

CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

**Venue: Eric Manns Building,
45 Moorgate Street,
Rotherham S60 2RB**

Date: Monday, 19th April, 2010

Time: 10.00 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 (as amended March 2006).
2. To determine any item which the Chairman is of the opinion should be considered later in the agenda as a matter of urgency.
3. Update on 2010 Rotherham Ltd. Void Turnaround Performance (Pages 1 - 6)

(The Chairman authorised consideration of the following item to enable the matter to be processed.)

4. Difficult to Let Bungalows (Pages 7 - 12)
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 meeting for 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. Sheltered Level Access Improvements 2010/11 (Pages 13 - 16)
(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act - information relating to the financial/business affairs of any person (including the Council))

(The Chairman authorised consideration of the following items to enable the matters to be processed.)

7. Neighbourhoods General Fund Revenue Budget Monitoring to 31st March, 2010 (Pages 17 - 22)
(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act - information relating to the financial/business affairs of any person (including the Council))

8. Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring to 31st March, 2010 (Pages 23 - 27)
(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act - information relating to the financial/business affairs of any person (including the Council))

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL - REPORT TO MEMBERS
--

1.	Meeting	CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS
2.	Date	19th April 2010
3.	Title	Update on 2010 Rotherham Ltd void turnaround performance
4.	Directorate	Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

5. Summary

A scrutiny review was carried out in 2009, to address Member concerns over the time taken to re-let empty ('void') Council properties. A report was provided to Cabinet Member and to Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel in November and December 2009 respectively, that described progress against each of the recommendations of the review. Four of the seven actions were not complete at that point, and it was agreed that an update report would be provided to Cabinet Member and Scrutiny Panel during April 2010.

Additionally, concerns had been raised by Members regarding reported performance on void turnaround times, and whether the figures provided by 2010 Rotherham Ltd included all Council properties awaiting refurbishment works. Detailed work has been carried out by RMBC's Neighbourhoods and Adult Services Performance Team and 2010 Rotherham Ltd's Empty Homes and Performance teams, and a new calculation methodology is proposed from 1st April 2010 onwards. Section 7.4 of this report explains these changes.

6. Recommendations

That Cabinet Member:

- **Agrees that the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review have now been addressed by 2010 Rotherham Ltd.**
- **Notes that the methodology used by 2010 Rotherham Ltd to calculate void turnaround times will change from 1st April 2010.**

7. Background

7.1 Overview

Scrutiny reviews were carried out of void turnaround times and the Choice-Based Lettings (CBL) process during 2009. The aim of the scrutiny review into void turnaround times was 'to consider the current process for re-letting void properties and make recommendations for improvements in order to minimise the length of time that houses are empty and provide a more effective service for tenants'.

The review report made seven recommendations, and progress was reported back to Cabinet Member and Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel during November and December 2009, at which point three of the seven recommendations were complete, and the other four were on target for completion. It was agreed that a further progress report would be provided in April 2010. A summary of progress is provided at section 7.2.

At the time of the scrutiny review of void turnaround times, two other key work streams related to the management of empty homes were identified. Firstly it was agreed that RMBC and 2010 Rotherham Ltd should work together to take a more robust and joined-up approach to dealing with long-term empty properties in Rotherham, in both the public and private sectors. This work is ongoing and a brief update is provided at section 7.3.

Secondly, Members raised concerns regarding how 2010 Rotherham Ltd was reporting performance against BVPI 212 – average time to re-let properties. The apparently high levels of performance (18.25 days for quarter 2 of 2009/10) did not concur with general perceptions that Council properties were often empty for several weeks. Extensive work was carried out by NAS performance and 2010 Rotherham Ltd's Empty Homes and Performance Teams, and a new reporting framework has been agreed. This is summarised under section 7.4.

7.2 Progress against the recommendations of the scrutiny review

Recommendation 1: That improvements are made to the CBL process in line with the recommendations of the current scrutiny review.

Progress has been reported separately by RMBC's Housing Choices Manager.

Recommendation 2: That the verification process is made more efficient by screening out ineligible bids at an earlier stage.

Reported as complete in November 2009.

Recommendation 3: That clear criteria are published about the circumstances in which decorating vouchers will be issued to new tenants and that the allowance of £25 per room is reviewed.

Reported as 'on target' in November 2009. Update: 2010 Rotherham Ltd has reviewed and clarified the process and clear information is made available to tenants via the website (a decision was taken to retain the decorating allowance at £25) – complete.

Recommendation 4: That in line with good practice demonstrated by high-performing ALMOs, consideration is given to a reward scheme to encourage tenants to leave properties in good condition.

Reported as 'on target' in November 2009. Update: The "Fond Farewell" scheme has been up and running since October 2009 and is to be evaluated during April 2010, as there will be six months of data to review. If it is identified that the scheme is saving money, over and above that paid out, then consideration will be given to extending the scheme. If the costs are exceeding the savings, then the scheme will be ceased.

Recommendation 5: That information is provided to Elected Members on a regular basis on the void properties in their ward including reasons why a property is empty and when it is expected to be re-let.

Reported as complete in November 2009, and 2010 Rotherham Ltd continues to provide regular briefings to Members on empty properties in their areas.

Recommendation 6: That more detailed information is provided when reporting on voids to give a clearer picture of why properties are empty and the financial implications.

Reported as complete in November 2009, and empty properties are monitored via a joint RMBC / 2010 Rotherham Ltd working group, please see 7.3 below.

Recommendation 7: That action taken towards the recommendations of 2010 Rotherham Ltd's empty homes service review 'every day counts' (April 2009) be monitored and reported back to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel in due course.

Reported as 'on target' in November 2009. At that point, four of the 16 actions had not been completed. Two of these (review of decoration allowance and review of all new procedures) have now been completed.

Of the two remaining actions;

- Review 'incentives to stay' in order to reduce the number of tenancy terminations received - with the main reason for terminating a tenancy being "death", coupled with a low rate of failed tenancies, this procedure would have a very limited impact. The proposal could also work against RMBC's drive to address under-occupancy and as such will not be taken any further.
- Review the process of backdating tenancy commencement dates – this is due to be completed by October 2010 and clear sub-actions have been agreed. Completion will be monitored via regular liaison meetings between RMBC's Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods, Landlord Relations Manager and 2010 Rotherham Ltd's Interim Chief Executive and Senior Management Team.

7.3 Update on long-term empty properties

It was agreed that RMBC and 2010 Rotherham Ltd would work together to reduce long-term empty properties within the borough, both in the Council's stock and in the private sector. Working groups were established and monthly meetings are held, led by RMBC's Neighbourhood Investment Service.

A database of all properties that have been empty for over 16 weeks has been created and is being monitored and updated weekly. A number of appropriate actions have been identified for relevant teams, in order to reduce the number of empty properties. A target was set to reduce the number of properties empty for longer than 16 weeks, from 116 in November 2009 to 75 by the end of March 2010. As at 31st March 2010, the figure stood at 76 which demonstrates excellent progress, and a further target has been set to reduce the number to 25 by March 2011.

A number of other positive outcomes have been achieved as a result of this partnership working, and RMBC's Neighbourhood Investment Service is confident that with the continued support of relevant teams, the work being undertaken will continue to see a considerable reduction in the overall long term void figure.

7.4 Update on calculation methodology for void turnaround performance figures

As a result of concerns raised by Members, RMBC carried out a series of reality checks and produced a report to 2010 Rotherham Ltd that identified that performance as reported did not include voids requiring Decent Homes and other major works. RMBC's Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods reported to the ALMO Board in December, and 2010 Rotherham Ltd conducted an internal review of processes. As a result of this review, it was agreed that the overall 'turnaround' figure should include all void properties.

This is being brought to the attention of Cabinet Member and Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel at this stage, because as a result of the new methodology performance will appear to drop in 2010/11, compared to previously reported figures. Sub-indicators and targets will be developed, so that in addition to the headline figure, it will be possible to monitor separately performance on routine, 'simple' voids, and on more complex voids for example involving Decent Homes works. 2010 Rotherham Ltd is in the process of producing a detailed report setting out the new methodology, and once approved by RMBC (Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods and NAS Performance Lead) this will be implemented from 1st April 2010 onwards.

Since these issues have been highlighted, 2010 Rotherham Ltd has put a significant amount of additional resources into reducing the overall number of empty Council-owned properties, and as at 1st April 2011, 248 properties stood empty, compared with 386 at the end of September 2009. Of these 248, 50 properties are not available for letting for the following reasons: 19 are pending a Neighbourhood Investment Service (NIS) decision, 21 are non-traditional properties undergoing major refurbishment works and ten are warden flats requiring further assessment before being let. The net figure is therefore 198 empty Council homes, which represents a great achievement that can be attributable to the deployment of additional resources, and excellent partnership working between RMBC's Neighbourhood Investment Service and 2010 Rotherham Ltd. 2010 Rotherham Ltd's focus will be to sustain and improve upon this performance in 2010/11 and future years.

This is a standing agenda item at fortnightly liaison meetings between RMBC's Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods, Landlord Relations Manager and 2010 Rotherham Ltd's Interim Chief Executive and Senior Management Team. Performance will be monitored closely via these meetings to ensure continuous improvement of performance on both routine and major voids. Quarterly performance reports will continue to be provided to Cabinet Member by the NAS Service Performance Team.

8. Financial implications

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. Delays to re-letting properties result in the following financial impacts:

- Rent loss through voids (measured by local performance indicator 69)
- The cost of securing empty properties
- Costs associated with antisocial behaviour and vandalism
- Additional temporary accommodation costs as fewer properties are available to house homeless people on the housing register

9. Risks and uncertainties

The risks associated with delays to re-letting empty homes include the following:

- Continuing pressures on the housing register
- Negative perceptions of the neighbourhood
- Effect on RMBC's and 2010 Rotherham Ltd's reputation – we should be making the best possible use of the social housing we already have, as well as building new Council houses
- Increased costs (see section 8 above)
- Failure to achieve performance targets and therefore potential implications for the Council's Comprehensive Area Assessment

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The void turnaround performance indicator (BV 212) is a critical indicator for the Council and 2010 Rotherham Ltd, as it directly affects our ability to meet the needs of customers on the housing register, has implications for the *use of resources* judgment within the Council's Comprehensive Area Assessment, and empty homes can cause blight in neighbourhoods. There are implications for the 'safe' and 'proud' themes within Rotherham's Local Area Agreement.

Management of void turnaround times is one of 2010 Rotherham Ltd's core services. High performance in this area is crucial to achieving the standards set by the Audit Commission and the Tenant Services Authority.

Rotherham's new emerging housing strategy emphasises the importance of making the best use of our existing social rented homes, which includes ensuring high performance on void turnaround times.

11. Background papers and consultation

Background papers

- Scrutiny review report of void turnaround times
- Progress report to Cabinet Member on 30th November 2009 and to Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel on 10th December 2009

Consultation

- Officers within RMBC and 2010 Rotherham Ltd have been consulted on the content of this report.

Contact name

Jane Davies-Haire, Landlord Relations Manager

Jane.davies-haire@rotherham.gov.uk

Tel: 01709 334970 or 07500 102498

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS
--

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhoods
2.	Date:	19th April, 2010
3.	Title:	Difficult to Let Bungalows
4.	Directorate:	NEIGHBOURHOOD & ADULT SERVICES

5. Summary

This report is to inform Cabinet Member the impact of the challenges in letting properties that no longer meet the requirements and needs of the customers in Rotherham. There are an average of 22 difficult to let bungalows advertised at week, the report also identifies difficult to let bungalows across the Rotherham area which have been void for over 5 months (during 2009/10) on average and impact on income and performance.

The report makes the case to amend the Allocation Policy for these properties in order to increase accessibility by a wider range of customers and reduce impact on rent lost.

The proposed change will still give preference to customers who are assessed to benefit from early intervention to access aged persons or sheltered accommodation, but where there is no demand allow other applicants who meet the age criteria and are willing to pay associated charges assigned to the property such as the Rothercare or Sheltered charge to be offered these properties.

6. Recommendations

- **AGREE THE AMENDMENTS TO THE ALLOCATION POLICY DETAILED IN SECTION 7.14**
- **AGREE LOCAL LETTINGS POLICIES FOR ALL BUNGALOW COMPLEXES**

7 Details and Proposals

7.1 In Rotherham there are 2125 sheltered properties which provide the support of a visiting warden and 1009 bungalows with no warden service but have a community alarm (Rothercare) installed. Demands for smaller one bedroom bungalows have diminished also due to the varying architectural designs and locations within the borough. These properties also have varying types of adaptations for example, level access showers. Some have communal facilities for example a laundry room or a room for socialising. The majority of the sheltered properties in Rotherham are of Bungalow type.

7.2 Currently Sheltered properties can only be accessed by applicants who are over 55 years of age and have been assessed to be in priority need due to their health or social circumstances. Tenancy agreement for sheltered properties includes visiting warden and Rothercare facilities and therefore applicants accessing such types of tenancies have had to demonstrate requirements for such support service.

There is an oversupply in some areas in particularly a high concentration of sheltered bungalows in Wath, Dinnington and Kiveton Park.

Bungalows where Rothercare is installed can only be accessed by applicants who have been assessed to be in priority need due to their health or social circumstances.

7.3 All sheltered properties are accessed through Key Choices choice base letting system. The process involves the advertisement of properties, short listing and verifying the applicants who have placed bids for the advertised properties. Applicants formally register their respective bids for the available properties on a weekly basis.

7.4 The selection process is carried out by 2010 Rotherham Ltd. In addition to letting the properties, refusal reasons and rates are monitored by 2010 Rotherham Ltd. This is captured from applicants' feedback after the selected applicants have viewed the property. Often there are high refusal rates for these properties and moreover there is no demand from customers with an assessed need. However bids/requests have been received from applicants who meet the age criteria but have no medical issues. Some of these applicants are living in family Council houses and want to downsize to smaller accommodation such as a bungalow but they are restricted because they are currently in good health.

7.5 Each week an average of 22 bungalows are advertised as Direct homes. This means that these properties have already been advertised for a week and have had no demand from customers with an assessed need but will remain advertised on a daily basis until an applicants with an assessed need makes a request and accepts the tenancy. However most of these properties have received requests from older people with no medical need but want to move now into these properties and are willing to pay the charges. Some of these applicants live in family Council houses and by moving now are planning/preventing for the future when they may need to move to ground floor because of deterring health conditions associated with age.

Allowing the customer to access these properties will also free up a family home and assist other applicants on the housing register.

- 7.6** By not doing anything to change the Allocation Policy will mean a continuing impact on voids but moreover continuing the frustration from applicants that want one of these properties but because there are tight restrictions that are applied they cannot access them and the properties remain void. The table below are typical some examples and the impact on void periods and no payments for the Warden and Rothercare services.

Property Address	Number days void	Viewings	Assessmen completed	No. of properties in receipt of Warden Service	No. of properties affected by de-designate from Sheltered
Woodland Gardens Maltby	90	0	3	23	28
Durham Place Herringthorpe	95	3	5	31	54
Kilnhurst	220	2	4	23	41
High Nk, Burns Rd Dinnington	175	1	4	28	38
Kingswood Ave Laughton	35	2	1	12	18
Windy Ridge Aughton	70	0	1	20	26
Chapel Walk, Croft Catcliffe	175	None -due to no requests	None	14	23

- 7.7** The main reasons for refusal for the tenancies of above properties have been identified as :

- Lack of communal facilities
- The properties have 1 bedroom
- The properties are small hence limited storage
- Far from local amenities
- Poor access
- Unsuitable bathing facilities
- Rural location increasing the risk of isolation
- Area known for flooding

The average void period for the above properties is approximately 128 days and this is impacting on rent revenue as well as key performance indicator 212 and 69. Improving bathing facilities as one of area of improvement within the above listed properties would go some way to facilitate the letting process however; not all of the reasons for refusal could be addressed.

There are 3475 applicants on the housing register over the age of 60 years old with no medical need, 121 applicants who have been assessed as needing sheltered accommodation, 58 Extra Care and 948 applicants assessed as needed bungalows with Rothercare. Although there are a high proportion of applicants assessed as needing bungalows with rotherhcare we still have direct homes, as these properties are not fit for purpose e.g. steps, no adaptations etc.

- 7.8** Customer's aspirations and expectations have changed with time. Feedback indicates that 2 bedroom properties located within easy reach of local amenities with adaptable bathing facilities are the main requirements being specified by the vulnerable client groups over 55's. Unfortunately such facilities are not available in the these identified properties.
- 7.9** Work currently undertaken by the Sheltered Access Co-ordinator indicates that whilst such properties are proving difficult to let for customers who are over 55's there is demand/need from customers over the age of 50 with an assessed need for Shelter accommodation. However because the properties are age restricted they cannot access until they are old enough. It is therefore supported that the age criteria for sheltered accommodation be reduced to 50 years.
- 7.10** The current under occupancy policy encourages council tenants to downsize, but they have limited choice in respect of ground floor accommodation as the policy only allows access to ground floor flats not bungalows if they have no assessed medical need.

7.11 Proposed way forward

The Assessment team will continue to encourage and support applicants with an assessed need to make requests for ground floor properties that are advertised that meet their needs.

Amendment to the Allocation Policy for allocating sheltered accommodation.

It is proposed that the age limit be reduced from to 55 to 50 for sheltered accommodation. The following preference order explains that consideration will still be given to applicants with an assessed need in the first instance but this process will also enable other applicants over the age of 50 in the shortlist to then be considered. It is proposed that sheltered properties are let in the following preference order:

1. over 50 with an assessed need for the sheltered warden service with Priority Plus status (this will include council tenants who are under occupied)
2. over 50 with an assessed need for the sheltered warden service
3. over 50 who have lesser need and have been assessed for Rothercare but are willing to pay the associated property charges.
4. over 50 who have no medical assessed need but are willing to pay the associated property charges

Amendment to the Allocation Policy for allocating accommodation with Rothercare.

It is proposed that properties with Rothercare be let in the following preference order:

1. An applicants with an assessed need for ground floor accommodation with Rothercare facility with Priority Plus status (this will include council tenants who are under occupied)
2. An assessed need for ground floor with Rothercare facility in the Priority Group.
3. Applicants over the age of 60 in the general groups who have no medical assessed need but are willing to pay the associated Rothercare property charges.

7.14 Amendment to Local Lettings Policies

In January 2010 the Allocation Policy was amended to allow “Aged Persons” accommodation to be allocated to all disabled people assessed as needing a bungalow irrespective of age. However in order to ensure that the age profiles of the complexes are predominately older people i.e. avoiding an influx of lettings being made to one particular age group it is proposed that 50% on each complexes are solely advertised to older applicants over the age of 60 and that the other 50% be advertised to any age group with an assessed need. It is also proposed that all sheltered complexes and other bungalow complexes with the Rothercare facility (Aged persons bungalows) have a local lettings policy that excludes applicants with any management difficulties as detailed in the Allocation Policy Section 1.3.

8 Finance

- 8.1** The Sheltered Housing related income is collected weekly via the rents system OHMS (Online Housing Management System). The sheltered Charge is currently charged at £8.61 per week. The lost income for the sheltered charge for 10 void properties over 30 weeks would equate to £2583. At present there is a budget pressure on the Warden Service and there is a projected overspend for 2009/10 of £580K.

9 Risk and Uncertainties

Risks – There are charges associated with the property and new tenants will sign a tenancy agreement to pay the linked charges, however there is the risk that the new tenant would oppose payment if they don't need those facilities. It has to made clear on tenancy sign up that there are no exceptions, that the service is available but they may choose not to utilise it.

There is a potential risk that by lowering the age to access sheltered accommodation to 50 that this could result in complaints from existing applicants over 50 with an assessed need that have not been considered. This will have to be managed via the assessment team and the relevant information in relation to accessing sheltered accommodation will have to be made clear to all in this category.

Uncertainties - There has been an intention in the past to improve access and design of all sheltered properties, however, the lack of funding has limited the potential improvements. However by being more flexible would not only help older people move to more suitable accommodation for future need but would contribute towards the reduction and impact on rent revenue and warden/rothercare charges lost whilst void and facilitate meeting demand by making more family homes available for other applicants on the housing register.

10 Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The Allocation Policy is delivered at a local level and via the Key Choices Property Shop and Neighbourhood Offices, which supports the Council's commitment to providing greater accessibility to services, meeting social needs by helping to ensure a better quality of life, improving fair access and choice, protecting, keeping safe vulnerable people and specifically addresses the diversity agenda, by tailoring services to the needs of hard to reach groups.

- The Allocation Policy
- Local Lettings Policies
- Supporting People Strategy

11 Background and Consultation

In monitoring the Allocation Policy we have used the Housing Assessment Panel as a mechanism to consider any changes, where possible, to seek views of others to ensure any improvements are effective and are at the heart of customer's needs and aspirations.

The proposed changes have been informed by the Voids and CBL Sustainable Scrutiny Review. Further consultation has been undertaken with 2010 Rotherham Ltd, the Older People Manager, the Sheltered Housing Coordinator, the Housing Options team, finance and legal services.

Contact Name:

Sandra Tolley, Housing Choices Manager, Neighbourhood and Adult Services, Tel: 01709 (33) 6561, Email sandra.tolley@rotherham.gov.uk

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

Document is Restricted

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

Document is Restricted