

WRITTEN ANSWERS FOR COUNCIL

3RD JUNE, 2015

Questions from Members of the Public

Question - Mr. Smith referred to there being 196 empty houses in Dinnington and asked how many EDM homes in Dinnington had been issued.

Answer – There have been no Empty Dwelling Management Orders issued in Rotherham, and in fact there have only been 17 issued in the entire country.

This is because in the vast majority of cases EDMO's do not present a suitable or practicable way to deal with a housing problem which has often arisen as a result of low demand and property values.

Within the Borough the total number of empty properties is slightly above the national average at 3.05%, as opposed to a national average of 2.61%. In Dinnington the rate is 3.02% and hence at the borough average. The ward is ranked 6th highest, across the Borough, in respect of empty properties.

There are currently 179 private empty properties in the ward, this is made up of:-

- 60 properties which have been empty for less than 6 months. These properties are recognised as being vital to allow the housing market to function effectively and to facilitate both residential mobility and the improvement or re-development of the housing stock.
- 59 (33.0%) properties have been empty for over 6 months but less than 2 years. These properties are those that do not affect the housing market in the short-term and where the owner has either over valued the property or does not have sufficient funds available to improve the condition of the property.
- 17 (9.5%) properties have been empty for over 2 years. These properties may be those problematic and costly to bring back into use or properties where the owner has no intention of bringing the property into use.
- 18 (10.0%) properties are registered as being 2nd homes.
- 25 (14.0%) properties are recognised as being exempt from intervention by virtue of them being in probate.

Approximately 150 of the empty properties are owned by individuals who are not known landlords/agents or registered providers.

The value of properties in the Dinnington ward is similar to those in the rest of the borough. However, in some of the more deprived super output areas the average property value is less than half, if not a third (40-50K) of the borough and ward average. This value influences an owner's decision to invest in their empty property.

There has been a range of activity undertaken in Dinnington designed to reduce the problems associated with empty properties. For example, work has taken place with

property owners to deal with poor housing conditions such as damp and thermal insulation; as a result 3 empty properties were returned into use following completion of works under the Community Energy Saving Programme.

In addition a range of enforcement activity has taken place to ensure that properties are kept free of rubbish or hazards and that they are secure. Because records are not categorised by whether a property is empty or not, it is difficult to give precise figures for these interventions. However, as an example of work undertaken, since 2010, 332 properties have been made secure, of these 50 were in Dinnington. By definition it is apparent that these properties would have been empty. In these 50 Dinnington properties, accumulations of waste were dealt with on 57 occasions.

The Council would continue to offer homeowners advice and assistance to address property issues and where necessary take appropriate enforcement action and it was hopeful that the introduction of the Selective Licensing scheme will - over the length of the programme - help to improve the housing market in areas of low demand.

Question - Mr. Cutts referred to a question he had asked at a previous Council meeting about the employment of Councillors in commerce or industry to which he claimed he had not had a reply.

Answer - The occupations of the current Councillors were as follows:-

Unemployed/Retired – 30
Industry – 15
State or Local Authority Employment – 11
Commerce – 5

There were two Councillors who were yet to submit their register of interests were to be contacted to request they complete the register.

This information was available on the internet via the link to the site for information - <http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/councillors/name>

Adoption of a Revised Statement of Community Involvement

Question - Minute No. 19 (Adoption of a Revised Statement of Community Involvement) - Councillor Jepson asked about the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and the timetable for its adoption.

Answer – Consultation was undertaken on a preliminary draft charging schedule for the Community Infrastructure Levy in 2013 (5th August to 7th October) and then on a revised draft charging schedule 24th November, 2014 to 5th January, 2015. Since work had been undertaken looking to resolve issues around the proposed charge for Bassingthorpe Farm and how the necessary infrastructure for this major development could best be funded. This was the main issue raised by the latest consultation.

The next stage was to submit the Community Infrastructure Levy for examination in public. Subject to the necessary approvals by the Commissioners and the Council meeting, it was anticipated in September, 2015. This would be followed by an examination around December, 2015/January, 2016. Assuming the Community Infrastructure Levy was approved by the Inspector, the Council could adopt it around March, 2016 and begin charging shortly after that date.

A more definite timetable was not available at this time.

Question to Advisory Cabinet Members and Committee Chairmen

Supplementary Question to Question No. 1 - Councillor Cowles asked about SCRIF funding and the BDUK Contract, specifically about the broadband coverage, where this was in phases and if there was any copies of documentation?

Answer – It was still relatively early days with regards the Superfast South Yorkshire (SFSY) project.

In terms of the phasing of the rollout of broadband, current activity was mostly around BT conducting on the ground surveys. The precise order of rollout would not be known until the survey was complete, but a high level indication was available in the form of a map that was published here on the Superfast South Yorkshire site.

<http://www.superfastsouthyorkshire.co.uk/sfsy/where>

The key in the bottom right hand corner which explained what each of the colours meant:-

- Purple = 2015
- Red = 2016
- Blue = 2017
- Green = already served by 1 or more fast broadband providers so the area is out of scope of this project (due to State Aid considerations)
- Grey = technical solution and date yet to be confirmed

A postcode checker would be made available through the Superfast South Yorkshire website later this year (when BT have finished surveying) and this would allow for zooming in on areas and get more precise dates.

Supplementary Question to Question No. 4 - Councillor Cowles asked if he could have the cost of the legal action?

Answer - Rotherham Borough Council was referred to in the case heading, however the Council was one of nine Local Authorities who brought the proceedings, namely the four South Yorkshire authorities and five authorities from Merseyside. The proceedings were effectively brought by the nine Local Authorities on behalf of the Sheffield City Region and Merseyside City Region which were both dramatically affected by the European Funding decision made by the Government.

It was assumed the question related to the legal costs to the Council. Rotherham Council's share of the legal costs incurred by the local authorities who were a party to the court proceedings amounted to £24,578.

The Government's costs may be payable by the authorities. That issue was still to be decided by the Supreme Court. If these costs were payable by the authorities the maximum which would be payable by Rotherham Council, would be £15,000.

If the question related to the impact of the reduced European Funding on the Borough, as a result of the outcome of the case itself, as stated in the judgment this was likely to be a reduction in funding for South Yorkshire for the period 2014-2020, of around €300 million, compared to the previous funding between 2007 and 2013. This was approximately a 65% cut in funding, as accepted by the Government. Further the amount of funding proposed was approximately €60 million less than the European Commission notionally allocated for South Yorkshire.