

CABINET MEMBER FOR SAFE AND ATTRACTIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS
26th November, 2012

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

J43. PETITION - EASTWOOD VILLAGE

It was reported that a petition had been received, containing 107 signatures, from residents of Eastwood Village regarding experiences of anti-social behaviour. The petitioners asked that the Council approach South Yorkshire Police to place a Section 30 Dispersal Order on the area to alleviate the problems caused by large groups gathering in the area.

Resolved: - That the petition received be noted.

J44. REVIEW OF LOCAL LETTINGS POLICIES

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods submitted a progress report on Local Lettings Policies since the 2011 review, including recommendations for removals and further additions to the Policies.

As at 20th September, 2012, there were 20,811 properties in the Council's stock of which 3,221 had Local Lettings Policy criteria applied when advertised. Appendix 1 of the report submitted highlighted the proposed changes for the period 1st November, 2012 to 15th May, 2013, and would also seek to bring all Local Letting Policy criteria into one document.

Any proposed changes had been justified by supporting evidence such as abandoned properties, evictions, reported crime and tenancy issues. Wide-ranging consultation had been undertaken with residents, external partners and agencies and the voluntary sector as part of the Housing Strategy consultation. The Policies had also been discussed with the Police Protection Unit and Rookwood Bail Hostel given their concerns regarding exclusion of applicants who could not demonstrate good behaviour in the community for the previous twelve months. A number of applicants who had licence conditions had a medical need but no accommodation. Some, therefore, needed to be rehoused sometimes in adapted housing for which they were currently excluded from in terms of the Policy.

In such cases it was proposed that each case (subject to MAPPA arrangements) would be considered individually and procedures put into place to work more closely with Rookwood and other agencies.

In order to create sustainable communities, it was proposed that Local Letting Policies be changed to adopt the following principles:-

- To include and consider information about all household members not just the primary applicant
- Improve the processes and communication with the Police to obtain information on convictions
- To include pending court hearings

- To include different types of Local Lettings Policies
- To include tenancy breaches

The Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods noted that all Ward Members had been given the opportunity to provide an input into the consultation, and that the proposed amendments to the policy would be subject to an annual review.

Resolved: - (1) That the progress made be noted.

(2) That the proposed amendments to the Local Lettings Policy, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report submitted, be approved.

J45. REGISTERED SOCIAL LANDLORD NOMINATION RIGHTS

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods presented a report on an audit review conducted on the processes surrounding Registered Social Landlord (RSL) nominations and lettings.

There was a formal nomination agreement in place with 17 Housing Associations who had housing stock in Rotherham. The nomination arrangement enabled a single route to accessible, affordable housing via one housing application made to the Council who would then nominate applicants to all providers. The agreement contained a clause for each RSL in the area to agree to advertise and allocate all (100%) or a percentage (at least 50%) of their properties through the Key Choices' single housing register.

For 2011/12 the overall percentage of nominations for all RSLs was 60%. However, Chevin Housing Association was performing below the agreed quota. This had been raised by the Empty Homes Co-ordinator with them. It had been requested that, for a temporary period, 100% of properties were advertised with Key Choices until their agreed nominations quota was back up to 50%. The Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods explained that the data set used to calculate RSLs' performance was not in all instances for a complete year, as it was dependent on the month when agreements were made. Ongoing assessment would take place.

In respect of new builds, where possible, the Council had requested 100% in perpetuity but this could not always be agreed with every RSL.

The Empty Homes Choice Based Lettings Co-ordinator held regular meetings with RSLs to discuss the number of properties advertised through Key Choices and any training issues.

The Cabinet Member noted that the report contained two case studies that highlighted how partnership working between the Council and RSLs had led to positive outcomes for applicants.

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

(2) That an annual progress report be submitted that contained inputs from Lead Officers working in this area to highlight their observations and any issues of concern.

J46. RIGHT TO BUY RECEIPTS - IMPLICATIONS OF NEW RULES

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods submitted a report on the implications for Rotherham of the increased Right to Buy discount cap which had come into force in April, 2012.

Government guidance referred to 'one for one' replacement where, for every property sold under Right to Buy, a new affordable house would be built. However, in Rotherham there would be no significant amount of additional resources for new housing until approximately 80 properties were sold a year, double the prediction for 2012/13. Even if there were 80 sales per year over a 5 year period (400 homes), there would only be 82 homes delivered compared with 400 homes lost.

Two other key risks had also come to light:-

- Risk of not being able to fully fund Disabled Facility Grant works
- Risk that the costs associated with processing a higher number of unsuccessful and/or withdrawn Right to Buy applications would exceed the allocated budget.

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods reported that Central Government would be writing to all Council housing tenants directly to explain the Right to Buy scheme. There had been a significant increase in the projected numbers of Right to Buy applications and completed sales in forthcoming years.

However, if Right to Buy receipts fell below 29, alternative funding for the capital programme would need to be sought in relation to the provision of Disabled Facilities Grant programme to fund aids and adaptations.

It was noted that Government guidance allowed top-slicing of £1,300 from each successful Right to Buy for the legal, surveyors' and administration costs and staff time. This figure was intended to take into account the costs of failed Right to Buy applications. However, it was assumed that there would be a higher number of failed applications, for a variety of reasons, which could potentially lead to higher administrative costs than the £1,300 allowed from each successful application. This could lead to a pressure against the Housing Revenue Account. It was proposed that marketing activities be undertaken to potential applicants that requested that they only applied if they intended and had the ability to buy. Another option for consideration would be to raise the Government's awareness of the issue and request an increase in the £1,300 to a higher amount.

Discussion ensued and the Cabinet Member encouraged collaboration at a Sheffield City Region level to respond to Central Government regarding the level of permitted top-slicing for surveyors' costs, legal fees and administrative time.

Resolved:- (1) That it be noted that one-for-one housing replacement in Rotherham would not be possible.

(2) That funding for the Disabled Facility Grant Programme was at risk if the number of Right to Buy sales fell below 29 be noted.

(3) That the Authority, as part of the Sheffield City Region, raise with Central Government the issue of high costs associated with unsuccessful and withdrawn applications.

J47. 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 item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 2 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (information likely to reveal the identity of an individual)).

J48. STAGE 3 COMPLAINT PANEL

It was noted that a Complaints Panel meeting had been held on 8th November, 2012, comprising Councillors Atkin (in the Chair), Buckley and Ellis. The Panel heard a complaint received from Mr. F. relating to the experiences of his mother, Mrs. F., following her stairlift breaking down and the experiences of Mr. F. in arranging its initial repair and eventual replacement.

The Panel had felt that a full and frank apology should be made by the Council and that there were lessons to be learnt to prevent a similar situation arising again.

The Panel had also recommended that a payment be made of £200 as a gesture of goodwill to Mrs. F. for any inconvenience experienced and for the time and trouble of Mr. F. in pursuing the complaint.

Resolved: - That the Panel's findings be noted.