

**IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 26 July 2022**

Present:- Councillors Wyatt (Chair), Bennett-Sylvester, C Carter, Castledine-Dack, Ellis, Hunter, Jones, Khan, McNeely, Monk and Tinsley.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Atkin, Aveyard, Browne, T. Collingham, Cowen, Havard, and Taylor and from Mrs. Mary Jacques.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-
<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

11. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 7 JUNE 2022

Resolved:-

1. That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 June 2022 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

A personal interest was declared by Cllr Bennett-Sylvester as a tenant of the Council, and a personal interest was declared by Cllr McNeely as a tenant of the Council.

13. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

The Chair advised that there were no members of the public or representatives of media organisations present at the meeting and there were no questions in respect of matters on the agenda.

14. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair advised that there were no items of business on the agenda that would require the exclusion of the press or public from the meeting.

15. TENANT SCRUTINY REVIEW - AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report providing an update on progress in delivering the actions agreed following a review of the Aids and Adaptations Service by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel. This review had been conducted as part of a continuous programme of service reviews which are undertaken by the Panel. The work of the Panel was facilitated and supported by Rotherfed, the Council's Tenant Federation provider. The aim of the Panel was to investigate the customer journey for those using the Aids and Adaptations Service in terms of accessibility, clarity and fairness. The Tenant Scrutiny Panel completed its review in Spring 2021 and submitted a report describing the Panel's findings, together with

recommendations for service improvement. A report detailing the findings of the review and recommendations was received at Improving Places Select Commission on 29th June 2021. The Adaptations Manager described the range of actions undertaken in response to the recommendations. Customer contact systems and referral methods, triage stages, budgets and forecasting, efforts to sustain tenancies without moving, benchmarking and matters of policy and staff resource were described. It was noted that the full refresh of the policy had been delayed by pandemic impacts.

In discussion, clarification was requested in respect of current numbers of residents waiting for aids and adaptations. The response from officers noted that many referrals come into the service through the Housing Occupational Therapists. The backlog associated with this pathway is 48 weeks due to a NHS staff resource shortage in occupational therapy. Action plans are in place to filter through the backlogs. Team members are working with the occupational therapists to understand the backlogs and trusted assessors within the team are helping to work through the backlogs. Administratively, the case management system in use has also been evaluated to identify and resolve quick fixes. The service is very much cognisant that the qualified occupational therapists are responsible for making the recommendations to ensure the aid or adaptation meets individual needs, but the service were seeking out all fast-track options available to expedite backlog resolution.

A supplementary question was offered in respect of the possibility to utilise occupational therapist assistants for cases of less complexity. The response noted that a trusted assessor is a technical officer with experience who can oversee handrails for example. There is a further level required, for example, for level access showers. The service seeks to make best use of housing stock by sustaining tenancies in place where a move can be avoided. Currently, there was vacancy for occupational therapist assistant roles. Working in partnership with the NHS, training requirements in the team have lead times of 2-3 months from training to post.

Members noted the two topics excluded from scope of the tenant scrutiny review which were the housing allocations policy and the voids process and requested further clarification in respect of how the right to buy applies to a house with adaptations. The response from officers noted that the tenants aver in writing as part of the referral request that they were not requesting a right to buy. This situation is not seen to happen very often if at all. As part of the business review, consideration was being given to the policy to see what other authorities do as part of the benchmarking process. Transferring cost back onto the resident would likely not be looked on favourably, but it was an area for consideration which would be taken up as part of the ongoing review in collaboration with colleagues in the legal team.

Clarification around the point of contact was requested, as there can be conflation of repairs and adaptations. The response from officers noted that phone calls had been routed incorrectly of late, but this was being resolved. There were two officers on the phones handling calls every day, with consistent coverage from 8:30 to 5. Some extra referrals were received by the adaptations team which were considered by the occupational therapists in collaboration with the Housing Options Manager and with the Medical Assessment Team. Long term needs and possibility of short-term fixes were considered in order to make the best use of stock. A panel met monthly to discuss these on a case-by-case basis.

Clarification was requested around how the adaptations policy figured in the broader housing policy structure and how the policy was expected to evolve in the foreseeable future. The response noted that the Adaptation Policy was separate from other policies but a related policy that will need to be developed was the Housing Assistance Policy, which is part of the regulatory form order. The upcoming review of the Adaptation Policy would need to incorporate development of the Housing Assistance Policy. The goal of the review was to design the policy in a way that did not unnecessarily restrict the service whilst providing a policy that was approachable to the general public and that better served residents.

The representative of Rotherfed noted the positive dialogue between the service and Rotherfed around the action plan implementation. As the completion of the policy approached, Tenant involvement in redrafting the policy could be given consideration as a valuable way to receive feedback. The response from officers noted the close relationship between the service and Rotherfed and the intention to include tenants in the redraft.

Resolved:-

1. That the progress report be noted.
2. That the forthcoming leaflet be circulated to Members upon completion.
3. That the refreshed Housing Policy be considered for scrutiny in early autumn 2023, or at an appropriate time to allow for the new policy to be embedded.
4. That, pending assurances around prioritisation, the next update on Aids and Adaptations be received in early autumn 2023.

16. TENANT SCRUTINY REVIEW - SATISFACTION WITH REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE SERVICE

Consideration was given to a report reviewing tenant satisfaction in respect of tenants' experience of council housing. The review focused on performance measures, value for money, and tenant satisfaction. Relevant legislation and regulations were also noted in relation to the review work. Priorities assessed by the review included ease of reporting, quality of repair, and timeliness of repair. An account of complaints received in relation to the delivery of repairs services was also provided. The framing of questions and survey methods were also discussed.

Regarding the framing of the survey questions, Members agreed the surveys should be standardised. Officers noted that in terms of right first time and customer satisfaction, the questions are standardised. Previously, a partner asked some of their own questions but has since reverted back to the standard form.

Members noted the importance of tracking responses to all recommendations, even where these responses serve only to explain why a requested action could not be taken. The response from Rotherfed noted that during scrutiny reviews, the Tenant Scrutiny Panel will often set as a recommendation at least one aspirational suggestion where inroads may not be possible due to budget or legal implications. Officers invited feedback of specific instances where recommendations had not received response so that any such instances could be tracked down and examined.

Clarification of the category of Right first time was also requested. The example was given that, in situations where plastering could not be completed on the same day, there was often a need for additional visits. Sometimes further repair issues that are needed become clear once work has started. It was noted that 9 of 10 are right first time. The definition and the KPI responses received scrutiny, as interrogating these categories was important. Jobs which require additional work were not to be shut down but regarded as follow on work until completion. Examples of the operational process were given.

In respect of the customer contact centre, clarification was requested as to flexibility around requests from residents who were in exceptional circumstances. Although not raised by the scrutiny Panel as part of the review, the response from officers noted that sometimes the need is not one size fits all. Customer exceptions need to be reported in a timely way so that the service can respond, for example in circumstances of palliative care. The desire of the service to prioritise calls from vulnerable people and people with exceptional circumstances was emphasised. Furthermore, there was a senior officer prioritising specific types of repairs, for example, asbestos, and for those with immediate risk of life and property. There was also a senior officer within the contact centre to deal with points of escalation for repairs matters.

Further details were requested in terms of challenges around communications. The response from officers acknowledged that communications issues occasionally arise. For example, in reference to any temporary fix, there is always a future planned repair. A small wall may have collapsed in a garden, for example; the initial repair is to make the area safe. The next phase is to replace and rebuild. A reduction in these specific kinds of cases was observed, where communal repairs were being undertaken and customers were not always informed, especially during the previous two years where there was a reduction in face-to-face communications. This process was refined based on learning. The service was also working closely with the IT systems and call centre to obtain high quality requests for repairs. It was the operational view of the service that if the wrong trade attends a job, that job should not be shut down but should be referred to the planner to be sorted with the contractor.

Members also expressed interest in knowing more benchmarking information in relation to the repairs and maintenance service. Officers noted that Sheffield City Council had come to speak to the team about voids processes. The goal was to deliver a world class service, and direct comparisons through Housemark had shown the service were in the top quartile for Repairs and Maintenance. Key Performance Indicators (KPI) were consistently monitored, showing “right first time” had increased, and customer satisfaction stayed high. Further, the service were geared up to incentivise KPI delivery. The teams worked closely with tenants and partners and other authorities to drive quality.

Thanks for the updates to the scrutiny group were expressed, as well as recognition of the large amount of work performed by the scrutiny panel in a short span of time to ensure the voices of tenants were incorporated in the proceedings and to expand the involvement of tenants going forward.

Resolved:-

1. That the report and action plan be noted.
2. That the outcome of the forthcoming “You Said, We Did” publications be circulated to Members with a view to sharing widely the learning as evidence of the impact of tenant engagement.

17. REVISED WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to an update report and outline of scrutiny work for the 2022/23 municipal year.

Resolved:-

1. That the report and proposed schedule of work be noted.

2. That authority be delegated to the Governance Advisor in consultation with the Chair and Vice-chair to make changes to the schedule of work as appropriate between meetings, reporting any changes back to the next meeting for endorsement.

18. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised that there were no urgent items of business requiring the Commission's consideration.

19. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved:-

1. That the next meeting of Improving Places Select Commission will take place on 20 September 2022, commencing at 1.30 pm in Rotherham Town Hall.