

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

Venue: **Town Hall, Moorgate Street, Rotherham.** **Date:** **Thursday, 16 June 2005**
Time: **9.30 a.m.**

A G E N D A

1. To determine if the following matters are to be considered under the categories suggested in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972.
2. To determine any item which the Chairman is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency.
3. Questions from members of the public and the press.
4. Declarations of Interest.

FOR DECISION

5. Terms of Reference (Pages 1 - 5)
- presentation by Bronwen Moss, Scrutiny Adviser
6. Co-opted Members (Pages 6 - 8)
- report by Bronwen Moss, Scrutiny Adviser
7. Representation on Outside Bodies/Panels/Working Parties (Page 9)
- to determine representation

FOR DISCUSSION

8. Scrutiny Programme of Work 2005/06 (Pages 10 - 12)
- report by Bronwen Moss, Scrutiny Adviser
9. Housing Income Policy (Pages 13 - 51)
- report by Simon Bell, Housing Income Manager

FOR INFORMATION

10. Asylum Seekers Team Visit (Pages 52 - 56)
- report by Bronwen Moss, Scrutiny Adviser
11. Neighbourhoods Service Plan 2005/08 (Pages 57 - 81)
- report by Executive Director of Neighbourhoods and DVD Presentation

FOR MONITORING

12. Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods (Pages 82 - 89)
Minutes of meetings held on 25th April, 9th and 23rd May, 2005

MINUTES - FOR INFORMATION

13. Environment Scrutiny Panel (Pages 90 - 93)
- minutes of meeting held on 19th May, 2005
14. Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee (Pages 94 - 102)
- Minutes of meetings held on 15th, 22nd and 29th April, 2005

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 Paragraphs 8 and 9 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (supply of goods/services and negotiation of terms).

15. The 2005/06 HRA Budget and ALMO Management Fee (Pages 103 - 108)



Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel

Role and Terms of Reference

Role of Scrutiny

Falling within the remit of the panel:

- Review or scrutinise decisions made in relation to the relevant Council function;
- Hold detailed reviews and make recommendations to the Cabinet or full Council;
- Assist the Council and the Executive in the development of the budget;
- Conduct in-depth analysis of policy issues and assist in policy development;



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Role of Scrutiny (contd)

- Consider plans and strategies (including the Council Forward Plan of Key Decisions) prior to their implementation;
- Question members of the Executive and Boards and Chief Officers about their views on issues and proposals affecting the borough;
- Review performance;
- Liaise with external organisations.

Terms Of Reference

The work of the panel will include scrutiny of:

- The Borough Wide Housing Strategy;
- Accountability of the ALMO and other housing providers;
- Environmental Issues and Waste Management (including waste reduction/recycling, pollution control; control of litter and fly tipping; dog fouling.

Terms of reference (contd)

- Trading Standards and Food Standards;
- Neighbourhood Development and Management of Neighbourhood Services;
- Development of Sustainable Communities;
- Anti-Social Behaviour and Community Safety;
- Strategic Partnerships linked to the above agenda's – e.g. SRP, LSP etc.

ROOTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1. Meeting:	SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL
2. Date:	16 JUNE 2005
3. Title:	CO-OPTION ONTO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES PANEL
4. Programme Area:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S

5. Summary

Representatives of external organisations are co-opted onto the Panel for one municipal year. The *Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules* allow the Panel to ... "appoint a number of people as non-voting co-optees".

The rationale for having non-voting co-optees is to inform scrutiny debate across the panel's full remit, whilst avoiding duplication. This report gives the Panel the opportunity to consider co-optee representation for the 2005/06 municipal year.

6. Recommendations:

That:

- (i) members endorse the nominations for tenant representation as detailed.
- (ii) members agree which organisations they would like to co-opt a representative from, for the 2005/06 municipal year.
- (iii) those organisations be asked to forward their nominations for the 2005/06 municipal year.
- (iv) members agree which (if any) individuals they would like to co-opt onto the panel, for the 2005/06 municipal year.
- (v) all new co-optees be provided with an information pack and be invited to attend Panel meetings from 14 July 2005.

7. Proposals and Details

In 2004/05, the Environmental Scrutiny Panel had non-voting co-optees from the following organisations:

Housing Tenant Panel Representative	Mr Dennis Alderson
Housing Tenant Panel Representative	Mr Danny Willoughby
National Society for Clean Air	Mr Jack Carr
South Yorkshire Police	Sergeant B Bell/Inspector Richard Scholey
Rotherham Health Priority Trust	Mr Steve Hawkins
Rotherham Chamber	Mr John Lewis

The Council is committed to its core value of 'ensuring effective consultation and involvement' that 'properly informs Council policy and service improvements'. By involving representatives from a wide range of organisations with experience in the spheres of Housing, Environmental Issues, Community Policing and Health, the recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel will be better informed.

Attendance

Of the 2004/05 co-optees, attendance at meetings from August 04 to May 05 was as follows:

- Dennis Alderson attended 12 out of 14
- Danny Willoughby attended 9 out of 14
- Jack Carr attended 7 out of 14
- Sergeant Bell attended 1 out of 14
- John Lewis attended 3 out of 14
- Steve Hawkins did not attend any meetings.

Tenant Representation for 2005/06

Tenant Representatives are elected to serve on the Scrutiny Panel following a ballot organised through the Council's Tenant Involvement Unit and are elected for one or two year terms.

Dennis Alderson completed his two year term in May 05 and we are awaiting either his re-election or replacement.

Danny Willoughby has served 1 year out of a 2 year term and will continue through the 05/06 Municipal Year.

8. Finance

Any additional expenses arising from having co-optees on the Panel (e.g. additional travel or catering costs in connection with a review or off-site meeting) will be met from existing Democratic Services budgets.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

It is impossible to devise a list of co-optee organisations that comprehensively includes all issues that may be covered by the Panel. However, it should be noted that the Panel has the option of co-opting additional specialists for any specific matter that it sees fit, as well as for scrutiny reviews.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

Corporate Plan Priority Themes:

Rotherham Proud – “Rotherham people and pride in the borough are at the heart of our vision. Active citizenship and democracy will underpin how Rotherham works. Equalities and diversity will be highly valued.....”

11. Background Papers and Consultation

None

Contact Name: *Bronwen Moss, Scrutiny Adviser, Tel ext: 2790 and bronwen.moss@rotherham.gov.uk*

NEIGHBOURHOOD SCRUTINY PANEL**REPRESENTATION ON OUTSIDE BODIES
2005/06**

1.	Health, Welfare and Safety Panel	Councillor Hall Sub – Councillor Nightingale
2.	Members Consultation Advisory Group	Councillor Atkin
3.	Member Training Panel	Councillor Hodgkiss
4.	Members Sustainable Development Group	Councillor <u>Atkin</u> (<i>Chair of Panel</i>)
5.	Recycling Group	Councillor Atkin
6.	Social Concerns Committee Churches Together in Rotherham	Councillor <i>Jackson</i>
7.	South Yorkshire Trading Standards Sub-Group	Councillors Burke and Hodgkiss
8.	Yorkshire and Humberside National Society for Clean Air	2 Representatives required (Councillors Atkin, <i>Jackson</i> and Hodgkiss)
9.	Yorkshire and Humberside Pollution and Advisory Council	Councillors Hall and <i>Jackson</i>
10.	Women's Refuge	Councillor P.A. Russell

ROOTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1. Meeting:	SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL
2. Date:	16TH JUNE 2005
3. Title:	WORK PROGRAMME 2005/06
4. Programme Area:	Chief Executive's

5. Summary

The new panel is being asked to consider issues which it might consider as suitable for review during the coming year.

6. Recommendations

That Members draw up a list of possible scrutiny reviews for the year and request the scrutiny adviser to subject them to the scrutiny checklist for suitability.

7. Proposals and Details

The current scrutiny plan has been informed by the corporate priorities agreed by the council, issues raised by elected members on behalf of the communities they serve and with reference to national agendas.

Each of the Council's Scrutiny Panels is required to develop a forward programme of work for the new Municipal Year. It is important that the forward programme decided by the Panel is realistic in terms of the scope and number of issues to be considered and relevant in terms of adding value to the work of the Council or in responding to the community. Scrutiny should be challenging if it is to be effective and a well thought out forward programme of work is important to enable this to happen.

However, it is not possible to be too specific at this stage on the precise nature of some issues for scrutiny and consequently the forward work programme will to some extent evolve during the course of the year.

Issues which Members may like to consider for detailed review could include:

- Community Policing
- Waste Minimisation
- Development of Area Assemblies – jointly with Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel
- Disabled Adaptations – jointly with Adult Services and Health Scrutiny Panel

Others issues which the panel may wish to discuss at a themed panel meeting include:

- Fly Tipping and Environmental Crime
- Trading Standards
- Asylum Seekers
- ALMO and Decent Homes

8. Finance

There are no financial implications arising out of this report. Recommendations arising out of scrutiny reviews may have financial implications and these will need to be evaluated when such recommendations are referred to Cabinet.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The work programme must be realistic in terms of the capacity to properly examine issues that come before it. Issues may be referred to the Panel which are not known about at this stage.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

Corporate Plan

Community Strategy

All associated Scrutiny Reviews and progress reports

All associated Inspection's by outside bodies and recommendation outcomes.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

None

Contact Name: *Bronwen Moss, Scrutiny Adviser 01709 822790*

bronwenmoss@rotherham.gov.uk

ROOTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel
2.	Date:	16 June 2005
3.	Title:	Housing Income Policy
4.	Programme Area:	Neighbourhoods/2010 Rotherham Ltd.

5. Summary

Rotherham 2010 Ltd in conjunction with Rotherham Borough Council have drafted an Income Policy which sets out the Council's strategic objectives and approach to income collection, arrears prevention, management and eviction action. The policy is designed to ensure that income is maximised, whilst at the same time keeping arrears to a minimum.

The document is designed to ensure that tenants receive a consistent and unambiguous approach to income collection. To achieve this, the Policy links into the council's anti-poverty strategy in key service areas such as Housing Benefit and Money Advice, as well as the principals laid out in corporate debt policy.

6. Recommendations

TO APPROVE THE HOUSING INCOME POLICY

7. Proposals and Details

Rotherham 2010 Ltd recognises that the prevention and effective management of rent arrears is crucial both in terms of maximising the resources available to maintain Council housing stock, providing services for tenants and to respond to the performance management requirements of Best Value and inspection.

The Housing Income Policy therefore gives a detailed summary of the aims and objectives of 2010 on behalf of Rotherham MBC, in the delivery of its income service. The main principals are income maximisation for the HRA, and provision of a customer focused service, to meet the needs of individuals or groups.

The policy strongly emphasises service provision, particularly for those tenants that are deemed vulnerable. It recognises that this client group will be most at risk of falling into debt and will adopt a sensitive approach that will involve support agencies wherever possible. The policy will ensure that all debtors are given clear and detailed information about their account, so that any arrears can be kept to a minimum.

Preventative methods are incorporated within the policy. 2010 recognised that early contact with the tenant is essential to establish a relationship. This would start at tenancy commencement where staff would note any special circumstances, carry out income checks, explain how the rent charge is formed, what is eligible for Housing Benefit and clarify the payment options.

In addition the way that 2010 will communicate with tenants and debtors is crucial to arrears prevention, particularly when addressing diversity issues and how to correspond with hard to reach groups. To ensure communication is effective we will ensure all letters and correspondence are written in simple language. Customers will be encouraged to access the Income Service through a designated Income Champion in their neighbourhood, who will offer advice to customers on a wide variety income related issues.

The Housing Income Champion will play a crucial role in service delivery and as such 2010 is committed to training and developing these staff to ensure they deliver not only the operational and policy objectives of the ALMO and Council, but high quality services for customers.

8. Finance

It is recognised that a 1% decline in collection rate would be equivalent to almost £500,000 in uncollected revenue. The Income Policy is therefore supported by a process management document, which details the procedures involved in income collection. Both documents are designed to maximise the income available for collection, whilst keeping the arrears to a minimum.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

Risks and uncertainties mainly relate to the fact that if the ALMO does not attain a minimum two star rating at the forthcoming ALMO inspection in November, funding for repairs and improvements will be severely limited.

The Housing Income Policy will contribute toward ensuring a successful outcome at the forthcoming inspection, whilst at the same time improve service provision for customers.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

2010 will be under continuous scrutiny to demonstrate that it is maximising rental income. Performance monitoring is an integral part of the Housing Income Policy's scope for operations and is driven by a suite of Best Value Performance Indicators. These play a key role in how stakeholders perceive the income service. Current performance places Rotherham in the upper quartile of league tables for rent collection. The Income Policy will enable this position to be consolidated and improved upon to meet our aim to be best in class by 2006.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

The background paper is the Housing Income Policy

The document has been open to consultation with stakeholders over several weeks. It has been broadly accepted as a working document that clearly lays out the aims and objectives of the Income Service.

Contact Name : Simon Bell, Housing Income Manager, Ex 2251
simon.bell@rotherham.gov.uk

Rotherham Borough Council

Housing Income Policy

**A POLICY FOR USE BY ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL
AND 2010 ROTHERHAM LTD**



T U R N I N G H O U S E S I N T O H O M E S

INTRODUCTION

Rotherham Borough Council's Housing Management Service will become part of an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) from May 2005. The ALMO, 2010 Rotherham Ltd, will deliver a variety of neighbourhood management and property maintenance services to the residents of Rotherham.

The housing income service will form part of 2010 Rotherham Ltd, and will manage a range of services associated with income management including:

- Rent collection;
- Arrears prevention;
- Current arrears recovery;
- Former tenant arrears recovery;
- Collecting Supporting People charges for Wardens and Rothercare;
- Miscellaneous services including court costs recovery, home contents insurance premium collection, and rechargeable repairs recovery.

The policy and procedures of 2010 Rotherham Ltd will ensure that the Council's rent income is maximised, whilst at the same time using preventative methods to keep any arrears to a minimum. It is acknowledged that any decline in rental income to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) could impact on:

- Future rent levels;
- The range and quality of housing management services;
- The resources required to maintain the housing stock;
- Meeting performance expectations of central government and the Council.

A relatively small decline in the proportion of rent collected could have a significant impact on service delivery. For example a 1% decline in the rent collection rate would be equivalent to almost £500,000 in uncollected revenue.

For the tenant, escalating rent arrears can generate anxiety and stress, and may ultimately lead to the loss of their home and homelessness. The policy acknowledges that rent arrears are often symptomatic of wider personal debt problems, and must be addressed in that context.

2010 Rotherham Ltd will be under continuous scrutiny of the Council to demonstrate it is not only maximising rental income, but using an approach which reflects the Council's continuing commitment to tackling poverty and deprivation. Income collection will have a significant impact on anti-poverty work as it not only identifies tenants in arrears, but highlights wider problems of poverty, debt, ignorance of welfare rights, and budgetary mismanagement.

2010 Rotherham Ltd will ensure that an objective balance is achieved between making it convenient for tenants to pay their rent, as far as possible

preventing arrears from occurring, and taking prompt action to recover any debts that do accrue.

The policy and procedure 2010 Rotherham Ltd will adopt has been approved by stakeholders, including tenants and staff who were consulted as part of the service review.

The aim of 2010 Rotherham Ltd is to be in the top quartile of ALMO's for arrears recovery in 2005, and to be best in class by 2006.

CURRENT RECOVERY PROCEDURE

This rent recovery procedure clarifies how 2010 Rotherham Ltd will meet the requirements of Rotherham B.C. and ensure that its rental and other income is maximised, arrears are kept to a minimum, and poverty issues are effectively addressed

The policy covers the Council's secure tenancies and describes what is expected from landlord and tenant, what the ALMO will do to help prevent rent arrears, and what action is taken if the rent is not paid.

The recovery procedure has a number of underlying principals including:

- 2010 Rotherham Ltd will recover rent arrears and other debts, in a fair and equitable manner, by giving debtors information about the arrears they owe, options for payment, and clear guidance on the consequences of non-payment.
- 2010 Rotherham Ltd will ensure that wherever possible, claiming of Housing Benefit and other benefits is maximised, by actively publicising the Benefit Services at a neighbourhood level, on websites, and in appropriate publications. This will include facilitating a Housing Benefit visiting service, providing information and assisting customer's to complete claims, and resource provision for the verification framework.
- 2010 Rotherham Ltd will give tenants and debtors detailed and accurate information about their account in plain language that has been approved by Crystal Mark and the tenants easy read group. 2010 Rotherham Ltd also acknowledges the needs of B&ME communities to have access to such information and will take steps to ensure this is provided.
- 2010 Rotherham Ltd will take action when more than two weeks net rent is outstanding, to minimise arrears and prevent build up.. This will utilise all methods of communication - in writing, by telephone, e-communication, text messaging, or by visiting the tenant or debtor at their home.
- When recovering arrears, 2010 Rotherham Ltd will clarify to the debtor, the consequences of failure to make and adhere to, agreements to reduce and clear their arrears or other debt. This clarification will include comprehensive advice about our arrears procedures, the sanctions available to the Council to recover the debt, and the implications these actions may have for that person.
- If the tenant or debtor does not pay the full rent or debt due, or keep to an arrangement to reduce the arrears or debt, 2010 Rotherham Ltd may take

action through the County Court to recover possession of the property. Before it does this, it will advise the tenant or debtor to seek independent advice about the costs associated with a court referral and the effects a judgement may have on future credit ratings. 2010 Rotherham Ltd will keep information of how to contact such independent advice available.

- 2010 Rotherham Ltd will work with all other appropriate agencies to support vulnerable tenants or debtors at each stage of the recovery process. A vulnerable tenant or debtor will be defined as one who has restricted access to the Income Service due to age, infirmity, disability, literacy or ethnicity. Families with young children will also be regarded as potentially vulnerable and a case review system will be put in place to examine any situations which are likely to result in eviction and consequent homelessness.

All debtors to Rotherham B.C. will be encouraged to make contact as soon as they encounter difficulties with payment or repayment, and to seek professional advice about managing personal finance. This will be achieved by publicising clear information in a variety of formats, about 2010 Rotherham Ltd's services, and how they can be easily accessed. Each tenant or debtor will be assigned a single contact person who will take responsibility for service delivery at a neighbourhood level.

The Housing Income Champion will play a pivotal role in delivering these services. They will facilitate a multi-agency approach to reduce debt and poverty by working with support agencies such as the Benefits Service, Money Advice, CAB and Social Services. This will effectively contribute towards 2010 Rotherham Ltd's duty to maximise tenant's income, to ensure they are able to meet their rental obligations to the Council.

To achieve this, service providers will assess the tenant or debtor's ability to pay by drawing up a financial means statement that not only assesses the income, and expenditure of the tenant (including any savings), but also that of any non-dependants within the household. 2010 Rotherham Ltd will almost always, agree to payment and repayment proposals made to it by the independent money advice services, such as the CAB and Rotherham's Money Advice Service to further develop our joint working approach.

2010 Rotherham Ltd recognises that where a tenant or debtor is receiving Income Support or Job Seekers Allowance, this will usually restrict the ability to pay the debt to no more than the amount recognised by the Department for Work and Pensions as a direct stoppage for arrears – currently £2-80 per week. As a matter of policy, we will never evict any debtor as a result of Housing Benefit arrears; consideration will be given to other options for recovery, including claw-back from ongoing benefit rather than placing a tenancy in jeopardy.

ARREARS PREVENTION

It is recognised that the effectiveness of the relationship between the Income Champion, the tenant or debtor, and the Housing Benefit Service will be a key factor in resolving rent arrears. Early and continuing contact with identified officers is the positive way of building this relationship. 2010 Rotherham Ltd will adopt the following principals:

a) Pre-Tenancy Assistance

When a prospective tenant accepts an offer of accommodation, 2010 Rotherham Ltd will:

- Note any special circumstances eg. if English is not the first language, any disability issues, varying family arrangements etc;
- Carry out an income check for all members of the household and advise on Housing Benefits. Particular attention will be paid to tenants with variable incomes eg. seasonal workers;
- Explain how the rent charge is formulated and what is eligible for Housing Benefit;
- Clarify the various payment options with the tenant, promoting whenever possible the Councils preferred payment method (Direct Debit);
- Complete a Housing Benefit form, and explain the verification framework;
- Advise who to contact if difficulty is experienced paying the rent, including the Income Champion, Money Advice, and the Citizens Advice Bureau;
- Stress the importance of keeping the Benefit Service and 2010 Rotherham Ltd informed of any changes in circumstance.

2) New tenant strategies.

In addition to pre-tenancy assistance, 2010 Rotherham Ltd will:

- Carry out home visits to tenants and debtors, wherever possible at pre arranged times;
- Offer to put tenants and debtors with special circumstances in touch with appropriate support agencies;
- Assist new tenants to complete Housing Benefit and other welfare benefit forms;
- Continuously review procedures and seek appropriate best practise by attending user groups and benchmarking clubs.

3) Communication

2010 Rotherham Ltd recognises that the methods used to communicate with tenants and debtors will be crucial to rent arrears prevention. Appropriate communication strategies will therefore be developed to address diversity issues, including how best to correspond with hard to reach groups. These issues will impact on how the rent arrears and other debt recovery process will be managed Rotherham.

To ensure effective communication 2010 Rotherham Ltd will:

- Ensure that all letters and correspondence sent to customers is written in simple language, using plain English. Key documents will also be available in other languages, in braille and on tape;
- Review on an annual basis all stationary, using the Council's easy read group;
- Encourage customers to access the service through the Income Champion in their neighbourhood, under the catchphrase '*we are here to help*';
- Conduct all arrears interviews in private - in the home or at a convenient office location;
- Offer an interpretation service where required;

HOUSING BENEFIT AND MONEY ADVICE

2010 Rotherham Ltd acknowledges that regular liaison between Housing Benefit and the Housing Income Service will bring added value to both Services. Liaison will take place on a monthly basis, where representatives from both services will meet to discuss the effectiveness of the Service Level Agreement (**See Appendix 2**). Regular dialogue will bring the following benefits:

- Developing better working relationships by having key identified officers that are accountable for various parts of the service;
- Setting clear performance targets eg. response times to individual case enquiries and follow-up work;
- Encouraging agreement on information to be shared eg. in relation to claims coming to an end, or soon to be reviewed;
- Banding and agreeing to timescales by which claims will be processed depending on the level of arrears to help clear any backlogs, then agreeing times when claims will be processed within the 14-day limit set by the DSS.

Housing Benefits will hold surgeries at Neighbourhood Offices, enabling customers to get advice on any benefit entitlement. Housing Income Champions will promote this facility to ensure income maximisation for their clients.

The Benefits Service will provide Neighbourhood Offices with access to their IT systems, enabling 2010 Rotherham Ltd staff to check the status of a client's claim. This system will improve customer service and minimise delays in payment.

Working relationships between Benefits and Income staff will improve by developing a better understanding of each other's roles. This will be achieved through the development of:

- Strategic planning between managers;
- Joint training;
- Job shadowing;
- Joint meetings and workshops;
- Sharing of information;
- Publicising services.

2010 Rotherham Ltd will encourage customers to discuss their personal finance issues with its staff in absolute confidence, but recognises that some clients may want independent advice. In these circumstances it will direct clients to the Council's Money Advice Service, the CAB or other appropriate agency.

The Housing Income Service will work in association with independent counselling agencies such as the Money Advice and Citizens Advice Bureau to promote shared strategies for addressing debt issues. It will also work with the care service sector, in particular Social Services and the Health Service, to establish a network of contacts who can assist with individual cases. It will actively endorse these services in the firm belief that a multi-agency approach is the most productive means of resolving debt issues.

2010 Rotherham Ltd will adopt other anti-poverty methods to deal with debt issues. This will include actively encouraging the use of mainstream banking, and credit unions as a means of obtaining credit, as opposed to more expensive unlicensed moneylenders. 2010 will assist with the establishment of any new credit unions, offering advice and support as appropriate.

CORPORATE DEBT POLICY

2010 Rotherham Ltd will support Rotherham B.C's corporate approach to maximising collection of all charges and debts. Within the Corporate Debt Policy, the Council recognises that some people are unable to meet their financial commitments, and seeks in cases of hardship to assist debtors to manage their debts.

This policy covers the collection of Council Tax, Non Domestic Rates, Council rents, Sundry debts and Housing Benefit overpayments. It is part of an arrangement between Council programme areas to promote effective working arrangements in dealing sympathetically with customers who cannot pay, whilst treating those who won't pay with reasoned determination.

Principals of recovery action:

- Bills will be produced, and recovery action undertaken in accordance with the Council's legal obligations;

- Staff will act at all times, in a customer friendly and non-judgmental manner;
- Clear written policy guidelines will be made available to staff involved in recovery action;
- Staff involved in recovery action will receive induction and refresh training in debt and benefit awareness;
- Every effort will be made by staff to maximise income, benefits and other entitlements for customers. They will also ensure money and debt advice is accessed;
- In cases of hardship, 2010 Rotherham Ltd will assist tenants and debtors in identifying and maintaining a realistic payment plan;
- All available methods of customer contact will be adopted, including text, e-mail, and access to a council web site page that gives advice on debt related issues.

Recovery procedures

- Will be effective to ensure that where people have the means, they pay their debts and are not able to avoid their obligations;
- Must effectively distinguish between customers who cannot pay and those who will not pay their debts;
- Will identify debts promptly and pursue recovery;
- Must allow for a full appraisal of a customer's circumstances, wherever possible working in partnership with advice agencies;
- Must acknowledge the claims of competing creditors, and the consequent need to address prioritisation of debts including housing rent, as advised by the Councils Money Advice Service;
- An information pack on dealing with debt and sources of independent advice will be made available to customers;
- Where appropriate, applications will be considered to suspend recovery action pending appeals or further investigation;
- Recovery Agents will be employed according to a detailed code of practice and regular monitoring. This code will be subject to regular review.

Human Rights

Our policies and procedures will strive to be fair and equitable, acknowledging human rights and natural justice, in all aspects of debt recovery.

Equal Opportunities

2010 Rotherham Ltd will adopt the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report definitions of racism, racist incident and institutional racism.

2010 Rotherham Ltd believes in openness, fairness and equality in the way it provides services to Rotherham's diverse communities, and that every individual is entitled to be treated with respect. When recovering a debt to the Council, there will be no discrimination against any individual for cultural,

ethnicity or national origins, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, political or religious beliefs, socio-economic status, appearance or lifestyle.

2010 Rotherham Ltd understands that some customers require additional advice and assistance in order to access services and exercise their rights. All information provided would be available in appropriate languages, Braille or audiotape. When required, interpreters will be arranged as well as practical

help provided for people with impaired hearing or vision. All premises will be made compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act.

Complaints

All complaints will follow the Council's formal complaint procedure. An information leaflet, which explains the process, is available at all 2010 Rotherham Ltd offices.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Monitoring of performance will be a key factor in ensuring 2010 Rotherham Ltd meets the Council's requirements to maximise its rental income. All staff involved in the process will be aware of their individual and team targets, as well as the overall performance targets of 2010 Rotherham Ltd itself. The 2010 Rotherham Ltd Board will be accountable for ensuring all aspects of this policy are observed and targets met.

Housing Income staff will receive weekly information on arrears performance, and comparative data on how they compare to other areas and teams. The reports will highlight performance against target.

2010 Rotherham Ltd will also compare its performance with other Social Landlords and ALMO's, through benchmarking groups and membership of professional bodies such as the Housing Quality Network.

Quality checks will take place to ensure that staff are adhering to policy and procedure. Internal auditors, the Performance and Quality Unit and Neighbourhood Managers will all carry this out function. Issues arising from the quality audits will help formulate training plans for the Housing Income Service.

The Council will set 2010 Rotherham Ltd realistic performance targets that will not only be challenging but will help it meet its objective of being best in class by 2006.

The following performance indicators relate to the Housing Income Service and will be indicative to the ALMO board and the Council how the service is performing at both a local and national level.

The table below lists current performance indicators and targets:

Housing Income Management							
Indicator	Summary	Area	2003/4	2003/4	2004/5	2004/5	2005/6
			Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target
BV 66a (a)	Rent collected.	ALMO	98.10%	97.72%	98.30%	98.35%	98.40%
BV 66a (b)	% of tenants with more than 36 days rent arrears	ALMO	New Indicator			Targets to be agreed	
BV 66a (c)	% of tenants in arrears who have had NSP served	ALMO	New Indicator			Targets to be agreed	
BV 66a (d)	% of tenants evicted as a result of rent arrears	ALMO	New Indicator			Targets to be agreed	
NM 66b	Rent arrears of current tenants.	ALMO	1.75%	1.75%	1.73%	1.70%	1.67%
NM 11	% of recouped rechargeable repairs	ALMO	NEW	27.70%	30%	35%	40%
LIB236	% of all current tenants owing 13 weeks rent at 31 st March, excluding those owing less than £250.	ALMO	New Indicator			Targets to be agreed	
AES1	% leasehold management service charge income collected	ALMO	New Indicator			Targets to be agreed	

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Housing Income Service will develop an annual service plan to reflect the role and responsibilities of 2010 Rotherham Ltd, and the aims and objectives of the Council. The plan will demonstrate the 'golden thread' linking strategies back to the corporate objectives of the Council. The plan will also link to other Council service plans (eg. Housing Benefits), to ensure customers receive a cost-effective, fit for purpose service. The plan will also identify the resource requirements necessary to meet its objectives. This will include analysis of financial, physical and human resources, including provision for staff training and development.

2010 Rotherham Ltd is committed to training and developing its Housing Income Staff, to ensure they play a key role delivering the operational and policy objectives of the ALMO and the Council. High quality services provided by high quality staff are the means to achieving this.

2010 Rotherham Ltd therefore seeks to recruit, retain and develop staff in a manner that continually improves staff performance and contributes to the mission to 'build sustainable communities'. It therefore requires effective training and development for its board members, managers and staff. They

must acquire knowledge, skills, qualifications and attitudes sufficient to enable excellent performance.

The action plan has been developed around four key objectives:

- People are aware of their job role and how it fits into the service plan;
- People are encouraged, involved, feel recognised and receive feedback;
- People can see a learning and development culture, in an environment that encourages equal opportunities and commitment;
- People can see and demonstrate their role in improving the performance of 2010 Rotherham Ltd.

To achieve these, the Housing Income Service will develop annual training plans that feed into the strategic development plan for 2010 Rotherham Ltd. These plans will evolve from:

- Regular staff performance and development reviews
- Induction training
- The evaluation of learning and development activity
- Housing Income Champion meetings
- Staff/customer suggestions
- Benchmarking

Training plans will evolve from the outcomes of the performance development review (PDR) process, where each individual will receive an annual review and interim reviews at six monthly intervals. The review will be based on mutually agreed individual targets and how the individual is performing against these. The process will ensure that staff achieve key competencies and behaviours to enable the Housing Income Service to achieve high and consistent standards for its customers.

SCOPE OF OPERATIONS FOR 2010 ROTHERHAMPeriod 2004/2005

	2003/4	2004/5
Total Rent Debit	52,419,057	51,825,276
Current Tenants		
Number	23,409	22435
Arrears	£895,000	*£825,000
Current tenants over 2 weeks in arrears	2898	2731
% of tenants on Housing Benefit	53.17%	56.26%
Enforcement Action		
Notices Seeking Possession	2121	1614
Possession Orders	603	545
Evictions	104	103
Former tenant		
Arrears	888,153	*1,022,810
Cash Collected	219,100	*210,710
Collection rate	22.74%	20.6%
Debt written off	438,198	47,354
Best Value Performance Indicators		
BVPI 66a	97.72%	*98.27%
BVPI 66b	1.75	*2.11%

* Estimate for year-end 2004/5

Service Standards

This Housing Income Service Standard sets out:

- What the Housing Income Service does;
- What kind of service customers can expect;
- The commitment to the customer;
- Putting things right;
- How to get more help and information.

This guarantee is an agreement made between 2010 Rotherham Ltd, Rotherham B.C. and its customers. Customers have been involved in setting this standard and will monitor and review the standard throughout the year. This is to promote continuous improvement.

Customers can measure the quality of the service they are getting by comparing it with the standards believed to be the minimum they are entitled to set out in an information leaflet.

A summary and statement of the current policy and procedures on Housing Income is available in a wide variety of formats and is available on the web site. The following represents the content of the leaflet.

- **What is the service?**

The Housing Income Service provides a number of services including the following:

Ways to pay your rent

2010 Rotherham Ltd favours and provides a choice of payment methods. However, it has preferred payment options. These are ranked as follows, with the first option being the most cost effective means of collection for both the tenant and the Income Service:

- Direct Debit;
- Standing Order;
- On-line at www.rotherham.gov.uk;
- Automated telephone payment on 01709 336810;
- Debit/Credit Card – either on-line, by telephone or by office;
- By post – Cheques/Postal Orders payable to Rotherham Borough Council;
- Office payments – at Civic Building, Rotherham or any area office Monday to Friday;
- Post Office using Transcash, although there maybe a small charge.

To find out more about the above options contact any Neighbourhood Housing Office listed at the end of this document

Housing Benefit

- Housing Benefit helps towards paying your rent. It doesn't matter if you are in work, unemployed or retired, or whether you receive other benefits. You can still make a claim and may get some help.
- Claim forms and advice on all benefits are available at Housing Benefits, Civic Building, Walker Place or through Benefit Surgeries held at your Local Neighbourhood Office.

How we will tackle rent arrears

- Rent is due on the Monday of each week. If you get behind with your rent payments you will be in arrears. If this happens you should contact your Local Neighbourhood Office immediately. If you pay your rent monthly you should do so in advance and not in arrears.
- 2010 Rotherham Ltd will take action on behalf of the Council against tenants who get into arrears and do not take steps to sort out the problem. If you do not pay your rent promptly when it is due you may be taken to court and, if the problem persists, eventually lose your home.

How we will help to prevent arrears

- We will give detailed advice to all new tenants on anything relating to their rent account;
- We will discuss issues non-judgmentally and in confidence;
- We will advise you on entitlement to welfare and housing benefits or refer you for specialist advice;
- We will help you to complete housing benefit claim forms;
- We will provide details of other agencies that can help you, eg Advice Centres.

Former Tenants arrears

If you are no longer a current Council tenant, but still owe arrears, we will pursue this debt. We may use any of the methods below:

- Letters sent to your new or last known address
- Telephone calls to your home, or your mobile telephone, including texting;
- If we have details, we may contact a family member or your employer
- Debt Collecting Agencies, who will visit you at your new address
- Use tracing agents if we do not know your new address

If you fail to respond or do not adhere to a repayment agreement, we will pursue this debt using, but not limited to, any of the methods below:

- Deductions from state benefits
- Attain a court order to:
 - Make deductions from your earnings
 - Obtain a share in any property you own
 - Seek payment from others who owe you money
 - Ask a bailiff to visit
- Your debt will be pursued until it is cleared so please contact our Former Tenants collection team on Rotherham 382121, who will make a repayment agreement with you, in order to avoid further action being taken.
- **What kind of service can you expect from us?**

This service standard provides information on our response to customers accessing the Housing Income Service

If you do fall behind with your rent, we will:

- Send a letter to you if you owe two weeks rent, we will try to contact you and send another letter if you owe three weeks rent
- Try to reach a satisfactory agreement with you to repay any arrears, taking into account your income and expenditure
- Refer you for independent advice if you agree

Before taking any legal actions, we will ensure advice is always available, and we have given sufficient warnings. (This involves sending letters telling you the situation, and also visiting you at your home)

We will treat **vulnerable** tenants sensitively, and try to resolve any issues affecting payments before legal actions are taken.

Remember that any debt could affect you in the following way:

- Prevent you from being rehoused in Rotherham Council property;
- Will be passed to a mortgage company/Housing association whenever a reference is requested;
- Affect your credit rating;
- Affect your right to buy your Council House;

• **Our Commitments to You?**

We will:

- Listen to and respond to all enquiries fairly and consistently;
- Send a rent statement to all current tenants twice a year;
- Refund credits on rent accounts within 15 working days, upon receipt of a request for refund;
- Carry out home visits if you ask us to;
- Provide information in different languages, braille, large print and on audio tape if you require it.

We will also monitor our standards by:

- regularly quality checking our work;
- Staff dealing with rent arrears will be trained to a high standard and will listen to your comments, in order that our service can be reviewed and improved where necessary.

So that you know if we are keeping to these standards we will

- Publish performance targets and results in council publications;
- Display this information in our public offices.

The range of information available will include:

- Details of rent arrears performance set against Best Value performance indicator targets. For example in 2004 Rotherham was placed in the upper middle quartile of Local Authorities when compared to other Councils in its performance relating to rent collection and arrears recovery;
- The number of tenants that have been served with a Notice of Seeking Possession (NOSP), taken to Court or evicted for rent arrears. For example in 2004 we served 1883 NOSPs, obtained 528 court orders and evicted 100 tenants for rent arrears.

- The proportion of tenants receiving refunds within the 15-day target. In 2004 for example, 99% of all refunds were actioned within this timescale.
- **Putting things right**
 - If you are not happy with the service that you have received, please contact the staff at one of the Neighbourhood Housing Offices (see end of leaflet). If you continue to be dissatisfied we would encourage you to make a complaint. You can pick up a complaint form from any 2010 Rotherham Ltd or Council office or through our web site (details at the end of this leaflet). Alternatively, you can contact the Neighbourhoods Service Quality Champion at:

**Neighbourhoods
Neighbourhood Development
Strategic Services
Eastwood Depot
Chesterton Road
Rotherham
S65 1SZ
Telephone: 01709 822216**

- We always try to provide the best services that we can. We want to get better and provide a better service to you. We do this by using customer feedback to improve the quality of our services to you.

APPENDIX 1

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE SHEET

Income and Expenditure Sheet for (Name) _____

Income	Weekly/Monthly
Wages	
Wages/Salary – Partner	
Income Support – JSA	
Income Support	
Disabled Persons Tax Credit	
Working Families Tax Credit	
Retirement Pension	
Child Benefit	
Incapacity Benefit/Sickness Benefit	
Disability Living Allowance	
Invalid Care Allowance	
Maintenance	
Non-Dependants Contribution	
Total Income	

Expenses	Weekly/Monthly
Rent	
Council Tax	
Water Rates	
House Insurance	
Life Insurance	
Gas	
Electric	
Other Fuel	
House Keeping	
TV Rental	
TV License	
Fines	
Maintenance Payments	
Travelling Expenses	
School Meals	
Clothing	
Laundry	
Telephone	
Prescriptions	
Child's Pocket Money	
Other 1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
Total Expenses	£
Net Income	£

Notes	
Debts	Weekly/Monthly
Rent Arrears	
Mortgage Arrears	
2 nd Mortgage Arrears	
Council Tax Arrears	
Water Rates Arrears	
Fuel Debts – Gas, Electric, Other	
Fines Arrears	
Maintenance Arrears	
Catalogue	
Credit Cards	
Loans	
Other	
Total	£
B/F Net Income	£
Deduct Total Debts from Net Income	£

Credit Debts	Balance Owed	Offer of Repayment
Creditor		
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
Total Owed	£	

This is an accurate financial statement

Tenant

Signature _____

Address _____

Date _____

APPENDIX TWO

SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT BETWEEN

HOUSING BENEFIT

&

2010 ROTHERHAM LTD



2010
ROOTHERHAM

TURNING HOUSES INTO HOMES

**Service
Level
Agreement**

between

RBT (Connect) Ltd (Benefit Services)

And

2010 Rotherham Ltd

Housing Benefit administration for tenants of the Local Authority

Between

Signed on behalf of 2010 Rotherham

Signature.....

Position...Chief Executive, 2010 Rotherham

Date. 31st March 2005

Signed on behalf of RBT Ltd

Signature.....

Position Executive Director, RBT Ltd

Date. 31st March 2005

SLA Number.....

Service Level Agreement

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1. Objectives of Service Level Agreements

The formation of the Rotherham Arms Length Management Organisation (henceforth known as '2010 Rotherham Ltd') allows an additional investment in Rotherham's homes of £215m by 2010. A prerequisite for this investment is that clear evidence is provided to the residents of Rotherham, the Government, Rotherham Borough Council (RBC), Rotherham's employees and other stakeholders, that a genuine arms length relationship exists between 2010 Rotherham and Rotherham BC. This is particularly important in relation to services supplied to the Council by 2010 Rotherham and vice-versa.

In order to evidence the new relationship, a suite of Service Level Agreements (SLA's) has been developed. A SLA is a formal negotiated agreement, which sets out expectations, clarifies responsibilities and ensures effective communications between a service provider and its customers.

This service level agreement describes:

- The **Services** that will be **provided** by the contractor (RBT Connect Ltd) to the client (2010 Rotherham Ltd), together with the term of this agreement, the availability, the costs and the process for varying service levels.
- The **Management Arrangements**, including the responsibilities of parties, the required service standards and the procedures for review, escalation, arbitration, remedy, warranty and termination.
- In the **Appendices** – details relating to the Services, Costs, Contacts and Service Standards.

2. Service Provision

i. Outline of Services Provided

The primary objective of this SLA is to help facilitate a quality service provision for the benefit of the service users of Rotherham BC. The Service Level Agreement recognises that, whilst the statutory responsibility for the Housing Benefit Scheme lies with the Local Authority, discussions need to take place with 2010 Rotherham Ltd to ensure continuous improvements to service delivery. In particular: -

- The administration of a Benefit Service in accordance with the Housing Benefit Regulations for local authority tenants.
- The creation of service levels and standards to be achieved by the Benefits Service and 2010 Rotherham Ltd.
- The Service Level Agreement will promote of good practise and the establishment of the monitoring and sharing of information between the two parties.

- Rotherham 2010 Ltd will support and co-operate with the Benefits Service in its endeavours to provide an excellent service to its customers.

Details of the services provided are shown in Appendix A.

ii. Term of the Agreement

- a) The term for this SLA will be from 16th May 2005 to 31 March 2006, i.e. a period of twelve months or for such extended term as the parties may agree.
- b) If either party wishes to terminate this SLA at the end of the original period of twelve months, or at any time thereafter, then the notice provisions at Clause 3 viii shall apply.

iii. Conditions of Service Availability

- a) Service Availability is detailed in Appendix A. All services to be delivered must be capable of measurement for performance purposes.
- b) A Service Continuity Plan will be developed by the Contractor and be available for inspection by the Client's Nominated Officer.
- c) The Plan should be available for inspection from 31/3/05 and updated as required for future inspections.

iv. Costs of Services

- a) Details of Costs of Services are provided in Appendix B.

v. Variations to Services Supplied

- a) The services provided and detailed in Appendix A may be varied from time to time by written agreement between the officers nominated in Section 3 i.
- b) The services as set out in Appendix 1, may not be sub-contracted or assigned in whole or in part, without the prior written consent of **the client**.

3. Management Arrangements

i. Nominated Officers

- a) The nominated officers for this SLA are:

For the Client: Business Development Manager

For the Contractor: Service Leader RBT Connect Ltd

Contact details and a list of other officers who may be involved are attached at Appendix C.

- b) It will be the responsibility of Nominated Officers to manage this agreement on behalf of their respective organisations.
- c) No variations to this agreement will be valid unless authorised in writing by the Nominated Officers or a higher management authority.
- d) It is the responsibility of Nominated officers to ensure that any changes that they agree are within their own organisation's delegated powers.
- e) It will be the responsibility of the Nominated Officer to determine whether any agreed variations require the approval of a higher management authority.

ii. Responsibilities of Both Parties

- a) Each party must always act in good faith.
- b) Information exchanged/published must be timely and accurate.
- c) All agreements and information exchanged will be deemed to be confidential excepting that which is required to enter the public domain. Both parties will act in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998, the Freedom of Information Act 2005, and Rotherham BC Information and Computer Security Policies.
- d) Each party will conduct this SLA with due regard for and in accordance with, the particulars and generalities set out in the 'Agreement For Housing Management And Other Services' between Rotherham BC and 2010 Rotherham, and with particular reference to Part F – Responsibilities Of The Organisation (Section 16 – Providing The Services).

- e) Each party will act in compliance with:

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974;
Race Relations Act 1976;
Sex Discrimination Act 1995;
Disability Discrimination Act 1995;
Construction Act 1996;
Employment Rights (Consolidated) Act 1996;
Human Rights Act 1998;
Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000;
Freedom of Information Act 2005;

And any subsequent amendments or revisions.

iii. Service Standards

- a) Details of all Service Standards are provided in Appendix D.

iv. Proactive Supply of Additional Information

- a) Subject always to any legally binding constraints (whether under statute or otherwise), the Contractor shall use its reasonable endeavours to provide the Client at the earliest opportunity with such information as the Client may properly require to enable it to comply with its obligations under this SLA, including but not limited to any type of management review, audit or inspection that relates to the SLA.
- b) Any information obtained by the Client that may affect the continuation or future requirements of this SLA must be disclosed to the Contractor's Nominated Officer at the earliest opportunity.

v. Reviews and Revisions

- a) Information relating to Service Standards should be supplied by the Contractor to the Client as described in Appendix D. The aim should be to supply monthly information within 10 working days of the month end although it is recognised that this may not be possible on occasion. In the latter case, the contractor will be expected to notify the client as soon as it is known that it will be unable to supply the required information, and with proposals for doing so.
- b) A formal, minuted, performance review held between the Client's and the Contractor's Nominated Officers must take place at least four times i.e. each quarter during the year, or more frequently if required.

- c) Revisions to Service Standards may be agreed at these meetings.
- d) In order to facilitate performance monitoring, the Contractor must supply to the Client's nominated representative by 31 December of the year prior to year of the agreement, a monthly profiled forecast of the required Service Standards.
- e) The Contractor has approved a Framework for Continuous Improvement with the objective, *inter alia*, of ensuring Best Value for all service areas within **the Client's** responsibility. Both parties will work together to ensure that the costs of providing specific services and the quality of service provision are regularly evaluated against externally available comparators for cost, quality and timeliness. Such comparison will take account of market prices for specific services where measurement of both volume and quality is practical and of information becoming available through benchmarking and peer group comparisons.
- f) Where the assessment indicates that the cost of the services is significantly above the comparators and/or the quality of the service standards is significantly below those comparators, the Nominated Officer for the contractor will prepare an action plan to address the issues within an agreed timescale.

vi. Escalation Procedures

- a) Any disputes as to performance that cannot be reasonably resolved by the Nominated Officers through the Review and Revision procedures outlined above, can be escalated to meetings involving the Chief Executive of 2010 Rotherham and the Executive Director of RBT.
- b) Further escalation will involve the Chair of 2010 Rotherham, the Cabinet Member, Neighbourhoods and the Cabinet Member for Corporate Finance.

vii. Arbitration, Remedies and Warranties

- a) It is expected that the SLA will be adhered to by both parties and that the Council's service standards will continue to develop and improve, to the benefit of tenants and the wider community of Rotherham. Implicit within this SLA is that the services to be provided are warranted to assure good performance.

- b) If the performance relating to the SLA remains of concern to the Client after the Review and Escalation procedures detailed in paragraphs v and vi above, it may serve a formal dispute notice on the Contractor. Such notice shall state the subject matter of the dispute and shall specify the proposals for the resolution of the dispute.
- c) No later than fourteen days after the date of service of a dispute notice, the Contractor shall respond by specifying its proposals for the resolution of the dispute, and specifying a date (which shall be not less **than fourteen nor** more than twenty-eight days after the service of the counter-notice) for a meeting to resolve the dispute.
- d) The meeting referred to in paragraph c) above shall be attended by three members of the 2010 Rotherham Board (1 a Council Member, 1 an Independent Member and 1 a Tenant Member) and three members of the Rotherham BC Cabinet. Additional attendees should be the respective Chief Executives of Rotherham BC and 2010 Rotherham, (or their nominated representatives) at a place to be agreed between the parties. The executive Director of Rotherham 2010, shall chair the meeting.
- e) Those persons present at such meeting shall use their best endeavours in a reasonable manner to resolve the dispute between the parties, but if the dispute shall not be resolved the provisions for termination in paragraph viii below shall apply.

viii. Termination Circumstances

General

- a) If the Client wishes to discontinue the receipt of the service for any reason other than poor performance, a minimum notice period of 6 months must be given in writing by the Client's Nominated Officer. Prior to serving such notice, the Client must have consulted with the Contractor on the issues relevant to such a decision.
- b) If the Contractor wishes to discontinue the provision of the service, a minimum notice period of 6 (six) months must be given in writing by the Contractor's Nominated Officer. Prior to serving such notice the Contractor must have consulted with the Client on the issues relevant to such a decision.

Poor Performance

- a) In the event of continuing poor performance by the Contractor after the escalation and arbitration procedures described above have been exhausted, the Client has the right to give written notice of intention to seek alternative service solutions and terminate the

relevant SLA, being obliged to observe a maximum notice period of three months set out above under Term of the Agreement.

- b) Poor Performance will be defined in Appendix D – Service Standards.

4. Appendices

A. Details of Services Provided

B. List of Contacts

Appendix A

Housing Benefit Administration

1.1 Processing claims

a) The Service will determine claims within 14 days, or as soon as reasonably practicable thereafter, of receipt of the claim and all necessary supporting evidence.

b) The Service will:

Use its best endeavours to seek missing information within 2 working days, or as soon as reasonably practicable thereafter of receiving an incomplete claim.

Give priority to cases where the claimant has been served with a notice seeking possession, court action is pending or the claimant is under threat of eviction.

Accept individual requests signed by tenants for Housing to make enquiries on their behalf. A pro-forma, agreed by both parties, will be used for this purpose.

c) The Housing Service will offer assistance to their tenants to complete Housing/Council Tax Benefit claims.

The Housing Service will forward any appropriate additional information within 1 working day of its receipt.

The Housing Service will keep a record of the information gathered in respect of each claim and the date it was dispatched to the authority. Alternatively, where it is more appropriate to do so, Housing will advise the claimant to promptly attend the Authority's office with the necessary documents, for example where the claim involves earnings from self-employment.

d) The Service will provide the Housing Service with training and manuals that enable Housing Service's nominated officers to verify documents to the standards set out in the Verification Framework. The Authority will be responsible for updating the Housing Service on any changes to the Verification Framework. The Housing Service will notify the Service of any new members of staff requiring training. The Service will be responsible for providing training to new Housing staff. The Service will provide refresher training on an annual basis.

e) All supporting evidence gathered by the Housing Service will be verified to standards set by the Verification Framework.

f) The Housing Service will ensure that only officers who have received appropriate training will verify documents. Housing will ensure that officers

with responsibility for pursuing arrears will not take part in the scheme.

g) The Housing Service will ensure that it complies with the Data Protection Act regarding the processing and retention of personal information.

1.2 Eligible rent

a) The Housing Service will inform the Service of projected rent and service charges applicable to new schemes in advance of those schemes being completed.

b) The Housing Service will provide the Service with details of increases in rents and service charges in Housing Benefit direct cases at least 4 weeks prior to the effective date of the increase.

c) The Housing Service will provide the Service with details of increases in rents and service charges, in, Housing Benefit direct cases, in an electronic format.

1.3 Housing Benefit Pending

The Housing Service should not initiate action against the tenant when the Authority has confirmed that Housing Benefit will be forthcoming.

1.4 Claim Reviews

a) The Service will notify the Housing Service, where a claim has been suspended or cancelled because the tenant has failed to follow up a review of their claim.

b) The Housing Service will remind its tenants of their duties to report any changes of circumstances to the Service.

c) The Housing Service will notify the Service promptly when relevant properties become void and promptly report any relevant change in circumstances of which they become aware in relation to Housing Benefit cases.

d) The Service will act on changes in circumstances within 7 days or as soon as is reasonably practicable thereafter.

e) The Service will make the Housing Service aware of the procedures open to them for reporting suspected fraudulent benefit claims and will promptly inform the Housing Service of any changes to these procedures. The Service will advise the Housing Service of any of any changes in regulations and guidelines relating to the prevention, detection and prosecution of fraudulent claims. The Service will provide the Housing Service with copies of the fraud newsletter.

f) The Housing Service will alert the Service to any case raising a reasonable

suspicion of fraud, and will co-operate with the Service's enquiry's into suspected fraud. The Housing Service will circulate the benefit fraud newsletter to appropriate staff.

1.5 Recovery of overpayments

- a) The Service will comply with the Housing Benefit Regulations in respect of overpayments.
- b) Housing Benefit overpayments will not be posted to the claimant's Housing Rent account. Outstanding overpayments will be recovered as follows -;
 - **From underlying entitlement.**
 - **From retrospective awards of weekly entitlement at the appropriate rate of recovery.**
 - **From further entitlement to Housing Benefit at the appropriate rate of recovery.**
- c) Where an outstanding overpayment has been recovered from a lump sum underpayment and the tenant has rent arrears which may jeopardise the tenancy, the Overpayment Team will consider the tenant's circumstances and negotiate an alternative method of recovery with the Housing Service and the tenant.
- d) Where an outstanding overpayment has been set to recover from ongoing entitlement to Housing Benefit and the tenant has experienced difficulties in paying the shortfall in rent, the Overpayment Team will negotiate a more affordable level of recovery with the tenant and the Housing Service.
- e) The Overpayment Team will notify the Housing Service in writing of cases where an outstanding overpayment has been transferred from a previous claim and has been set to recover from ongoing entitlement to Housing Benefit.
- f) The Overpayment Team will contact the Housing Service before posting an outstanding overpayment to a rent account with a credit balance.
- g) The Housing Service will contact the Overpayments Team before refunding any credit.
- h) Where a tenant has died and there is an outstanding Housing Benefit overpayment the Overpayment Team will liaise with the Housing Service.
- i) Outstanding overpayments covering a period that is after the date a tenancy has terminated will be posted back to the tenant's rent account if the account is in credit by that amount.
- j) Both parties recognise that recovery by deduction from continuing direct payments in respect of the claimant does not count as recovery from the Housing Service.

k) The Service and the Housing Service will seek to minimise overpaid benefit by encouraging tenants to request an underlying entitlement calculation.

1.6 Promotion

- a) The Service and the Housing Service will take all reasonable steps to publicise the Housing Benefit scheme. The Housing Service will take all reasonable steps to ensure their tenants are aware of the availability of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. They will ensure that appropriate staff, including housing management and reception staff, receive adequate training. They will promote the completion of application forms at the time of letting where it appears new tenants may be entitled to Benefit; and they will co-operate with the Service in take-up campaigns where appropriate.
- b) The Service will provide the Housing Service with a stock of the Authority's Housing Benefit application forms to be supplied to potential claimants.
- c) The Service will advise the Housing Service of changes in the scheme, or in its own administration, which are likely significantly to affect them or their tenants. The Service and The Housing Service will co-operate to ensure tenants are aware of relevant changes.

2. Liaison and review

2.1 Both parties agree to the establishment of liaison meetings in respect of the day to day administration of this Service Level Agreement. The responsibility for

Organising these will be with the Service Development Managers and the Housing Manager the meetings will be held quarterly. Should any pertinent matters arise ad-hoc meetings may be called at a time and venue agreed by both parties.

2.2 Enquiries to the Service from the Housing Service will be dealt with by telephone call to the Customer Contact Centre.

Enquiries will fall within one of the following categories:-

The customer is present

The claim is non-routing

The case involves notice seeking possession, court action or eviction.

The case has been suspended for more than 28 days.

A contact list will be supplied once the Contact Centre is fully operational. A separate list of provisional contacts will be supplied in the meantime.

Routine enquiries to the Housing Service from the Service will be dealt with by telephone call to the Housing Officers.

Both parties agree to respond within 2 working days, or as soon as reasonably practicable thereafter.

2.3 The Service will nominate a Technical Officer and the Housing Service will nominate a Housing Officer to deal with non -routine enquiry's and provide the names, telephone numbers, and email addresses of this officer. Both parties agree to respond within 5 working days or as soon as reasonably practicable thereafter. Any change of liaison officer will be notified with the minimum of delay.

2.4 Concerns should be raised and disputes resolved with the Service Development Managers and the Housing Managers. All parties agree that these procedures should be used before more formal channels are resorted to. Both parties will discuss the most appropriate method of dealing with individual issues as they arise. Both parties agree to resolve issues within 10 days of them being raised, or as soon as reasonably practicable thereafter. Exceptionally matters that cannot be resolved at this level will be referred to the Benefits Manager and the Housing Manager.

2.5 The parties will actively seek opportunities to work together on issues (e.g. advice, staff training) arising from Housing Benefit. They will both have particular regard to the needs of Black and Ethnic Minority tenants, tenants for whom English is not their first language, and vulnerable tenants generally.

2.6 The parties will establish performance measures and targets by references to
Benefit Regulations, Best Value indicators, Audit Commission reports and
Citizens' Charters.

2.7 The parties agree to review annually this Service Level Agreement and to:
review progress against existing targets; agree any amendments to
performance measures and targets; discuss any other relevant matters agreed
by both parties.

2.8 Both parties recognise that to ensure continuous improvement there is a
requirement to share information regarding the processing and determining of
individual benefit claims, as well as wider issues relating to overall benefits
process. However both parties should be mindful of and comply with the Data
Protection act when requesting or supplying information.

Appendix B: List of Contacts

Client Side:

Business Support Unit

Mick Dobson – Business Support Manager Ext. 2272

Simon Bell – Housing Income Manager Ext. 2670

Andy Williams – Housing Income Controller Ext. 3781

Finance and Accountancy

Anne Ellis – Finance and Accountancy Manager Ext. 3421

Contractor Side:

Housing Benefits

Mike Hedges – Service Leader Ext. 3872

Kate Wright – Operations Manager Ext. 4146

Alan Ainsworth – Operational Manager Ext. 3331

Mike Ripley – Service Development Manager Ext. 2879

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1. Meeting:	SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL
2. Date:	16 JUNE 2005
3. Title:	ASYLUM SEEKERS TEAM - MEMBERS VISIT
4. Programme Area:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S

5. Summary

Cllrs David Hall, Rose McNealy, Jeb Nightingale and Denis Alderson visited the Asylum Seekers Team based at Holywell Place, Rotherham. The visit took place on 9 May 2005 ; the format for the visit included meeting the team, a discussion with Andrew Crowley on dispelling the myths surrounding asylum seekers and information on the dispersal process. Members also visited a property at Rawmarsh used to accommodate asylum seekers.

6. Recommendations:

That Members:

- a)** Note the report for information;
- b)** That a themed meeting on this subject is arranged jointly with the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel.

7. Proposals and Details

Members were invited to attend this visit at the Environment Scrutiny Panel on 21 April 2005 – minute 153. Members had previously expressed an interest for a further visit to the team after the first one on 21 May 2004. Members were interested to discuss with the Team the truth behind some of the myths around Asylum Seekers.

Members were also interested in the dispersal process when an Asylum Seeker arrives in Britain and the services offered to those who have had Home Office Approval to stay in this Country.

An explanation of how the dispersal process works was given. Members were told about the Induction Centres in Portsmouth, Barnsley and Leeds where Asylum Seekers stay for 7 days to receive health screening and advice before being allocated accommodation by one of the local authorities or agencies who take part in the scheme. Participating organisations are signed up to a Contract with the Home Office for 5 years. RMBC commenced their contract in 2000 and house approximately 250 asylum seekers. This contract is due to be reviewed in November 2005.

Social Workers who operate within the Team offer support on the following issues:

- Screening and welcoming clients
- Immigration issues
- Legal issues
- Health and educational needs
- Promoting integration into local community

Members had the opportunity to clarify some of the myths that relate to services and facilities received by Asylum Seekers when they arrive in Rotherham. Information given to Members can be found at *Appendix 1*.

The group were taken to see a property at Rawmarsh that is used as temporary accommodation. Members were able to see the standard of accommodation and the facilities provided for Asylum Seekers.

The accommodation consisted of a double bedroom, lounge and eating area and a small kitchen and bathroom. The basic utensils for cooking are provided, as is a bed and new bedding, a wardrobe and table and chairs. A radio is provided so that Asylum Seekers have the opportunity to listen to programmes and music in English. This helps to break down language barriers and provides contact with the wider environment outside of Rotherham.

8. Finance

There are no financial implications arising out of this report

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The visit provided members with a greater understanding of the processes in place to receive Asylum Seekers into the local community. Having the knowledge to dispel myths circulating within the community is important for developing community cohesion.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

Corporate Plan Priority Themes:

Rotherham Achieving – “Rotherham will be a prosperous place, with a vibrant mixed and diverse economy, and flourishing local businesses. Inequalities between parts of the borough and social groups will be minimised.....”

Rotherham Proud - Rotherham people and pride in the borough are at the heart of our vision. Active citizenship and democracy will underpin how Rotherham works. Equalities and diversity will be highly valued. We will be renowned for our welcome, our friendliness and commitment to the values of social justice. Rotherham will be a caring place, the most vulnerable will be supported.....”

Community Strategy:

Safe and Inclusive Communities - Creating safe and inclusive communities for all, and ensuring that individuals and communities enjoy a better quality of life.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

None

Contact Name: Bronwen Moss, Scrutiny Adviser, Tel ext: 2790 and bronwen.moss@rotherham.gov.uk

ASYLUM SEEKER BRIEFING

Key facts for Rotherham

1. At the end of March 2004, the Home Office reported that Barnsley had 490, Sheffield 1300, Doncaster 1000 and Rotherham (May 2005) 677 asylum seekers in houses contracted to the Home Office since April 2000.
2. Rotherham's Population is 248,000, and has declined by 5,500 since 1991
3. There are 4 agencies providing support - the Local Authority; Clearsprings (private sector); Angel Housing (private sector); Safehaven (Housing Association). The Refugee Council currently uses some properties in Rotherham for Emergency Accommodation, but these numbers are expected to reduce.
4. Asylum seekers are living in 265 houses, which they must leave when their case is decided.
5. There are 107,000 houses in Rotherham, of which 3406 (mostly private properties) are empty.
6. 94 council houses (0.004% of council stock) out of a total stock of 25,000 are being used for asylum seekers
7. The Home Office pays for the dispersal programme
8. There is a government funded dedicated GP service for all asylum seekers.
9. Asylum seeker school children are supported in the Welcome Centre before being integrated into ordinary schools. The Welcome centre is part funded by the Asylum Team. There are 151 asylum seeker children (0 -16) in Rotherham
10. Asylum seekers are given temporary furnished accommodation whilst their asylum claim is assessed. The furnished accommodation scheme is now being extended to homeless people in Rotherham.

Dispelling the Myths

MYTH: Our council tax bills are going up to pay for asylum-seekers.

FACT: The costs of looking after asylum seekers and processing their claims are met by central government.

MYTH: The UK takes more than its fair share of the world's asylum seekers.

FACT: 7 other European countries have more asylum seekers per head of population than Britain. Britain has 1.7 asylum seekers for every 1000 people whilst Austria has 4.9. (UN figures).

MYTH: Britain is a 'soft touch' for asylum seekers.

FACT: The Government has tightened up immigration control. Ferry firms and hauliers who bring over stowaways are fined and extra immigration staff have been issued with heartbeat and breathing detectors.

MYTH: All our asylum seekers are bogus.

FACT: The latest Home Office data shows just under 27% of those applying last year were found to have a genuine case, and were granted refugee status. (Regional

records show that 47% of asylum seekers in the region are granted permission to stay in this country)

MYTH: All asylum seekers abuse the NHS.

FACT: The government has to look after asylum seekers, including medical needs, under international law. (see Key Fact 8). Some asylum seekers are qualified nurses, doctors and consultants.

MYTH: All asylum-seekers live in luxury.

FACT: Single asylum seekers aged over 25 live on £38-a-week, whilst married couples have £59-a-week. This pays for all non-housing costs. If they stay with relatives or friends they can be denied that. When their asylum claim is decided the asylum seeker has to leave their furnished accommodation. They are not provided with mobile phones, DVD's, cars, or televisions.

MYTH: Asylum seekers don't want to work.

FACT: Many seekers have left behind businesses or skilled jobs in their home country and are keen to start work and earn money. People who arrived after July 2002 are banned from working in the UK whilst they claim asylum. They can do voluntary work.

MYTH: Asylum seekers are taking our housing.

FACT: Most are given "hard-to-let", or properties that required extensive repair and no one else wants and do not form part of any council waiting list. Most are housed in privately-rented property. (see Key Facts 6 and 7).

MYTH: Most actually come from safe countries.

FACT: Most refugees in recent years have come from the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Columbia, Turkey, Iraq and Iran - countries where there has been serious conflict or grave human rights abuses. Most would prefer to stay at home, but have fled because of persecution.

MYTH: Asylum-seekers are linked to criminal gangs.

FACT: Statistics show that there has been no refugee crime wave.

(Adapted from the national press)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Web site addresses for more information

- www.refugeecouncil.org.uk
- www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk
- www.amnesty.org
- <http://www.leeds.gov.uk/pageView.asp?view=&style=0&identifier=200226902919949> (Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium)
- <http://www.asylumsupport.info/>
- www.asylumaid.org.uk
- www.refugeeaccess.info

- www.jcwi.org.uk

For more information on local issues contact, Andrew Crowley, Team Leader. Rotherham Asylum Project Team. 01709 838434, or email - andrew.crowley@rotherham.gov.uk

HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
25th April, 2005

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

202. ROTHERHAM'S HOUSING STRATEGY 2004-07

The Housing Strategy Manager submitted Rotherham's Housing Strategy 2004-07 which had been assessed by Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber and confirmed that it met the "Fit for Purpose" standard. This achievement would contribute positively to the Council's CPA score at the next assessment.

Since the draft Strategy had been submitted in July, 2004 (Minute No. 18 refers), the Strategy had been updated in light of comments by the Environment Scrutiny Panel and Government Office and aligned with the revised Community Strategy.

The next step was to ensure that there were satisfactory mechanisms in place for Government Office monitoring purposes. It would be monitored on a monthly basis and regular reports on the action plan submitted to the Cabinet Member.

Resolved:- (1) That the achievement of a Fit for Purpose Strategy, a first for Rotherham, be noted.

(2) That a report be submitted in 1 month's time on all the actions that should have been completed by March, 2005, including the use of the premises previously occupied by the Rotherham Women's Refuge.

(3) That copies of the Strategy be made available to all Members of the Council in the Members' Room, the Strategic Housing Partnerships, all Programme Areas, Managers with Neighbourhoods, members of the ALMO Board and other stakeholders and interested parties.

(4) That the Housing Strategy be placed on the Council's internet and intranet sites.

203. 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 Paragraphs 7 and 8 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (financial affairs of someone other than the Council/provision of goods/services).

204. MINOR FIXINGS CONTRACT PENALTY CLAUSE

In accordance with Minute No. 197 of 21st March, 2005, the Acting Principal Grants Officer submitted a further report on the proposed penalty clause open to use by the contractor against the Council.

The penalty clause would only apply if materials required from the Council to the Contractor were not provided within 48 hours from the time of the order being placed as the contractor may then be able to claim loss of income or increased expenditure.

Resolved:- (1) That should a claim be made as a consequence of equipment not being supplied within contractual timescales, the settlement of the claim will fall on Social Services.

(2) That the Cabinet Member for Social Services be informed of the above.

CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
9th May, 2005

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

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Kaye.

205. STREETPRIDE PERFORMANCE RESPONSE TIMES

The Head of Streetpride submitted the Streetpride performance response times for the quarter January to March, 2005.

Overall performance was similar to that of the previous quarter with only 5 services not fully meeting targets during the quarter as follows:-

Request for a vehicle access crossing	90.7%
Streetlight out	82.3%
Dangerous defect in carriageway	95.3%
Removal of flytipping	79.3%
Removal of dog mess	96.7%

The average overall success rate had increased from 94.4% to 97.6%.

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

(2) That Streetpride continue to monitor performance response times and report to the Cabinet Member on a quarterly basis.

(3) That the Wardens and Caretakers review undertaken by the Environment Scrutiny Panel be submitted to a meeting of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Environmental Services as soon as possible.

206. 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 items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in those paragraphs stated below of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

207. NEGOTIATED TENDER SUBMISSION - WATH REGENERATION SCHEME PHASE 7A

Resolved:- (1) That the negotiated tender figure of £661,518.44, dated 5th April, 2005, from Bramall Construction for Wath Regeneration Scheme Phase 7A Environmental and Highways Works only, be approved.

(2) That an informal meeting be held with Project Managers to enable

Members to ask further questions regarding the demolition of the block of flats on Denman Road, Wath upon Dearne.

(3) That in future updated progress schedules accompany regeneration scheme reports which should also be submitted to the Regeneration Board.

(Exempt under Paragraph 8 of the Act – amount of expenditure to be incurred by the Authority)

208. TENDER REPORT - DECENT HOMES WINDOWS AND DOORS REPLACEMENT SCHEME AT MALTBY

The Projects and Partnership Manager, Economic and Development Services, submitted a report seeking authority to accept a negotiated tender for the window and door replacement works to 774 properties in the Maltby area as part of the Decent Homes Scheme.

Resolved:- That the guaranteed maximum price tender of £2,795,894.88, with a target price of £2,616,494.88, submitted by Neighbourhood's Property Services Section on 28th April, 2005, for the replacement of windows and doors in Maltby, be approved and a start be made subject to the conditions of contract being agreed.

(Exempt under Paragraph 8 of the Act – amount of expenditure to be incurred by the Authority)

CABINET MEMBER FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS
Monday, 23rd May, 2005

Present:- Councillor Ellis (in the Chair); Councillors Kaye, N. Hamilton (Policy Advisors) and P. A. Russell (Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Davies and Hall.

1. ACCESS AND ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY FOR 2010 ROTHERHAM LTD.

The Head of Housing Services submitted the Access and Accommodation Strategy approved by the 2010 Rotherham Ltd. Board on 16th April, 2005, for information.

On the 15th April, 2005, the Board had considered the background to the current provision of accommodation used by 2010 Rotherham, issues of accessibility and set out a number of proposals for developing a pragmatic, strategic and cost effective approach to the organisation's accommodation needs. It had agreed the following:-

- That 2010 base its initial approach to access and accommodation on the Rotherham Borough Council model, amending and/or refining it as neighbourhood management requirements arise
- The establish separate company headquarters in 2005 that were fit for purpose and represented value for money
- To continue to use all existing district office premises, branded as 2010, under license from Rotherham Borough Council until proposals for new customer service centres and video conferencing kiosks were implemented under the Council's Corporate Strategy: at that point, the 2010 Board to formally decide whether it wishes to use the new premises or make alternative arrangements
- To further develop the Eastwood site as the operational base for Property Services
- To continue to use the 4 district maintenance depots, branded as 2010, under license from Rotherham Borough Council, until business re-engineering was complete, following which they would cease operation and the license terminated
- Develop a business plan in 2005 for the PVCu plant at Barbot Hall which included consideration of premise requirements
- A further and comprehensive survey of customer's accessibility requirements be undertaken jointly with Rotherham Borough Council as soon as possible with detailed consideration of B&ME and other 'hard to reach' groups
- That 2010 adopt Rotherham Borough Council's 'Workstyle' strategy as a long term objective for the operation of its service outlets
- To accept the 'as is' position outlined in the report and move forward by referring the Strategy to a sub-committee with a report

needing to be produced by September, 2005

Resolved:- That the Access and Accommodation Strategy which 2010 Rotherham Ltd. has agreed be noted.

2. NEIGHBOURHOODS SERVICE PLAN 2005/08

The Strategic Services Manager submitted a report detailing the Neighbourhoods' Programme Area Service Plan for the next 3 years.

The actions within the Plan would ensure the achievement of the outcomes prioritised by the Council and the community. It recognised the changing environment in which the Programme Area was now operating to ensure that it delivered excellent service as well as better quality of life in every neighbourhood in Rotherham. It contained 16 strategic objectives that would translate the vision into reality.

The Service Plan was split into 3 distinct parts:-

- Priorities
- Profile
- Actions Plan

There would be greater development of partnerships especially in relation to addressing anti-social behaviour, the health of communities, industry, commerce and prosperity which were essential to help deliver a better quality of life for all. 2010 Rotherham Ltd. was a major partner in the delivery of the Service Plan through the development of neighbourhood management techniques. 2010 would deliver strategic objectives 1-5 through its own delivery plan.

It was noted that the first draft of the Aids and Adaptations Review was due imminently. A joint meeting of Neighbourhood and Adult Social Care and Health Cabinet Members would be held to discuss the report.

Resolved:- (1) That the Neighbourhoods Service Plan for 2005/06 be approved.

(2) That the Chairman of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel's agreement be sought to the presentation of the Service Plan DVD at a Panel meeting.

(3) That an update be submitted on a 3 monthly basis.

(4) That a report be submitted to a meeting of the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods in October on Objective 7 (increase the number of active tenant and resident participants).

3. FORWARD PLAN 2005/06

The Strategic Services Manager submitted the Neighbourhoods' Forward Plan 2005/06 for consideration.

The Plan would provide the Programme Area with a clear focus on issues which would require decision and discussion with Corporate Management Team and Members to ensure that critical tasks over the next year were delivered with full stakeholder involvement.

The document would be managed on a weekly basis and supplied to the Cabinet Member.

Discussion ensued on the document and the issue of Scrutiny Reviews. The reporting mechanism of Reviews was unclear and inconsistent and needed to be streamlined.

Anti-social behaviour, increasing tenant and resident participation, Area Assemblies, aids and adaptations and regeneration were highlighted as particular areas of work that required detailed discussion. The Executive Director would timetable each to the appropriate Cabinet Member meeting.

Resolved:- That the Neighbourhoods' Forward Plan 2005/06 be approved.

4. SHELTERED AND AGED PERSON'S HOUSING REVIEW

The Head of Housing Services submitted a further report on the work that had been undertaken on the above.

A project management team had been established, under the joint responsibility of Neighbourhoods and Social Services, to oversee the sustainability reviews of the 32 sheltered housing schemes. A timetable had been agreed, with key milestones, to deliver all the reviews by July, 2005.

A letter had been sent to residents, via the Wardens, confirming that the process was due to start on 23rd May.

The latest version of the project plan was attached to the report as an Appendix.

Resolved:- That the report be noted.

5. 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 following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in those paragraphs indicated below of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

6. DISPOSAL OF PROPERTY - THRYBERGH

Resolved:- That the matter be deferred until 6th June, 2005, to enable the occupier of the property to consider the report.

(Exempt under Paragraphs 3, 8 and 9 of the Act – accommodation provided by the Council/proposed purchasing costs of property/negotiation of terms)

7. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR APPLICATIONS EXCEEDING DELEGATED POWERS

The Head of Housing Services submitted 3 Disabled Facilities Adaptations (public sector) and 1 Disabled Facilities Grant (private sector) for consideration.

1. Public Sector Applications

Resolved:- That application Nos. 18947, 18514 and 18815 be approved in the sum of £120,742.33 provided that the works are carried out:-

- (a) substantially in accordance with plans and specifications submitted by the Head of Housing Services;
- (b) within a period of 12 months of the application being approved.

2. Private Sector Application

Resolved:- That application No. 18774 be approved in the sum of £18,054.20 provided that the works are carried out:-

- (a) substantially in accordance with plans and specifications submitted by the Head of Housing Services;
- (b) within a period of 12 months of the application being approved.

(Exempt under Paragraphs, 4, 5 and 8 of the Act – contains names and addresses of individuals requesting financial assistance)

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL
Thursday, 19th May, 2005

Present:- Councillor Atkin (in the Chair); Councillors Burke, Clarke, Hall, Hodgkiss, McNeely, Nightingale and P. A. Russell. together with Mr. D. Alderson (Housing Tenant Panel)

Councillor Ellis was in attendance at the invitation of the Chairman.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rushforth, Vines and The Mayor (Councillor F. Wright).

159. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

The Chairman expressed his disappointment that the Scrutiny Panel had not received the report on the possible split of the Housing Revenue Account between Neighbourhoods and the ALMO which had been deferred since 24th February, 2005 (Minute No. 128 refers).

Resolved:- That the Executive Director of Neighbourhoods clarify with the Head of Corporate Finance the position with regard to the report and that it be submitted to the 16th June meeting of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel.

160. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS.

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

161. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

162. NEIGHBOURHOODS RESTRUCTURE - PROGRESS REPORT

The Executive Director of Neighbourhoods submitted a progress report on the restructuring of the Neighbourhoods Programme Area.

Recruitment to the new posts was almost complete with only 6 members of staff not in a permanent post. A total of 295 full-time equivalents had been successful in obtaining a new post, 62% of which represented a promotion. 162 full-time equivalents had remained the same principally within the Neighbourhood Services Departments with 12 new employees having joined the Programme Area.

The restructuring had been a massive exercise and it had been down to the efforts of the staff that the Service had continued functioning and meeting the Performance Indicators.

Work was now taking place to ascertain what level of savings had been

achieved by the restructuring.

Discussion ensued on the report with the following points raised/clarified:-

- Weighted criteria had been applied to the Area Offices and those suffering from multiple deprivation had seen an increase in staffing levels.
- 2010 Rotherham Ltd. would review everything that was transferred to them. They would have to ensure they achieved the 2* rating and focus on the 3 issues identified by the Audit Commission i.e. equality and diversity, value for money and the competitiveness of the DSO.

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

(2) That the Head of Corporate Finance submit a report to the June meeting of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel on the savings achieved by the restructuring.

163. FLYTIPPING SCRUTINY REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS - UPDATE REPORT

The Head of Neighbourhood Services presented a joint report produced by Economic and Development Services (Streetpride Services) and Neighbourhoods on the 12 recommendations the Fly Tipping Scrutiny Review Group had identified as areas of potential service improvements.

Several of the recommendations were already planned and resource allocations made within either Streetpride or Neighbourhoods Service Plans. A review of Warden Services had been undertaken by the Scrutiny Review Group, the proposals from which would inform the future direction and funding of Warden and Ranger services. The development of IT compatibility and web sites required RBT engagement and firm costings agreed; no detail was available at the present time.

Discussion ensued on the report. The following points were raised:-

- The number of fixed penalty fines issued for littering and small scale fly tippers had increased over the past year. Attempts would be made to further increase this year.
- The Service continually monitored the take up of the bulky item collection service. The price had been held in 2003/04 and 2004/05 but had increased this financial year.
- The "Toxic" waste education campaign was currently being taken on board by schools.
- 6 staff dealt with "Streetpride Connect" which was much wider than just environmental issues and covered a whole range of Streetpride issues.
- The Waste Management Unit was aware of the commercial rates for waste disposal. Often private contractors followed Council price

- increases.
- The Waste Minimisation Programme was still to be developed and worked through the Service Plan.

It was noted that the Caretakers and Wardens Review was to be submitted to the 14th July Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel.

Resolved:- (1) That the actions taken in response to the Fly Tipping Scrutiny Review Group's findings be noted.

(2) That the Scrutiny Adviser convene a meeting with local Magistrates as a matter of priority to discuss penalties for those found guilty of fly tipping.

(3) That quarterly reports be submitted to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel on the take up of the bulky item collection service.

164. CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

The Panel noted the decisions under delegated powers by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Environmental Services held on 11th April, 2005.

Further to Minute No. 201 (Sheltered Housing and Aged Person's Accommodation Review), the Cabinet Member for Housing and Environmental Services reported that a project plan had now been drawn up. A letter was to be sent to all Members setting out 4 consultation dates and inviting Members to be involved. A letter was also to be sent to residents informing them of the next stage of the process.

165. ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st April, 2005, were noted.

Arising from Minute No. 153 (Asylum Seekers Team), it was noted that a visit had taken place on 9th May, 2005, a report on which would be submitted to the June meeting of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel.

166. PERFORMANCE AND SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

The Panel noted the minutes of the meeting of the Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee held on 8th April, 2005.

167. CO-OPTED MEMBERS

The Chairman reported that a letter had been sent on his behalf to all Co-opted Members thanking them for their work during the 2004/05 Municipal Year. The next meeting would consider the issue of co-option for 2005/06.

168. CHAIRMAN

Councillor Atkin thanked the Panel for their work and help over the past year whilst he had been Chairman.

The Cabinet Member of Housing and Environmental Services expressed her appreciation to Councillor Atkin in his work as Chairman.

PERFORMANCE AND SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
15th April, 2005

Present:- Councillor Stonebridge (in the Chair); Councillors Clarke, Hall, Hussain, License, R. S. Russell and Sangster.

Also in attendance were Councillors Austen, Darby, Davies, Gosling, Littleboy, P. A. Russell, Senior, Thirlwall and Turner.

Apologies for absence were received from The Mayor (Councillor F. Wright), Hodgkiss, Pickering, G. A. Russell, St.John and Whelbourn.

138. SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced proposals for the consideration of scrutiny arrangements in light of changing Cabinet Portfolios and the changing agenda in relation to children's services amongst other drivers for change.

It was noted that all scrutiny panel members had been invited to the meeting and facility had been made for comment from those Members unable to attend.

Members considered a number of options including examples from other authorities. Members divided into three groups and carried out a "SWOT" analysis looking at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the current arrangements and also considered a "SWOT" analysis of the options put forward.

The general consensus from the meeting was that Option 1 (Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee plus five scrutiny panels based to a great extent on the proposed Cabinet Portfolios) be the preferred option. However, some Members felt that a second option should be considered which would result in the Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee plus six scrutiny panels. The sixth scrutiny panel would consider scrutiny of external organisations/agencies.

Discussion ensued on the responsibilities under each of the proposed scrutiny panels as outlined in Option 1 and amendments were suggested.

Resolved:- That the two options now discussed be worked up for consideration as the proposed future organisation of scrutiny.

PERFORMANCE AND SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
22nd April, 2005

Present:- Councillor Stonebridge (in the Chair); Councillors Clarke, Doyle, Hall, G. A. Russell, R. S. Russell, St.John, Sangster and Whelbourn.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor License.

139. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at this meeting.

140. CORPORATE PLAN DRAFT

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Lee Adams, Assistant Chief Executive and Colin Bulger, Head of Policy and Partnerships who presented the submitted report detailing progress made to date towards developing a new Corporate Plan for the Authority and how the Plan would be finalised.

The report covered :-

- progress and future work requirements
- consultation
- key headlines from draft consultation report :
 - The Vision
 - Town Centre
 - Facilities
 - Transport/Traffic/Parking
 - Crime and Safety
 - Equalities
 - Corporate Improvement Plan
 - Key milestones

Also submitted were :-

- the Draft Corporate Plan 2005-2010
- partner responses to the consultation
- agreed Vision Statements as at 14th April, 2005

It was noted that the Corporate Improvement Plan would be submitted when finalised.

Discussion and a question and answer session ensued covering various issues including :

- suggested textual amendments
- need for document to be user friendly

- grouping together of objectives
- need for outcomes and not just process
- how the plan relates to other strategic plans and the need for pictorial representation of such
- stretching targets
- plain English edit
- spatial strategy
- waste issues
- theme titles
- responses to consultation
- fear of crime
- key decisions and the Forward Plan
- tourism
- relationship with constituents

Whilst acknowledging the hard work already carried out in the preparation of the Plan, the Committee noted the need for further work prior to Council endorsement of the Plan on 25th May, 2005.

Resolved:- (1) That the information be received.

(2) That, subject to the comments made, this Committee supports the direction of the draft Corporate Plan and the further work now discussed.

(3) That submission of the Corporate Improvement Plan be awaited.

(4) That the Corporate Plan be reviewed by this Committee in September, 2005.

141. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES

Further to Minute No. 99 of the meeting of this Committee held on 11th February, 2005, Helen Best (Project Manager, Review of Community Based Services) and David Hamilton (Head of Adult Services) presented the submitted report on the progress of the Best Value Review of Community Based Services.

The report covered :-

- Remit of the review group and scope of the review
- Progress
- Assessment of service areas : Option appraisal meetings
- Comparisons
- Links with relevant scrutiny reviews; work on national service frameworks and work being undertaken on the strategy for older people

Discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were covered –

- Carers Strategy
- Surveys being carried out by the PCT
- open public meeting for feeding back the outcome of the Review's research and draft recommendations

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

(2) That the clarification of the remit of the Best Value Review Group and the scope of the review be noted.

(3) That the linkage with relevant scrutiny reviews, work done on national service frameworks and the strategy for older people be noted.

(4) That the provisional date of 9th May, 2005 for the open public meeting be noted.

(5) That the final draft of the Best Value Review report, together with its draft recommendations and draft implementation plan, be presented to this Committee in June, 2005.

142. LOCAL:VISION - THE FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Committee considered Minute No. 81 of the meeting of the Democratic and Resources Scrutiny Panel held on 5th April, 2005, together with a submitted report presented by Sioned-Mair Richards, Scrutiny Adviser relating to the above.

It was noted that the Government wished to open a debate about the future of local government through the publication of discussion papers.

The aim of the local vision was to generate a shared vision of the future of local government through an inclusive process of debate. The vision should be one of central and local government working together with its partners to deliver better outcomes for people and places.

Reference was made to the further discussion papers that had been published relating to "Citizen Engagement and Public Services" and

“Vibrant Local Leadership”.

Discussion ensued and it was felt that a seminar or workshop should be arranged for all Members.

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

(2) That, to widen the debate on this matter, arrangements be made for a workshop for all Members of the Council to be facilitated by the Local Government Information Unit.

143. MINUTES

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting held on 8th April, 2005 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

144. WORK IN PROGRESS

Members of the Committee reported on the following issues :

(a) Councillor Stonebridge reported on a meeting with other local authority scrutiny chairs to discuss protocols for a joint meeting.

(b) Councillor Sangster reported that Brian James, Chief Executive of the PCT had addressed the Health Scrutiny Working Group earlier today.

(c) Sioned-Mair Richards reported that the Members Training and Development Panel had recently held two successful workshops.

145. CALL-IN

There were no formal call in requests.

(The Chairman authorised consideration of the following item to prevent any unnecessary delay in processing the matter referred to)

146. MINUTES AND SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS

The Committee considered the minutes of the special meeting of this Committee held on 15th April, 2005 relating to options for the organisation of scrutiny.

Discussion ensued on the titles of the proposed scrutiny panels and the two options referred to for the future organisation of scrutiny were clarified.

Resolved:- (1) That the minutes of the meeting of this Committee held on 15th April, 2005 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

(2) That the two options discussed for the proposed future organisation of scrutiny be processed for further consideration as now discussed.

PERFORMANCE AND SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
29th April, 2005

Present:- Councillor Stonebridge (in the Chair); Councillors Doyle, Hall, G. A. Russell and Sangster.

Also in attendance were Councillors Barron, Jack, Kaye, McNeely, Pickering, Stone, Turner and Wootton.

Apologies for absence were received from The Mayor (Councillor F. Wright); Councillors Clarke, Hodgkiss, Hussain, D. Nuttall, S. Nuttall, P. A. Russell, R. S. Russell, Thirlwall and Whelbourn.

147. SCRUTINY OF THE DRAFT COMMUNITY STRATEGY

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Colin Bulger, Head of Policy and Partnerships, who presented the submitted report indicating that Rotherham Partnership had been developing the Community Strategy for Rotherham. The Council had been heavily involved in the process. The report highlighted the background to, proposals for and details of, the Community Strategy. The timetable for adoption of the Community Strategy was outlined.

Also submitted was the fourth draft of the Community Strategy 2005-2010.

Colin gave a powerpoint presentation covering :-

- background to development of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP's) and community strategies
- Local Government Act 2000
- characteristics of an LSP
- characteristics of a community strategy
- Rotherham MBC : A Partnership Approach
- Added value to Rotherham MBC
- Contribution to CPA – KLOE's
- Rotherham Partnership
- Rotherham's Community Strategy
- How the Community Strategy was formulated
- Piloting around the Community Strategy (1)
- Community Strategy (2)
- Delivery Structure
- Theme format
- Measure of progress
- Strategic actions to deliver change

A general discussion and question and answer session ensued covering various issues including :-

- a clear overall Vision
- clear strategic themes
- SMART targets
- voluntary and community sector ownership
- equality of partnerships
- aspirational understanding
- harmonisation of budgets/shifting resources
- impact of the strategy : the 'so what' test
- celebrating success
- cross cutting themes and judgement criteria for other themes
- plain English edit
- need to recognise differences in communities
- staged targets
- Parish Council consultation at grass roots level
- impact on delivery plans
- pictorial representation of how the Strategy fits in with other strategic plans
- key shared directions
- responsibility for partnership compliance

The meeting then considered the submitted draft Community Strategy 2005-2010 document, particularly with regard to the Measures of Progress and Strategic Actions to Deliver Change (Years 1-2, 2005/07) in respect of the following themes:-

- Rotherham Achieving
- Rotherham Learning
- Rotherham Alive
- Rotherham Safe
- Rotherham Proud
- Fairness
- Sustainable Development

Discussion and a question and answer session ensued covering various issues including:-

- suggested textual amendments
- populating missing figures
- promoting and encouraging sporting achievement
- support for small businesses
- national average targets
- stretching targets
- monitoring responsibilities
- community local space
- fear of crime
- misuse of alcohol and illegal drugs
- health inequalities
- anti-social behaviour

- quality of the built environment
- symbolic flagships for each of the themes
- developing local democracy at a neighbourhood level
- National Census 2013 considerations

Whilst acknowledging the hard work already carried out in the preparation of the Strategy, the Committee noted the need for further work, including edit, prior to Council endorsement of the Community Strategy.

With regard to the views of this Committee, the Chairman, in closing the meeting, thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution.

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