to enable more efficient care for older people through a specialised development was shared with the Board. This has been developed alongside Adult Social Care to help achieve savings while maintaining quality of care for our vulnerable residents.

Members thanked the Director and Partnerships Programme Manager for attending the meeting and providing a useful update to the Board.

The Board asked for further information relating to private housing development sites in the borough.

The Board requested that information on housing development statuses be shared with local ward members twice per year to enable them to answer queries more easily and to help inform their constituents about the significant amount of work being done by the Council on these developments.

Members also asked for a mechanism to be established to allow councillors to easily report any land they identify for development opportunities to the Council. Any identified land could be investigated and the local councillors kept informed throughout the process.

The Board felt that it would be beneficial for a member briefing session to be held for all councillors on housing. This should cover both the strategic direction of housing in Sandwell as well as updates on sites across the borough.

Councillor P Hughes
Chair