

**CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS
Monday, 30th November, 2009**

Present:- Councillor Akhtar (in the Chair); Councillors Goult and Kaye (Policy Advisors).

J88. CHOICE BASED LETTINGS – IMPROVING THE SERVICE FROM A CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVE

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report summarising progress made against the recommendations of the Sustainable Scrutiny Review into Choice Based Lettings.

Following the Review's findings, the Key Choices Team, Assessment Team and 2010 Rotherham Ltd.'s Empty Homes Team met and developed an Improvement Plan which was now in place to ensure that areas for development and subsequent gaps in the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) processes were addressed.

Although the Review did not comment in any depth on the process for turnaround of void properties, it had since come to light that there were concerns and was now being looked at separately.

All the Review's 24 recommendations had been actioned; progress made to date was summarised in the report submitted.

A number of the recommendations had financial implications which had required the Key Choices Service to carry out further exploration to identify funding streams. For 2009/10 most of the additional costs were to be met by the Homelessness Prevention Grant.

Discuss ensued on the report with the following issues raised:-

- An evaluation by 2010 had revealed 5,000 x 3 bedroom and 100 x 4 bedroom Council homes occupied by a single person.
- Leeds City Council promoted an under occupancy scheme offered a financial incentive to under occupiers;
- If cash, would it affect those on benefits
- Instead of cash, payment of gas and electric bills for a year

Resolved:- (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the further work taking place include ascertaining the number of 2 and 1 bedroom bungalows available in the Borough.

(3) That investigation take place into the budgetary implications of providing financial inducement to those under occupying Council accommodation.

(4) That the progress against the Scrutiny Review recommendations be considered by the Corporate Management Team and Cabinet.

J89. SCRUTINY REVIEW - VOID TURNROUND TIMES

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services submitted a progress report against the Scrutiny Review of void turnaround times recommendations. Of the 7 recommendations, 3 had been completed with the remaining 4 on target.

The aim of the Review was to consider the current process for re-letting void properties and make recommendations for improvements in order to minimise the length of time that houses are empty and provide a more effective service for tenants. A summary of the recommendations and action against each were set out in the report.

It should be noted that 2 separate detailed pieces of work relating to void turnaround times were now being undertaken. The Service Performance and Service Quality Teams had carried out a number of 'reality checks' of 2010's performance on void turnaround times in response to concerns raised by the Scrutiny Panel. The reality checks had highlighted concerns over performance and a series of meetings were to take place to consider action required to rectify this.

The Scrutiny Panel had also requested a report on long term empty properties which would be submitted to its December meeting addressing long term voids in both the Council's housing stock and the private sector.

The 'fond farewell' reward scheme pilot was being paid for from within 2010's existing resources. A value for money review would be completed to assess whether the scheme was contributing to savings.

It was noted that the Decoration Allowance would form part of the review being undertaken by 2010.

Resolved:- (1) That the progress against the Scrutiny Review recommendations be noted.

(2) That the work being undertaken to address reality checks of performance on void turnaround times and a strategy for dealing with long term empty properties.

(3) That a further report be submitted to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel in April, 2010, confirming completion of the outstanding actions within 2010 Rotherham Ltd.'s Empty Homes Review Action Plan.

J90. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET MONITORING UP TO 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2009

The Finance Manager reported on the Housing Revenue Account which,

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to the end of September, 2009, was project to outturn with a surplus of £1.66M (3% variance from gross budget) by the end of March, 2010.

The key variances included:-

Supervision and Management Costs

Forecast to overspend by £417,000 principally due to the expansion of the Rotherham Furnished Homes Scheme. This was in the main offset by increased income in Non-Dwelling Rents.

Negative Subsidy to Government

Changes to the guidance as a result of the prevailing economic conditions had allowed the Authority to take advantage of increased subsidy in return for a reduction in the proposed rent increase.

Depreciation of Fixed Assets

Forecasted to be £529,000 less than the budget of £19.800M.

Repairs and Maintenance

2010 Rotherham Ltd. currently projecting a balanced budget.

Income

Dwelling Rent income forecasted to be below budget by £1.506M which has been offset by the forecasted rent loss due to voids and other losses and refunds being less than budget (£357,000).

The potential to charge the HRA up to £1.008M of costs relating to the externalisation of the Repairs and Maintenance Service at 2010 was also noted.

Resolved:- That the report be noted.

J91. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:- That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in those paragraphs indicated below of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

J92. SHELTERED HOUSING WARDEN ACCOMMODATION

Further to Minute No. 263 of 2nd April, 2007, the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services reported on the current position with regard to former Warden occupied properties.

On 22nd December, 2009 (Minute No. 128 refers), a proposal to allow Wardens to remain in their current properties following retirement or on leaving the employment of the Council, had been approved. As a result, the majority of retiring Wardens selected the option and reverted to a

standard tenancy. This had resulted in 13 flats being vacated which still currently remained empty.

The report also referred to the Neighbourhood Centre Review, currently in the process of being finalised, and sheltered/aged persons housing warden accommodation together with options that had been investigated and discussed.

Consultation had taken place with residents at the sheltered or aged persons housing schemes and Ward Members with regard to the future use of the vacant accommodation. The majority were in favour of re-letting the accommodation.

Discussion was ongoing with Key Choices and the Empty Homes Team to establish a Local Lettings Policy which would address some of the concerns raised in relation to fear of anti-social behaviour. It was proposed that the Policy would state that first floor flats would not be offered to families with children under the age of 12 years.

Resolved:- (1) That the re-letting of vacant flats attached to a neighbourhood centre be approved subject to a Local Lettings Policy.

(2) That consideration be given to the inclusion in the Local Lettings Policy that a property would be let to those who had been a Council tenant for a specified period of time with no history of anti-social behaviour.

(3) That the Neighbourhood Centres Review Final Recommendations report be submitted to a future meeting.

(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act - information relating to the financial/business affairs of any person (including the Council))

J93. NO. 2 HOLLYTREE AVENUE MALTBY

Further to Minute No. 179(1) of the Regeneration and Asset Board on 17th May, 2007, the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services reported on progress with regard to the disposal of the above property.

Despite extensive efforts by Asset Management, with support from the Neighbourhood Investment Service, to progress a disposal to a RSL, agreement had not been reached predominantly due to RSL funding constraints and adverse housing market conditions.

It had been concluded that the option was no longer viable unless the Council was prepared to dispose of the property at a significant discount which would exceed the estimated investment cost to the Council of bringing the property back into use as a Council rented home.

In view of this, 2 options had been considered for the future of the

property:-

- Option 1 Retention as a Council rented property
- Option 2 Sale on the open market

The Neighbourhood Investment Service supported Option 1 to provide a re-housing solution to a household affected by area based regeneration activity.

Resolved:- (1) That the option of disposal to a RSL be set aside.

(2) That Option 1 set out in the report be supported.

(3) That the appropriation of the property from the Learning and Disability Service to Neighbourhoods and Adult Services, at an appropriation value of £115,000, to facilitate Option 1, be supported.

(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act - information relating to the financial/business affairs of any person (including the Council))

J94. NON TRADITIONAL PROPERTY REVIEW

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services presented a report on the 128 non-traditional properties which had been identified as sustainable for retention and investment through an option appraisal process.

To date, the Council had approved structural works and Decent Homes investment in 669 non-traditional Council-owned properties following a detailed option appraisal process and in-depth consultation within each area and property type. Decent Homes works were currently on hold within the remaining non-traditional properties until an investment decision was made.

The properties were of various construction types with differing levels of structural defects. The report detailed the investment options which had been explored with residents and local Ward Members and presented a rationale for investment based upon cost and sustainability criteria subject to identification of funding to undertake the structural works.

Resolved:- (1) That investment in the 131 non-traditional properties identified in the report submitted be approved enabling Decent Homes work to be carried out.

(2) That a further report on the timetable for delivering the investment, once funding has been secured, be submitted.

(3) That separate reports be submitted for the 4 remaining properties at Leicester Road, Dinnington and 9 properties at Montgomery Square, Wath upon Dearne.

(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act - information relating to the financial/business affairs of any person (including the Council))

J95. NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

Further to Minute No. 84 of 29th September, 2008, the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services reported on the review currently being undertaken of neighbourhood centres and gave a brief overview of the immediate investment requirement for those located within a sheltered or aged persons housing complex.

There were currently 62 communal facilities attached to a sheltered/aged persons housing complex. The stock condition survey commissioned in May 2007, had identified the level of investment required within each centre and provided a timescale for investment to be undertaken.

An investment programme has been developed addressing the improvements on a priority basis per centre over a 12 year period. The estimated investment requirement for all centres totalled £3,262,925.

The review had also considered future options for the communal facilities, guest bedrooms and vacant living accommodation attached to a centre. There had been strong support from Ward Members and residents during the consultation process with the recommendation that the majority of centres being retained.

The Housing Investment Programme contained a budget managed by 2010 Rotherham Ltd. to deliver Disability Discrimination Act works to neighbourhood centres and other HRA properties. However, the majority of centres were DDA compliant and, therefore, it was unlikely that the budget could be fully spent on this type of works.

Resolved:- That the variation to the Housing Investment Programme to allow the use of £168,000 from within the £300,000 Disability Discrimination Act works budget for essential improvements and investments within the neighbourhood centres be approved.

(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act - information relating to the financial/business affairs of any person (including the Council))

J96. INVESTMENT REVIEW OF NON-TRADITIONAL PROPERTIES AT MONTGOMERY SQUARE, WATH UPON DEARNE

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report highlighting the investment requirements for 9 Council-owned and 3 leasehold non-traditional, steel framed concrete clad constructed properties at Montgomery Square, Wath upon Dearne.

The report detailed the investment options which had been explored and

a rationale for investment based upon cost and sustainability criteria subject to identification of funding to undertake the structural works.

Resolved:- That the structural investment be approved, subject to identification of the necessary funding, which allowed Decent Homes investment to be carried out to the 12 non-traditional properties at Montgomery Square, Wath upon Dearne.

(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act - information relating to the financial/business affairs of any person (including the Council))

J97. SHELTERED HOUSING WARDEN SERVICE

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report setting out short term/interim solutions to reduce the projected overspend of the Sheltered Housing Warden Scheme.

Proposals for the merged of the In House Sheltered Housing Warden and Care Enablement Service had been supported by both Cabinet Members for Adults Social Care and Health and Housing and Neighbourhoods in March, 2009. The merged service would allow a more efficient and streamlined preventative service maximising the existing staff skill set, reduce duplications and support an increased range of customers offering broader support activities.

A Project Board established to ensure the success of the project had proposed that a feasibility study should commence at York Gardens, Wath upon Dearne, for 3 months with Care Enablers based in the area taking over the role of the Sheltered Housing Wardens.

The report also highlighted the financial situation of both the Wardens and Care Enabler Services and the charges incurred for provision of such.

Resolved:- (1) That the progress to date on the initiative be noted.

(2) That the Care Enabling capacity be utilised at York Gardens, Wath upon Dearne, to cover the vacant scheme for a 3 month period effective from 9th November, 2009.

(3) That the proposal to apply this approach to a number of other vacant schemes across the Borough to create financial savings be supported.

(4) That discussion take place with the Primary Care Trust on the possible involvement of the Service on discharge of patients.