

**IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
14th September, 2016**

Present:- Councillor Mallinder (in the Chair); Councillors Allen, Atkin, Buckley, Cutts, Jones, Price, Reeder, Sheppard, Taylor, Walsh and Whysall, Mrs. L. Shears and Mr. B. Walker (Co-opted Members).

Also in attendance were Members of the Health Select Commission:- Councillors Albiston, R. Elliott, Sansome and Short.

Councillor Beck, Cabinet Member for Housing, was in attendance at the invitation of the Chair.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jepson, Marles, Rushforth and Wyatt.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

14. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions from the press and public.

15. COMMUNICATIONS

The Chair indicated that there were no items for communication.

16. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 29th July, 2016, be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

17. ROTHERHAM'S HOUSING STRATEGY 2016-19 - PROGRESS REPORT

The Select Commission received the following presentation from Tom Bell and Jane Davies on the progress of the 2016/19 Housing Strategy:-

Housing Growth: Progress

- Starter Homes Bid – 450 in Rotherham, focused on programme in town centre – report to Cabinet on 10/10/16
- Sale of HRA owned sites/ site cluster deal/ custom build – sold 12 sites since Christmas and planning applications coming forward
- Strategic acquisitions
- Bassingthorpe Farm – Garden Villages bid
- SCR Social and Affordable Housing Compact

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION - 14/09/16

Housing Growth: Current Priorities

- Starter Homes programme – establishing delivery arrangements
- Housing Masterplan
- Shared Ownership and Affordable Housing Programme Bid – potential Sheffield City Region collaboration
- Exploring options for creating a Housing Company/joint venture partnership
- Developer summit October 2016

Social Housing

- Housing Revenue Account Business Plan updated and Asset Management Strategy produced
- New Tenancy Agreement produced/DVD produced
- Tenant Involvement Strategy published
- Tenant Conference
- Strategic Housing Advisory Panel
- STAR tenant satisfaction survey completed with excellent results
- Tenant Participation

Social Housing Current Priorities

- Exploring new ways of delivering social housing in the future
- Exploring a transitional landlord scheme
- New initiatives to reduce Right to Buy fraud
- Marking affordable home ownership opportunities
- Developing a new Strategic Tenancy Policy
- Preparing to implement “Pay to Stay”
- Tenant profiling

Private rented sector: Progress

- Little London – decision to negotiate acquisition
- Strategic review of Selective Licensing
- Further contract awarded to deliver loft and cavity wall insulation for private householders, funded by Central Government
- Continuing to work with private landlords to improve the private sector

Current priorities:

- Deliver Improvements to The Little London Estate
- Conducting Selective Licensing Review
- Diversifying the Offer of Private Rented House

Affordable Home Ownership:

- Starter Homes and Rent to Buy
- Understanding markets for affordable home ownership
- Developing communication strategy – new website
- Deliver shared ownership

Specialist Housing

- Vision for housing for older people
- Extra care housing
- Six units of short stay accommodation allocated in Shaftesbury House
- HRA site identified for development of a wide range of specialist schemes
- New children's homes approved, being developed in partnership with CYPS
- Action Housing – new scheme for young people
- Developing the housing offer for people with learning disabilities
- Holding an event in October to engage with developers and stimulate the market for specialist housing in Rotherham

Discussion ensued with the following issues raised/highlighted:-

- The Strategy was available on the Council's website. A hard copy would be sent on request
- The Strategy did not consider land for development. When land was sold the permission of Cabinet was required. A report that was submitted over a year ago which enabled the release of sites had included over 150 sites
- A working group had been established to examine the Pay to Stay Policy and consider how the data would be collected. Government guidance was awaited
- Many of the Indicators were annual for the purpose of Government returns, building new homes. There would not be full accurate information to measure outcomes on a quarterly basis
- Clarity was required with regard to Repairs and Maintenance as it appeared as if the position had deteriorated. There had been a struggle with rent recovery but measures had been put into place
- A significant amount of funding in the budget to ensure that Decent Homes were brought back into decency in year and the target would be met. Every year properties fell out of decency.
- There were Asset Management and Investment plans to improve stock. There was good progress on external wall insulation and properties targeted without cavity wall insulation or fuel poor. There had been a massive programme in relation to the traditional housing stock
- Housing regeneration was very important with increasing pressures from Legislation which meant it was more difficult due to the Government agenda on home ownership rather than social and rented

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION - 14/09/16

- Tentative steps were being taken on new ways of delivering social housing. A collaboration between the Local Authority and a developer who owned a site to build 20 specialist new homes at Rawmarsh. A report had been submitted to Cabinet containing the site cluster programme
- When the properties were sold under Right to Buy only 30% came back into the Council's Capital budget that could be used for the next home built as the sum was discounted to the purchaser rather than market value
- A report had been submitted to Cabinet seeking approval of a contract for a developer who would work as an agent to the Council covering 7 sites. 1 site could sell immediately with the other 6 sitting derelict for many years as the cost of building the properties would be more than the return. The developer would design the sites in partnership with the Council and submit a planning application in due course
- There were low levels of Right to Buy fraud in Rotherham. Credit checks were being put into place, together with face-to-face meetings, so as to avoid unscrupulous organisations benefitting from such purchases. It did not preclude sons and daughters from purchasing the property for their parents but the Council needed to understand where the money had come from
- It would be helpful to know how many people were occupying the specialist housing and what the waiting list was due to concern regarding consultation and members of the public being able to understand what kind of housing application they were making. There had been a lot of work on mapping and gathering intelligence. In terms of support for people with learning disabilities, the work was being led by Adult Social Care
- There were a series of priority "bands" depending upon the needs of the household
- On the cluster sites it was hoped to deliver 3/4 units for specialist needs on a case-by-case basis
- The number of those homeless due to mental health issues was incredibly small
- There had been a doubling of rents in the private rented sector in the last decade. Work was being undertaken to improve standards and with the help of enforcement. A programme of long term empty property acquisition had commenced together with consideration as to how new properties could be built that were rented privately. Strenuous efforts were being made to avoid having a multitude of absent landlords as well as rent to buy so households could shift from renting to purchasing

Resolved:- That the progress made to date against the commitments in the Housing Strategy be noted.

18. CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIUM - DIGNITY PLC

Damian Wilson, Strategic Director, Regeneration and Environment, gave a verbal update on Cemeteries and Crematorium – Dignity PLC – including the background as to how the decision had been made to outsource the Service.

The contract had been in place since 2004. A lot of work had taken place at the time to assess the state of Rotherham's Cemeteries and Cremation Service which had required significant investment not least because of the Environmental Legislation which had changed in relation to cremations.

The Council had taken the opportunity to explore different options available to deliver that Service in the future one of which was a partnership arrangement where another organisation would deliver the Service. It had been subject to tender and considered through the Council, Cabinet and Scrutiny process in September 2007. The 35 year contract was entered into by the Council with Dignity in 2008.

Dignity had taken over the cemetery and crematorium at East Herringthorpe and the 8 municipal cemeteries around the Borough. There were certain requirements that the company had to satisfy as part of the contract initially around East Herringthorpe i.e. upgrade of the cremators, improving the Chapel and reception facilities, car park and overspill, administration services, development of crematorium grounds especially around memorials and grounds maintenance depot. Most of the investment was now completed - £3m overall.

In relation to municipal cemeteries, there was a need to identify additional burial space, improved security/management and development of sites, management and maintenance of those cemeteries and to develop the grounds linked to memorials to allow areas of contemplation.

The contract was different to that of a normal contract. In this instance, the contractor paid the Council for the privilege of running the Service but would take the income as they had made significant investment. However, due to historically the Council making a surplus on the Service (£350K), there was an agreement that Dignity would pay the Council a fee that would be no less than £375K per annum (index linked to inflation) – currently standing at £435K a year. There was also a profit share arrangement which saw the Council receiving 20% of any further growth in the rate of return taking into account their external rate of return as a company netting off their investment.

Members had raised a number of concerns/complaints on issues e.g. grass cutting, grounds maintenance generally, dog fouling, anti-social

behaviour, Muslim burial times, cost of burials, cost of memorials. Investigations had revealed that the complaints were related to the “under-management” of the contract by the Council and a lack of democratic oversight and information to Members. Dignity had been reluctant to meet at first but, once the issues had been explained, had been very helpful and forthcoming and flexible in their willingness to work with the Council. There had been an “under-management” by the Council of the contract and an “under scrutiny” of what Dignity’s expectation was. It had been suggested to Dignity that they submit an annual report which they were in agreement with and would provide their proposed investment plans.

Resolved:- That the report be noted.

(2) That the name and contact details be provided to Members of the Dignity Liaison Officer.

19. EMERGENCY PLANNING

Damian Wilson, Strategic Director, Regeneration and Environment, presented a report on the review of the Resilience and Emergency Planning Shared Service Arrangements.

The Shared Service had been established in June, 2011 to oversee the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity functions of both Rotherham and Sheffield Councils. It delivered a joint resilience service to both Councils.

The combined service shared resources, knowledge, skills and expertise to ensure that the Council met the responsibilities placed upon them through the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) 2004. As a Category 1 responder under the CCA the Council was required to:-

- Assess the risk of emergencies occurring and use this to inform contingency planning
- Put in place emergency plans
- Put in place business continuity management arrangements
- Put in place arrangements to make information available to the public about civil protection matters and maintain arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public
- Share information with other local responders to enhance co-ordination
- Co-operate with other local responders to enhance co-ordination and efficiency
- Provide advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about business continuity management

There was a joint legal agreement underpinning the Shared Service which provided an overview of the obligations of both Councils on aspects such as commencement and term of the Agreement, representation on outside

bodies, fraud and irregularity, withdrawal and termination. It also contained provision for a Joint Committee to be in place for the duration of the Agreement (see Appendix A of the report submitted); Terms of Reference were attached at Appendix B.

The changes to the Council, both at Senior Leadership Team and across all Directorates, had inevitably forced a review of the way in which the Council approached resilience, both to ensure the statutory requirements under the CCA continued to be met and that all arrangements remained appropriate and proportionate.

The report set out 3 potential areas for consideration i.e. internal governance, external emergency response arrangements and emergency response arrangements.

Resolved:- That the report be noted.

20. COMMUNITY SAFETY STREET SCENE PARKING SERVICES

Damion Wilson, Strategic Director, Regeneration and Environment Services, referred to a paper circulated to Members regarding Community Safety Street Scene Parking Services and the potential for the Council to commence utilising powers under the Traffic Management Act 2004.

After speaking to Councillor Lelliott, Cabinet Member for Jobs and the Local Economy, and the Leader, there was a desire to involve Scrutiny in the process. It would be trialled for six months and then brought back to Scrutiny in March to show how the process had worked. It would be quite controversial.

There were 2 aspects to the initiative. Firstly those who were persistent evaders especially those with vehicles that were not registered with the DVLA and thought they could get away with parking where they wanted to. There was a list of 60 persistent offenders where there were outstanding fines in excess of £41,000. There was a suggestion the Council started moving into action involving the removal of vehicles after the issue of 6 Parking Control Notices. The car was taken off road until ownership was proved and the fine and storage costs paid.

The second was hazardous parking which was a significant problem concentrated in certain areas of the Borough. It was suggested that where a car was parked on a junction, on or near a pedestrian crossing or on an arterial route causing major delays, that a Notice be issued, watched for a period of time, the Parking Services Manager contacted and then decide if the vehicle should be removed.

It would be introduced immediately through Delegated Powers but there would be a report back on the impact.

The Select Commission would support implementation of these proposals.

21. EMERGENCY PLANNING TASK AND FINISH GROUP - UPDATE

As Councillor Wyatt, Chair of the Task and Finish Group, had submitted his apologies, Christine Majer, Scrutiny Adviser, presented the report of the Group.

So far the Group had met once. One of the options that the Group could look at was the governance arrangements as referred to at Minute No. 20. At its next meeting the Group would discuss what issues it would scrutinise and the scope of the review.

The Group would like to go on a study finding visit to Tees Valley to learn from their experience.

The Group's next meeting would be held on 17th October, 2016.

Resolved:- That the report be noted.

22. PRE-SCRUTINY - FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

Christine Majer, Scrutiny Officer, presented the key decisions included in the Forward Plan, all of which came under the remit of the Improving Places Select Commission.

It was noted that the decisions could be divided into 2 sections firstly decisions that would be taken by 10th October which was out of line with the Select Commission's meeting dates. The second section was decisions to be taken by 14th November. If the Select Commission could consider if it wished an item to be included on the agenda.

It was pointed out that the Forward Plan was a living document and quickly became out of date with items being moved to a different Cabinet meeting dates. The Democratic Services Manager undertook to e-mail Members with a list of the 14th November Cabinet items.

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

(2) That the Democratic Services Manager supply Select Commission Members with information on the 14th November, 2016, Cabinet agenda items.

23. COUNCIL HOUSING TENANTS - SCRUTINY

Lilian Shears, Co-opted Member, gave a verbal progress report drawing attention to the following:-

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION- 14/09/16

- Survey commenced in June - decided it would target 18-35 year old tenants as they were the group least likely to engage and were the least satisfied with the services
- Devised a questionnaire which was widely distributed
- Some of the surveys entered onto a spreadsheet, thanked all respondents and asked how best to keep in touch with them
- Researched good practice elsewhere
- In July met with Rush House, Morrisons, Wilmott Dixon and Tenancy Support Officers and others
- Revealed that younger tenants tended to be treated differently particularly by Council staff over the telephone
- Further surveys conducted in August
- Collation of all the surveys 21st September
- There would be a further meeting to agree the way forward as well as a Young Tenants Forum where there would be focus groups and exercises to explore the barriers to engagement

The Chair thanked Lilian for her report.

24. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That a further meeting be held on Wednesday, 26th October, 2016 at 1.30p.m.