

CABINET MEMBER FOR SAFE AND ATTRACTIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS
Monday, 29th November, 2010

Present:- Councillor Akhtar (in the Chair) and Councillor Kaye (Policy Advisor).

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Goulty.

J73. HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS 2ND QUARTER PERFORMANCE 2010/11

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services, presented the submitted report which outlined the Key Performance Indicator results and efficiency projections for the second quarter of 2010/11.

At the end of September, there were 9 Indicators where performance information was available. Of those 9, 7 were in line to achieve their year end targets with the remaining 2 not available until later in the year.

The Indicators currently on target were:-

- NAS22 Private sector homes demolished/made fit
- NAS30 Percentage spend of the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder
- Number of 'Affordable' homes delivered
- Percentage of non-decent Council housing
- NI184 Food establishments in the area which are broadly compliant with food hygiene law
- NAS34 Average length of time waiting for major adaptations from assessment to work beginning
- NI156 Number of households living in temporary accommodation

The off-target Indicators were:-

- NI182 Satisfaction of Business with Local Authority Regulation Services (Neighbourhoods)
The level of satisfaction remained at 78% and was 'off target' against the monthly control and year end target of 85%. Through discussions with the Business Regulation Manager there was evidence that, due to the weighting formula for this Indicator, performance had been affected by businesses responding where they 'Agree' as opposed to 'Strongly Agree'. An action plan had been developed looking at the processes making up this Indicator and to identify the reasons why businesses responded more negatively.
- NAS17 Average Re-let Time from Termination to start of New Tenancy (2010 Rotherham Ltd.)
The number of days taken to re-let empty properties was 28 and was "off target" against the monthly control target of 27 days. At the end of 2009/10 the average was 18 days however that did not include properties that had been taken out for Decent Homes modernisation works. The figure of 28 days now included such properties.

1st Quarter performance exceptions were:-

- NAS22 Private sector vacancies brought back into use or demolished (Neighbourhoods)
Performance at the end of September was 68, almost 3 times the expected rate at the end of the quarter. The overall target for 2010/11 was 98.
- NI158 % Non Decent Council Housing (2010 Rotherham Ltd.)
Reduced from 6.29% (1,319 dwellings) at the end of 2009/10 to 2.10% (440 dwellings) at the end of September.
- NI155 Number of Affordable Homes delivered (Neighbourhoods)
At the end of the 2nd quarter there had been an additional 88 affordable homes delivered, ahead of the control target of 74 and in line to achieve the LAA target for the year of 256.
- NI156 Number of Households living in Temporary Accommodation
As at the end of September, 31 households in temporary accommodation which was in line with the monthly control target of 31. In line to achieve the year end target of 28.

Discussion ensued on the average re-let time and the importance of this re-emphasised. Matthew Spittles, Director of Operations, 2010 Rotherham Ltd., reported that internal meetings were held on a daily basis and weekly meetings with the contractors.

Resolved:- That the 2nd quarter position and the excellent progress in performance be noted.

J74. THE SAFER ROTHERHAM PARTNERSHIP - PARTNERSHIP PLAN 2010/11

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services submitted the Partnership Plan 2010/11, a statutory 3 year plan which required to be reviewed and updated annually. Its function was to build on the Joint Strategic Intelligence Assessment which set out the analysis of crime and disorder and helped identify the priorities upon which the Partnership would focus its efforts. The Plan took forward and identified ways in which they would be delivered.

The Plan was designed around a robust performance management framework to ensure that it was a 'living' document that partners could use to review and monitor progress against targets set for the identified priorities. The Plan also offered opportunities to engage and interact with local communities to keep them informed of priorities, progress and the people involved in the Partnership.

The last Joint Strategic Intelligence Assessment for Rotherham recommended that the following should be seen as priorities for the Partnership in 2010/11:-

- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Serious acquisitive crime
- Reducing re-offending and managing offender behaviour
- Serious violent crime

- Improving lives by reducing the harm caused by substance misuse
- Reducing and managing perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour and improving confidence and public satisfaction
- Improving the quality of life of our most vulnerable communities

Work was due to commence on the 2010/11 statutorily required Intelligence Assessment making recommendations for partnership activity for 2011/12.

The new coalition Government had made it clear that Community Safety Partnerships had a key role to play in the reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour and that the Partnership Plan and Joint Strategic Intelligence Assessment would remain as key elements in achieving locally and nationally set priorities.

Discussion ensued on the statistics and the possible effect should there be a reduction in the number of Police Officers. A workshop was to be held across the services that were represented through the Safer Rotherham Partnership to discuss potential impacts. There was anxiety amongst the services dependent upon the Partnership work that the significant reductions in crime achieved would be undermined

Resolved:- That the 2010/11 Partnership Plan be endorsed and be submitted to the Safer Rotherham Partnership for adoption.

J75. AREA ASSEMBLIES - DEVOLVED BUDGET PROJECTS

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services submitted project proposals from Rotherham North, Rotherham South and Wentworth Valley for the Area Assembly devolved budget for 2010.

The proposals would enable the delivery of local initiatives which met community priorities as identified in the Area Plans of the Area Assemblies.

Resolved:- (1) That the project proposals to be funded from Area Assemblies Devolved Budgets be approved.

(2) That subject to further clarification, the proposal to resurface MUGA area to the rear of Chislett be approved.

J76. SHAFTESBURY HOUSE DISTRICT HEATING SCHEME - PROPOSED CHANGE TO CURRENT CHARGING AND PAYMENT METHOD

In accordance with Minute No. 60 of 4th October, 2010, the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services reported on proposed changes to the current charging and payment method for the above District Heating Scheme.

A detailed review of all Schemes had been undertaken by Internal Audit in 2006 which had identified that the Council had not been recouping its running costs at Shaftesbury House. The Ombudsman had further scrutinised the Council's management of its schemes in 2007 following a resident complaint and instructed the Council to take immediate action to align all its schemes and introduce a fair and consistent charging system.

A full financial review was undertaken of all schemes in 2007. The review had concluded that Shaftesbury House should be reviewed separately at a later date due to the planned introduction of a new more efficient meter system that was not compatible with the current pre-heat controller token scheme.

Shaftesbury House was programmed to have meters replaced by March, 2011. Changing the meters would require the existing pre-payment token system being replaced with a more efficient system and residents transferred over to the fixed weekly pre-payment scheme through their rent account. As it would impact on the weekly/monthly amounts currently being paid by residents, it was proposed that the new meters be programmed to be installed to align with increased charges being applied from April, 2011.

The report set out the 2 options of how the new payment process at the Scheme could be introduced as follows:-

- Option 1
Change the existing meter, increase the unit costs immediately and introduce the fixed weekly pre-payment as other scheme users from April, 2011.
- Option 2
Replace the existing meter, apply the new unit cost and place residents on an introductory fixed weekly payments. In order to minimise the impact to residents, it was proposed that a phased approach be used over 3 years.

Resolved:- (1) That option 2 be approved as the new payment process for Shaftesbury House.

(2) That a copy of the Tenancy Agreement be sent to all residents of Shaftesbury House drawing attention to the health and safety issues associated with the use of household appliances for heating purposes.

J77. HOUSING ALLOCATION AND LOCAL LETTINGS POLICY UPDATE

The Director of Independent Living submitted further proposed amendments to both the Housing Allocation Policy and Local Lettings Policies. The report also detailed how an annual review of the Housing Register would be undertaken and how changes were being implemented regarding advertising properties in Key Choices.

The previous process utilised for reviewing the Housing Register had been resource intensive and costly. As from May, 2011, ICT software would facilitate an automated yearly review which would be activated on the annual date of each housing application. This would ensure that the Register remained up-to-date and only contained households wishing to be considered for 1 of the housing options advertised in Key Choices. The process would be more manageable and would alert customers via e-mail that their application was due to renewal and allow customers to update their application online. There would still be costs associated with the new annual review process, however, they would spread throughout the year.

As part of the Scrutiny Review of Choice Based Lettings, the process for

advertising properties via the local media had been examined. The results had shown that the numbers of customers using the Advertiser to view adverts had reduced with the most popular method being via online or by visiting the Property Shop. Last year 1,006 customers were asked which outlets they used to find accommodation:-

279 Rotherham Advertiser
 526 Key Choices website
 464 Key Choices Property Shop
 110 Neighbourhood Office

The cost of publishing properties in the local media equated to an annual spend of £44,200. In order to reduce the costs, it was proposed that the Service would cease advertising in the newspaper and utilise the savings to pay for the costs of the new annual Housing Register review process and broader homelessness prevention and resettlement activity.

The Housing Allocation Policy had been reviewed in light of specific cases and complaints which had highlighted issues with the existing practice. As a result the following amendments were proposed:-

- Amended priority to overcrowded households.
 Currently Environmental Health Officers assessed whether the occupiers of a dwelling were overcrowded using The Housing Act 1985 (Part 10) and The Housing Health and Safety Rating System. Where families were assessed as statutory overcrowded but were living together on a temporary basis, under the current Policy the household would only receive General Plus status without having had an Environmental Health Assessment. There was no definition of the "temporary nature" of the arrangement.

It was proposed that all households who claimed that they were living in overcrowded accommodation were referred for an Environmental Health Assessment. All households living in overcrowded situations who had applied for rehousing would be placed in the General Group until such an Assessment and would be as follows:-

| | |
|--|--------------|
| Statutory Overcrowded | Priority |
| Housing that had hazards associated with lack of space | General Plus |
| None of the above | General |

- Mutual Exchanges
 Currently lack of clarity in relation to the grounds under which the Council could withhold consent. Tenants could exchange like for like properties of the same size of where there were the same number of people accommodated.

It was proposed that this be amended to provide greater clarity so that tenants could exchange like for like properties that were of the same type and with the same number of bedrooms.

- Adapted Property or Disabled Persons Unit households who wished to move once they no longer need the adaptation

It was proposed that Priority Plus applicants be included as an incentive to move quicker and recycle adapted properties back into the system for letting.

– Local Lettings Policies

It was proposed that where there had been significant improvement in sustainability such as reduced abandoned properties, evictions and reported crime, that the Local Lettings Policy be removed.

Resolved:- (1) That the changes being implemented around the annual Housing Register review be noted.

(2) That the proposed cessation of publishing properties in the local press be deferred.

(3) That the amendments to the priority awarded in the Allocation Policy for overcrowded households be approved.

(4) That amendments to the Allocation Policy in relation to Mutual Exchanges be approved.

(5) That revisions to the Local Letting Policy, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report submitted, be approved.

J78. CONSULTATION ON NEW HOMES BONUS

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services reported that the New Homes Bonus Consultation document had been released for consideration by Councils on 12th November with a response deadline of 24th December, 2010.

It was the Government's aim for the New Homes Bonus to create a powerful, simple, transparent and permanent incentive which rewarded local authorities that delivered sustainable housing development.

The consultation consisted of 13 questions. Officers from Neighbourhood and Adult Services and Economic Development Services were working together to understand the implications for the Council.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be noted and the consultation process set out in the report be approved.

(2) That the completed consultation response be signed off by the Cabinet Member on 20th December, 2010.

J79. CONSULTATION ON SOCIAL HOUSING REFORM: LOCAL DECISIONS: A FAIRER FUTURE FOR SOCIAL HOUSING

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services reported that, as part of the coalition Government's intention to shift power from Westminster to councils and communities, it was carrying out a fundamental review of social housing as set out in a consultation document: Local Decisions: a fairer future for Social Housing.

The Government's stated intention was to make the social housing system fairer, striking a proper balance between the needs of new and existing tenants to ensure that the support, which social housing provided, was focused on those who needed it most for as long as they needed it.

The consultation document proposed new powers for local authorities and housing associations so that they could make best use of their housing in a way which better met the needs of individual households and their local area.

There would be a change in the law to deliver many of the reforms and it was intended that the Decentralisation and Localism Bill would do this.

The deadline for responses was 17th January, 2011.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be noted and the consultation process, as set out in the report, be approved.

(2) That the completed consultation response be submitted to the Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods on 10th January, 2011.

J80. 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.

J81. DECENT HOMES FINANCIAL POSITION

Further to Minute No. 63 of 4th October, 2010, the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services submitted an updated position statement on the financial outturn of the Decent Homes Programme and associated areas of risk.

Resolved:- (1) That the updated financial position and projected outturn for the Decent Homes Programme be noted.

(2) That the virement of the unallocated sum of £400,000 from the Environmental Programme be approved.

(3) That the temporary use of £1.2M of HRA 2010/11 balances, to be replenished in 2011/12, be approved.

(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act – information relating to the financial or business affairs of any person (including the Council))

J82. CHANGE TO HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY - RESIDENT SHELTERED HOUSING WARDENS

The Director of Independent Living submitted proposed amendments to the Housing Allocation Policy in light of the proposed merger of the Sheltered Housing Wardens and Home Enabling Service.

Severance and early voluntary retirement had been offered to Sheltered Housing Warden and Home Enabler staff members affected by the proposed merger of the Service. Within the proposals for the merged Service, there was no requirement for a Resident Warden. Currently, when a Resident Warden retired, it was clear within the Housing Allocation Policy that the 25% rent discount was removed and the tenancy changed from a non-secure tenancy to a secure tenancy. Wardens that had applied for severance, without access to their pensions or had decided to remain within the new merged structure, were not currently covered by the Policy.

It was proposed:-

- that any Sheltered Housing Warden in receipt of the 25% rent discount and had taken severance without accessing their pension be allowed to remain in their property but that the tenancy status be changed from a non-secure to a secure and the 25% rent discount removed
- any Sheltered Housing Warden staff that had chosen to remain in the merged Service be allowed to have their 25% rent protected and remain on a tied tenancy until the end of the current financial year only. After that point, the 25% discount would be removed from their rent and their tenancy change to a non-tied tenancy.

Resolved:- That the proposed amendments, set out above, be approved.

(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act – information relating to the financial or business affairs of any person (including the Council))