

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
26th March, 2014

Present:- Councillor Falvey (in the Chair); Councillors Andrews, Astbury, Atkin, Dodson, Ellis, Gilding, Godfrey, Gosling, N. Hamilton, Jepson, Johnston, Pickering, Roche, Sims, Swift, Wallis and Whysall; together with co-opted members Miss P. Copnell and Mr. B. Walker.

Apologies for absence were received from The Mayor (Councillor Foden) and from Councillors Read, P. A. Russell and Vines.

49. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

During consideration of item 53 below (Private Rented Sector), the following Members declared their personal interests shown:-

Councillor Dodson – landlord of private rented sector property
Councillor Ellis – Chair of Robond
Councillor Godfrey – Member of Robond
Councillor Sims – Member of Robond
Councillor Wallis – Member of Board of Laser Credit Union.

50. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions from members of the public or the press.

51. COMMUNICATIONS

There were no issues to report.

52. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 19TH FEBRUARY 2014

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission, held on 19th February, 2014, be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman, with the addition of resolution (3) to Minute No. 46 (Local Plan – Consultation on Main Modifications to the Core Strategy) that the comments of this Select Commission shall be included in the consultation feedback.

53. PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

Further to Minute No. 176 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 28th March, 2012 and Minute No. 164 of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 30th March, 2012, the Select Commission received a presentation from Paul Benson (Private Sector Housing Officer) which provided an update of the progress with the action plan and recommendations of the scrutiny review of the private rented sector.

The presentation responded to the recommendations listed in the original report and the following activity was discussed as progress being made:-

Recommendations 1 and 2: Long-term sustainable action plan

- Private Rented Sector engagement strategy
 - Borough wide/local data; landlord forums; research; etc.
- Enforcement
 - Proactive and reactive
- Support to local agencies, landlords and agents
 - Bond and Rent in Advance schemes, floating tenancy support
 - Localised initiatives e.g. Eastwood, Dinnington and Maltby
- Resources
 - Only staff time available and energy efficiency funding used

Recommendation 3: Engage with landlords, tenants and councillors

- Landlord information
 - Borough wide and local forums; Borough Council website
- Research, analysis and consultation
 - Landlords understanding of the Green Deal, consideration of Selective Licensing in targeted areas
- Tenant support
 - Floating tenancy support
 - Key Choices support offered to prospective prs tenants
- Enforcement protocol
 - Encourage better management of properties

Recommendation 4: Landlord accreditation scheme

- Accreditation scheme considered in 2012
 - Unfeasible due to lack of resources and interest
- Promotion of national accreditation schemes
 - Local landlords informed of NLA/RLA national on-line accreditation schemes
- Alternative landlord recognition/support schemes considered
 - Selective Licensing and alternative voluntary landlord scheme

Recommendation 5: Enforcement action

- Enforcement Concordat
 - Action taken to deal with private tenant service requests; 780 inspections, 93 notices served with ten prosecutions during 2013/14
- Charging of enforcement notices
 - Average cost £200/notice
- Proactive and reactive enforcement work
 - Aligned with the deprived area agenda
 - Reactive service offered throughout the borough
- Houses in Multiple Occupation review completed
- In-house training for Community Protection Unit officers

Recommendation 6: Empty properties back into use

- Council Tax charges
 - Increased for properties over two years empty and charging for properties empty less than six months
- Undertaking 'works in default'
 - To reduce impact of blight on surrounding area
- Use of regulatory powers
 - Framework created for 'enter dwelling management orders' and enforced sale procedures
- Social Housing Provider assistance

Recommendation 7: Private rented sector agency support

- Eviction/repossession prevention tools
 - Housing Solutions
 - Homelessness Strategy
- Landlord incentive schemes
 - Rent in Advance scheme
 - Bond schemes
- Floating tenancy support
- Private Rented Sector properties free from hazards

Continued activity will focus on the following;

- Provide a decision on Selective Licensing
- Progress 'enter dwelling management orders' and enforced sale procedures
- Market Private Rented Sector properties through the Property Shop
- Consider a tenant reference scheme
- Continue to offer rent in advance, bond schemes and floating tenancy support
- Increasing the usage of Private Rented Sector accommodation to deliver/meet 'homelessness duty'
- Explore options for providing single point of contact within Benefits
- Introducing a short-term tenancy intensive intervention service

During discussion of this item, Members raised the following matters:-

: feedback from the public consultation exercise undertaken in respect of the proposed selective licensing scheme; costs to landlords of the licensing scheme;

: reference to the investment of public funds in the regeneration of parts of the Rotherham Borough area (eg: the Eastwood Village and Springwell Gardens area);

: the difficulties which some tenants have in affording the cost of property bonds;

: reference to private rented sector properties in various parts of the Borough area, including those properties which have blighted their surrounding areas;

: some Members expressed the view that a mandatory licensing scheme for landlords would be more effective than a voluntary scheme;

: legal proceedings (eg: use of enter dwelling management orders and enforced sale procedures); the process and timescale of entering cases for Court proceedings;

: use of accreditations schemes and the inspection of the condition of properties;

: reference to the selective licensing schemes operated by other local authorities;

: Members noted the reasons why a Borough-wide licensing scheme for landlords would be impractical.

: Members asked to be provided with the presentation slides, displayed at today's meeting.

Resolved:- (1) That the information contained in the presentation be noted.

(2) That a report on the outcome of the public consultation exercise about the Council's proposed scheme for the selective licensing of landlords be submitted to a future meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission, prior to being considered by the Cabinet.

(During consideration of the above item, the following Members declared their personal interests shown:-

Councillor Dodson – landlord of private rented sector property
Councillor Ellis – Chair of the Rotherham Bond Guarantee Scheme Limited (Robond), a Homeless Charity
Councillor Godfrey – Member of Robond
Councillor Sims – Member of Robond
Councillor Wallis – Member of Board of Laser Credit Union)

54. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14 - UPDATE AND FORWARD PLANNING

Further to Minute No. 5 of the meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission held on 19th June, 2013, consideration was given to a report, presented by the Scrutiny Manager, concerning this Select Commission's scrutiny work programme, including an update of progress on the delivery to date, summarising achievements and changes that have taken place.

The report provided details of future agenda items and potential themes for consideration during 2014/2015.

Members discussed various subjects which could be considered by this Select Commission and agreed that reports on the following issues be considered at the meetings shown:-

i) 23rd April 2014 - housing issues (including homelessness and housing repairs); personal injury insurance claims arising from accidents on housing land (Minute No. 45 of the meeting of the Deputy Leader and Advisers held on 17th February 2014 refers);

ii) 18th June 2014 – issues concerning Streetpride (eg: highway maintenance, nuisance of off-road motor-cycles);

iii) continuing consideration of the scrutiny review of supporting the local economy (eg: apprenticeships; localisation of business rates; transport issues affecting the Dearne Valley).

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and its contents noted.

(2) That reports be submitted to future to future meetings of this Select Commission, as listed above.

55. EARLY FINDINGS FROM SCRUTINY REVIEWS

Consideration was given to a report, presented by the Scrutiny Manager, containing an update of this Select Commission's two main scrutiny reviews being undertaken during 2013/14. The following salient issues, under consideration as part of these scrutiny reviews, were highlighted:-

(i) Homelessness (Minute No. 4 of the meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission held on 19th June 2013 refers)

- : refresh of the Council's homelessness strategy
- : 28 days rule
- : visits to 'crash pads' (emergency accommodation) and hearing evidence in group sessions
- : limitations of existing provision (lack of bed-spaces in Rotherham)
- : sub-regional discussions about hostel bed spaces (and availability of funding)
- : provision of out-of-hours services
- : need for improved standards in the private rented sector
- : temporary emergency accommodation (clothes washing facilities; transport of children to schools; neighbour issues);
- : gaps in provision (eg: for single females and for vulnerable young adults – the issue of 'sofa-surfing');
- : the impact of sanctions on benefits imposed by the Department for Work and Pensions;

: consideration of this scrutiny review by this Select Commission, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and by Cabinet

(ii) Supporting the Local Economy (Minute No. 20 of the meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission held on 4th September 2013 refers)

: changes to local government finance, especially business rates
: future reductions in the European Regional Development Fund
: dependency on large organisations (eg: the local authority)
: whole Council approach, as well as the local Chamber of Commerce and the private sector
: the key role of the local authority, driving the local economy forward
: job creation and the targeting of deprived areas
: importance of land supply
: importance of regeneration areas such as the Dearne Valley
: investment in resources
: area-based regeneration and mixed land use proposals
: the Sheffield City Region must reflect Rotherham's priorities (forthcoming enterprise zone)
: creation of a 'business friendly offer' and dialogue with businesses
: integration of transport, education and housing
: availability of apprenticeships
: regeneration of outlying town centres within the Rotherham Borough area
: consideration of this scrutiny review by this Select Commission, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and by Cabinet.

Resolved:- That the report be received and its contents noted.