

CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**Monday, 11th April, 2005**

Present:- Councillor Ellis (in the Chair); Councillors Hall (Environment Scrutiny Panel), N. Hamilton and Kaye (Policy Advisors).

198. BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC HOUSING STRATEGY 2005-07

The Head of Neighbourhood Development and the Equalities and Diversity Officer submitted the Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Strategy 2005-07 which had been developed in partnership with customers and stakeholders.

The aim of the Strategy was to explain and set out what the Authority and its partner organisations were seeking to achieve in terms of race equality in housing. It would also address the main recommendations of the recent Audit Commission inspections including the Indicative ALMO Inspection.

The Strategy and Action Plan focussed around 3 key objectives:-

- Leadership – providing an effective framework for the inclusion of BME communities and a reduction in inequalities across all housing services
- Policies and Procedures – to eliminate inequalities and unlawful discrimination, promote community cohesion and equal opportunities through the development of policies and procedures which embrace equalities and diversity
- Service Delivery – services were provided that met the needs and aspirations of diverse communities.

The introduction of a specific BME Strategy also assisted the Council to:-

- Provide a framework for tackling racial discrimination and disadvantage
- Provide clarity to the Authority, its partners and service users on what they were seeking to achieve in the field of race equality
- Demonstrate to BME communities the Authority's commitment to race equality
- Set out a number of measurable objectives and performance targets that could be monitored in order to determine how far progress had been made
- Set up a BME Housing Strategy and Monitoring Group, involving stakeholders and BME tenants, to scrutinise the Housing Strategy and provide a forum for consultation
- Set up monitoring systems to identify customers in terms of ethnicity, age, disability and gender
- Participate in the Equip scheme and commitment towards 2 placements within the Programme Area
- Deliver training around cultural awareness via Mosque visits.

The Action Plan set out targets against performance for the Local Authority and some of its key partners. This was Rotherham's first BME Housing Strategy and would continue to evolve and further developed over time in response to the changing needs of BME communities.

In order to expand and develop the Council's approach with all housing providers across the Borough, the Strategic Housing Partnership had commissioned a Neighbourhood Renewal Adviser to assess and report on measures to promote equalities and diversity. This work would take place during April, 2005.

Discussion ensued on the report with the following points highlighted:-

- Linkages with Education, Culture and Leisure Services for the annual programme of events
- Inclusion of "signposting" in the Strategy to work that was taking place
- Discussions taking place regarding the reporting of racist incidents
- Discussions taking place regarding the provision of procurement opportunities for BME owned businesses and the increase in ethnic diversity of consultants and contractors.

Resolved:- (1) That the Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Strategy be supported.

(2) That the Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Strategy and action plan be forwarded to the Corporate Management Team.

199. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR THE "KEY CHOICES" CHOICE BASED LETTING SERVICE

In accordance with Minute No. 185 of 14th March, 2005, the Community Services Manager submitted a further report incorporating comments made by the Environment Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 24th March, 2005.

The property previously identified as suitable premises for the Property Shop was no longer available. The "Key Choices" lettings service would operate initially from Norfolk House reception until suitable town centre premises were secured and fitted out.

It was proposed that current and future applicants will be given at least 1 month's notice prior to the commencement of the "Key Choices" letting service.

The report addressed issues raised at the Scrutiny Panel and also acknowledged the difficulties that customers in neighbouring authorities had encountered. These included:-

- Informing applicants how to access the Service
- Support for vulnerable people
- Customer feedback following an unsuccessful property request
- Preventing anti-social behaviour
- Property standards
- Out-of-Borough applicants with no local connection
- Priority Need versus Waiting Time
- Offering choice to individuals in priority need
- Multiple property requests causing delay in allocating

Resolved:- (1) That a Choice Based Lettings Scheme be introduced in Rotherham.

(2) That the Scheme and the Property Shop be branded as “Key Choices” and the shop be established at suitable town centre premises.

(3) That the “Key Choices” Letting Service operate initially from Norfolk House Reception if necessary until alternative suitable shop premises in the town centre are sought.

(4) That provision for the capital costs of the Property Shop be made within the 2005/06 Housing Investment Programme and that support for the revenue costs be made within the Housing Revenue Account budget.

(5) That the Audit Commission be contacted with regard to similar schemes operating in other authorities.

(6) That a letter and Frequently Asked Questions be supplied to all Members of the Council.

(7) That progress reports be submitted on a monthly basis.

200. HOUSING DISREPAIR CLAIMS

The Head of Housing Services submitted a report setting out the impact of the current management strategy for dealing with disrepair claims (Section 11.82).

As at 31st March, 2005, the number of cases had fallen during the 18 month period from an all time high of 267 live claims to 70. In the period 257 claims had been settled comprising:-

57 cases where payment was required (average £4,155.32 per claim)
168 cases where no payment was required (potential saving of £698,093.76)
32 cases where the Council would receive costs.

Of the 57 cases where payment was required, the amount paid up to 5th April, 2005, was £236,853.78 (£114,928.45 during 2003/04 financial year and £121,925.33 during 2004/05). However, costs remain to be paid on 2

of the cases. The estimated cost is a further £8,000 which would be paid in the 2005/06 financial year.

Of the 32 cases where the Council would receive costs, the total sum of £122,001.73 was due of which £115,798.73 had already been recovered during 2004/05 leaving costs on just 1 case of £6,203.00 outstanding. This should be recovered early in the 2005/06 financial year.

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

(2) That the Head of Housing Services contact the Council's Press Office regarding an appropriate press release.

(3) That the Chair's thanks for the work carried out be conveyed to the staff concerned.

THE CHAIR AUTHORISED CONSIDERATION OF THE FOLLOWING ITEM TO ENABLE THE APPROPRIATE ARRANGEMENTS TO BE MADE.

201. SHELTERED HOUSING AND AGED PERSON'S ACCOMMODATION REVIEW

Further to Minute No. 196 of 21st March, 2005, the Head of Housing Services requested that the above item be referred to a special joint meeting of the Environment and Social and Community Support Scrutiny Panels for consideration.

It was noted that the Council, at its meeting on 6th April (Minute No. 93(3) refers), had referred the item back for further consideration.

Resolved:- That a joint meeting of the Environment and Social and Community Support Scrutiny Panels be convened to consider the issue together with a project plan proposing the way forward.