

**IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
Wednesday, 5th April, 2017**

Present:- Councillor Atkin (in the Chair); Councillors Allen, Atkin, Buckley, Cutts, Jepson, Jones, Marles, McNeely, Reeder, Rushforth, Sheppard, Walsh, Whysall and Wyatt.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Beck, Mallinder Price, Taylor and Julie Turner.

58. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made at the meeting.

59. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no members of the public or press present at the meeting.

60. COMMUNICATIONS

Due to the absence of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Commission, Councillor Atkin was voted in as Chair of this meeting.

61. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 22ND FEBRUARY, 2017

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission held on 22nd February, 2017, be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

62. EMERGENCY PLANNING TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Councillor Wyatt, Chair of the Task and Finish Group, gave a verbal update on the work of the Group highlighting:-

Councillor Wyatt, Chair of the Task and Finish Group, gave a verbal update on the work of the Group highlighting that the Task and Finish Group had met with Councillor Alam as the Cabinet Member responsible for Emergency Planning.

Meetings were also held with an experienced Forward Liaison Officer and the Interim Head of Communications both provided the group with a wealth of information towards the review. The Head of ICT and Digital Services would be interviewed in the near future.

63. HOUSING TENANT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY - UPDATE

Asim Munir, Tenant Involvement Co-ordinator, presented a progress report on the revised and updated Tenant Involvement Strategy which had been approved by the Housing Involvement Panel in February 2017.

The Strategy had been developed in partnership with Rother Fed who would continue to work with the Directorate on delivering some of the tenant involvement activity as part of the contract with them.

The report set out the methods that the impact of the Strategy would be monitored and evaluated.

The Tenant involvement menu of options had been reviewed and a new Housing Involvement Panel had replaced the Area Housing Chairs which gave tenants an opportunity to strategically influence housing Policies and Services. Work was taking place to widen and improve the ways in which tenants could communicate with the Service e.g. digital inclusion in order that under-represented groups could help to make a positive difference to the services they used.

The approach towards developing and updating the Strategy had been recognised as good practice through a blog which had been published on the Tpas website www.tpas.org.uk/member-news/our-tenant-involvement-strategy-at-rotherham.

Discussion

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

(2) That a further progress report be submitted in 12 months'. Asim Munir, Tenant Involvement Co-ordinator, presented a progress report on the revised and updated Tenant Involvement Strategy which had been approved by the Housing Involvement Panel in February 2017.

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The approach towards developing and updating the Strategy had been recognised as good practice through a blog which had been published on the TPAS website www.tpas.org.uk/member-news/our-tenant-involvement-strategy-at-rotherham.

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

(2) That a further progress report be submitted in 12 months'.

64. ENGAGEMENT OF YOUNG TENANTS OF COUNCIL HOUSING - ROTHERFED SCRUTINY REPORT

Asim Munir, Tenant Involvement Co-ordinated, co presented along with Sandra Tolley the Housing Operations Manager, the first scrutiny review undertaken by RotherFed, on behalf of the Council, to consider the engagement of young tenants in Rotherham Council housing.

It had been established that younger tenants, aged between 16 and 34, were on the whole more dissatisfied with their landlord's services through the 2016 STAR survey of tenants and residents.

The objectives of the Scrutiny Review were had been:-

To find out

- Why younger tenants were not engaging with their landlord
- How younger tenants would like to be engaged with Housing Services if at all
- Why some younger tenants were dissatisfied with Housing Services

To suggest how to

- Improve the engagement of younger tenants and their satisfaction with Housing Services
- Shape the future tenant involvement offer for younger tenants
- Potentially improve the STAR survey results for satisfaction of young tenants with their landlord

The Scrutiny Review Working Group had made ten recommendations:-

1. provide support to RotherFed in the development of a forum for younger tenants;
2. provide suitable training for all Council staff coming into contact with younger tenants particularly in the need to show mutual respect and empathy;
3. develop a menu of involvement opportunities for younger tenants and share this with both Council staff and tenants;

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4. review all Council documents, in particular those produced by Housing Services, to make them easier to understand for younger tenants. These should be tested out by young volunteers.
5. Evaluate the new tenant workshops being introduced in April 2017 with younger tenants and make improvements as necessary to the format and content;
6. Ensure that the tenancy support team approach is working well and increase awareness of this Service by making it clear what the benefits of the Service are to younger/new tenants;
7. Make sure that all younger tenants know who their Housing Officer is and how to contact them by:
 - (i) including points of contact for relevant teams in the new tenant packs and explaining the services they provide
 - (ii) introducing a system of notifying tenants of any changes to their Neighbourhood Housing Officer ideally through the newsletter or mail system
8. Consider the use of training sessions in schools to raise awareness of the implications of renting your own home including responsibilities and financial awareness;
9. Develop the Home Matters newsletter to make it more 'young person' friendly by incorporating a young tenants section or similar;
10. Review the social media used for engaging with tenants introducing ways of developing tenant consultations and keeping in touch with platforms such as Facebook and Twitter;
11. Develop a 'Tell Us Once' service for new Council tenants whereby they only have to inform one agency of their move. This information should then be shared with Council Tax, Benefits and Housing officers as appropriate;
12. Explore enhancing links with Children's Centres to monitor the number of Council tenants who are engaging with services and how they are signposted to services.

The report and its recommendations had been considered by the Housing and Neighbourhoods Senior Management Team who would work with RotherFed to continue working towards delivering against the Scrutiny Review recommendations. An action plan would be developed to monitor progress against the recommendations.

Resolved:- (1) That the RotherFed Scrutiny Review be noted.

(2) That an action plan be submitted in six months detailing progress against the recommendations.

65. REVIEW OF SELECTIVE LICENSING

Matt Finn, the Manager of the Community Protection Unit presented a progress report of the Selective Licensing Review.

The private rented sector was growing in response to the demand for lower cost housing outside of the social rented sector and the Council was committed to supporting and promoting private landlords to provide quality and affordable housing. The Authority introduced four selective licensing areas (Eastwood, Masbrough, Dinnington and Maltby South East) to help deal with problems caused by poor management of properties in the private rented sector.

The current designations would end in 2020. The Council would need to decide whether the designations had achieved or were on course to achieve their aims, whether the achievements could be sustained without licensing or whether additional licensing designations needed to be put in place to ensure the sustainability of improvements.

The report detailed the two key Performance Indicators aligned with improving standards in the private rented sector:-

Performance Measure 1 – Applications for licenses 4.5b(a) – The estimates had projected 1,254 privately rented properties within the licensing areas but it was clear that some areas had more properties than initially estimated (1,990). The performance of those over achieving areas was capped at 100% to ensure the overall performance was accurate.

Additional staff had been appointed at the beginning of the third quarter to enable more focussed enforcement to capture the remaining unlicensed properties. The performance objectives for 2016/17 had been met ahead of schedule by February 2017 with an outturn of 96% expected at the end of March.

Landlords of 76% licensable properties had applied for the scheme and it was anticipated that an objective of 95% could be achieved in 2017/18 with the dedicated enforcement resource.

Performance Measure 2 – Compliance with Selective Licensing Conditions 4.5(b) – This assessed licence and housing condition compliance rates after the properties had been inspected. 820 full property inspections had taken place (mid-March 2017). During the inspections 89% needed some level of improvement with 41% found to have serious risks to tenants. Only 11% were found to be in a good condition which did not require any further intervention.

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70% of the properties were expected to be compliant at the end of the informal stages of enforcement, however, based on the inspection outcomes over the first year of the measure, the 2016/17 outturn was likely to be 85% of properties found to be compliant. This demonstrated that whilst housing conditions across the designated areas were generally sub-standard at the initial inspection, following the rigorous inspection and enforcement process, landlords were choosing to improve properties within a reasonable time scale.

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

(2) That an annual review of the Select Licensing designations be submitted to the Cabinet each September.

(3) That further consideration be given to extending the scheme to other areas of the Borough where there was evidence to support it.

66. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That a further meeting be held on Tuesday 20th June, 2017, at 1.30 p.m.