

COUNCIL SEMINAR
Thursday, 4th February, 2016

Present:- Councillor Wallis (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Beck, Elliot, Jepson, Jones, Mallinder, Parker, Price, Russell, Sansome, Sims, Whelbourn and Wyatt.

10 ROTHERHAM'S HOUSING STRATEGY

Councillor E. Wallis, Advisory Cabinet Member for Housing, thanked Members for attending today and outlined the challenges being faced by the cuts and falling resources, which were not helped by the proposals in the Housing and Planning Bill.

The proposed three year Housing Strategy was an early attempt to provide support and alignment and maximise any opportunities.

The Chair welcomed Dave Richmond, Assistant Director Housing, Asset Management and Neighbourhood Services, and Jane Davies-Haire, Strategic Housing Manager, and invited them to give their presentation on Rotherham's Housing Strategy.

The presentation drew specific attention to:-

- The Vision for the Strategy.
- Evidence.
- Consultation.
- Key Consultation Messages.
- Challenges.
- Opportunities.
- Themes.
- Theme 1 – Housing Growth.
- The Council's Strategic Enabling Role.
- Housing Growth – Key Actions.
- Theme 2 – Social Housing.
- Maintaining High Standards.
- Opportunities for People to Move.
- Strengthening Communities.
- Social Housing – Key Actions.
- Theme 3 – Private Rented Sector.
- Private Rented Sector – where want to be in three years.
- Private Rented Sector – Key Actions.
- Theme 4 – Affordable Home Ownership.
- Home Ownership – Key Actions.
- Theme 5 – Specialist Housing.
- Housing for Older People.
- Children and Young People.
- Other Groups.
- Next Steps.

A question and answer session ensued and the following issues were raised:-

- Councillor Parker asked whether the New Homes Bonus was paid to the Council or social housing and advised it was paid for any house that was built in the borough.
- Councillor Beck referred to the various strategies, but specifically asked if as part of the town centre strategy there would be similar ones for the other townships like Dinnington, Thurcroft, Maltby and Swinton and was advised there were no separate plans, but this was a big opportunity for Rotherham Town Centre and they would look to see how the other smaller town centres could be involved.
- Councillor Parker referred to the auctioning of small plots of land and whether self-build opportunities should be expanded and shared between small builders and was advised this was an area being explored for specialist custom build which incorporated a custom build register on the website.
- Councillor Whelbourn made reference to the recent Central Government consultation on the proposed changes to National Planning Policy and asked how good was Rotherham in getting mortgages and suggested there be some liaison between relevant officers. He was advised that this was subject to consultation with further discussion on starter homes.
- Councillor Wyatt referred to the number of Right to Buy properties which were now privately rented at twice the price, but suggested there be more initiatives for living in the town centres with accommodation about shops to improve viability. He also asked about the numbers of privately rented properties stood empty and if there were any limitations on bringing those back into use.

He was advised that there were a range of actions being looked at including feasibility work about rental accommodation in town centres and grant support to bring empty homes back up to standard.

Any detail about accommodation stood empty should be forwarded on information and if a former Right to Buy property was stood empty the Council had some powers to be able to buy the property back.

- Councillor Jepson referred to the Core Strategy hearing two years ago and asked if the Housing Strategy would feed into the Local Development Plan and was advised that work plans were in place with funding from the HRA to ensure the key documents worked together.

- Councillor Russell referred to increasing homelessness and deprivation and asked if there were any plans to create more provision and how Rotherham would cope with the problem if there were no top-ups.

She was advised that this was a big problem and there was a need to understand how many people this may affect. The new Allocations Policy criteria had stringent affordability checks before properties were let. Stock needed to be re-assessed and consideration given to other occupancy provision in order to be more pragmatic and do the best for Rotherham's residents.

- Councillor Elliot pointed out that there was an omission as low income/owner occupiers did not feature and asked if there was any provision for assistance for this group with the difficulty of upgrading and maintaining properties to a high standard.

She was advised that grant assistance from the Council was no longer available, but that schemes were occasionally extended to owner/occupiers on estates where upgrades to say roofing programmes were taking place and owners were afforded the opportunity to link into these making upgrades and maintenance more affordable.

- Councillor Mallinder referred to the aging population, the decreasing housing stock and the creative initiatives for adaptations and she was advised that whilst the budget for adaptations was sufficient to accommodate requests this would come under increasing pressure as budgets were squeezed further. The Adaptations Team were working closely with Health colleagues to look at adaptations and exceptions were required.

Resolved:- (1) That Dave Richmond and Jane Davies-Haire be thanked for their informative presentation.

(2) That the information shared be noted.