

**COUNCIL SEMINAR  
8th November, 2016**

Present:- Councillor Beck (in the Chair); Councillors Allcock, Andrews, Atkin, Bird, Councillor Maggi Clark, Cusworth, Evans, Fenwick-Green, Jarvis, Khan, McNeely, Napper, Price, Reeder, Sansome, Sheppard, Short, Walsh, Williams and Wyatt.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brookes, Jepson, Mallinder, Roddison, Russell and Senior.

**HOUSING**

Councillor Beck, Cabinet Member for Housing, welcomed Members to the seminar and introduced the following officers who would be giving the presentation:-

Tom Bell, Interim Assistant Director, Housing and Neighbourhoods  
Jane Davies, Interim Strategic Housing and Investment Manager

Tom and Jane gave the following powerpoint presentation:-

Housing Context 1

- Population 260,997
- 108,291 homes
  - Owner occupier: 68%
  - Private rented: 11%
  - RMBC stock: 16%
  - Other social housing provision: 3%
- Dominated by traditional 3 bed semi-detached houses (50%)

Housing Context 2

- Average house price £146,467 (August, 2016 sales)
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment: 900+ new homes needed each year (1/4 of these to be affordable)
- Young people are leaving Rotherham
- More homes for first time buyers needed
- More specialist housing for older people needed

Allocations

- 6,457 people on Housing Register (July, 2016)
  - Band 1 = 251
  - Band 2 = 1,608
  - Band 3 = 1,695
  - Band 4 = 1,678 (introduced in 2015 for those in housing need e.g. lived in private rented sector)
  - Transfer = 1,225
- 2,000 properties advertised each year
- 40 homes allocated each week

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- Introduction of fixed term tenancies (April, 2017) changed the way we viewed social housing

### Rents

- Average rent for a Council 3 bed = £79.79 per week
- Compared to £122 for equivalent in private rented sector
- 2/3s of tenants on Housing Benefit
- Local Housing Allowance cap will affect under 35 year olds
- Universal Credit/Benefits cap – arrears rising
- Pay to Stay will affect 7,500 tenants

### Right to Buy Sales

- 70% of sales are 3 bed houses followed by 2 bed houses then 2 bed flats
- No significant patterns in geographical distribution of Right to Buy sales
- Losing best stock and more sustainable tenancies
- Implementing anti-fraud and credit checks as part of wider service improvement programme

### Right to Buy Receipts

- 30% of Right to Buy receipts – contribution to strategic acquisitions
- Not enough for 1:1 replacement
- Receipts also fund Disabled Facilities Grants
- Right to Buy extended to Housing Associations: Housing Association discounts funded by local authorities – levy on high value stock/enforced sale
- Levy estimated at £2M per annum

### Leaseholders

- Significant improvements to leasehold services
- 512 leaseholders (ex-tenants who bought their Council flat)
- 2/3s occupy their home
- 1/3 rent their home out
- Council increasing service charges to reflect cost of service and ensure full cost recovery

### Asset Management Priorities

- Health and Safety/compliance
- Sustainability of the portfolio
- Maintain and improve the standard of the assets
- Increase energy efficiency
- Transform neighbourhoods
- Value for money

### Strategic Housing and Investment Service

- Housing Strategy and policy development across all housing tenures, leasehold and Right to Buy services, market analysis

- Stock Investment planning for the Council's 21,000 homes including large scale maintenance programmes and budget setting
- Enabling public and private sector Housing Growth, new housing models, new partnerships and working across the Sheffield City Region

#### Housing Options

- Provision of Housing Advice and Assessment in accordance with the Allocations Policy
- Housing Solutions – homelessness assessment and prevention
- Home and Property Services – furnished accommodation, temporary accommodation and adaptations

#### Contract and Service Development

- Management of the Repairs and Maintenance Service
- Management of the construction partnership with Wilmott Dixon and Mears/Morrison
- Provision of high quality, customer focussed and value for money repairs and planned maintenance services
- Adherence to Health and Safety Regulation
- Management of void properties

#### Housing Income

- Maximising rental income whilst supporting tenants and leaseholders through changes in income
- Development and delivery of the Financial Inclusion Strategy
- Management of Housing Revenue Account 30 year business plan
- Rent collection and account management and arrears recovery

#### Neighbourhood Partnerships and Engagement

- Working in partnership to support communities to become safer, stronger and resilient by:-
  - Service support via 7 Area Assembly Teams
  - Tenant and resident involvement and capacity building
  - Addressing deprived neighbourhoods
  - Supporting Parish Councils

#### Housing and Estate Service

- Council Housing Tenancy Management and Enforcement
- Close working with Anti-Social Behaviour Unit and range of partner agencies
- Working with Tenancy Support partners and other agencies to help sustain tenancies
- Estate caretaking, communal cleaning and grounds maintenance
- Garage Site Management, lettings and tenancy terminations
- Housing administered land and property/asset reviews/purchase requests
- Neighbourhood Centres and laundry facilities
- Supporting Area Housing Panels

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### Integrated Housing Management Service Project

- Co-ordination and implementation of an Integrated Housing system to:-
  - Improve customer experience
  - Manage and maintain accurate data to support the business
  - End to end workflow capturing all customer transactions – providing consistent advice
  - Combine data across stock, income, voids, contracts, repairs and estate management

### Partnership Working

- Sheffield City Region, Homes and Communities Agency, Local Partnerships
- Rotherham Strategic Housing Forum
- Housing Associations and service providers
- Parish Councils
- Contract partners – Mears, Wilmott Dixon
- Communities – businesses, landlords, tenants and residents, voluntary sector
- Housemark, Tenant Participation Advisory Service, Northern Housing Consortium

### Performance

- Most Indicators meeting or exceeding targets
- Gas servicing – 100%
- Repairs completed right first time – 95%
- Anti-social behaviour cases resolved – 98.85%
- Planned and capital repairs completed in target time – 100%
- Routine repairs completed in target time – 99.36%
- Repairs completed to acceptable standard – 100%
- High levels of tenants satisfaction

### Housing Strategic Priorities

- Delivery of Housing Strategy
- Housing growth plans and new vision for housing
- Supporting Adult Care and Children and Young People Services through specialist housing
- Delivery of Housing Service Excellence Plan
- Maintaining top quartile performance and tackling areas where we are below target
- Improving customer profiling information
- Implementing changes and reshaping services to comply with new Legislation

### Discussion ensued with the following issues raised/highlighted:-

- Introductory Tenancies would still be implemented when Fixed Term Tenancies came into force

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- Cabinet Members for Housing and Adult Social Care were currently working on an Older Person's Strategy part of which would be specialist housing for those with acute needs and making sure people could stay in their own homes for as long as possible
- The Local Housing Allowance affecting the under 35s would affect those by the shared room rate. There were dispensations for single people who had overnight access to children
- The Policy around cost floors had not changed with regard to the cost of repairs carried out by a tenant who was now exercising the Right to Buy. The Local Authority had to ensure that the discount would not take the cost of the property below what the Authority had spent on it. However, the period over which it applied was 10 years but extended to 15 for those properties built or acquired after 2012
- Right to Buy was applicable once someone had been a tenant for 3 years which could be split between Housing Association and Council tenure
- The issue of insulation of certain properties on the Fitzwilliam Estate was still ongoing
- The Council's stock was surveyed and each property assessed for investment over a 3 year period
- Council-owned garage sites were being reviewed and invested in if found to have a sustainable future. Those found to be dormant were sometimes developed into new housing with 12 sites having been sold at public auction for housing development
- The Policy whereby tenants were expected to maintain their gardens and internal decoration to a reasonable state was still enforced through the Tenancy Agreement
- Rothercare was still promoted to tenants. When signing up for a tenancy, tenants had the option to opt out of the Service. There was an issue with an increased number of people not having a landline and, therefore, not being able to participate in the scheme
- Good progress had been made on customer profiling with a lot of information captured when a person applied for Council housing as well as the Council tenancy verification checks that took place. The information was not so good regarding to other household members. Work was taking place looking at other areas of data and crossmatching

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- The better the understanding was of the customers the more it would help in modelling services. It also helped with the building of new stock so the needs of the households could be considered and help drive efficiencies through the overall organisation
- Some tenants who were under-occupying their properties and paying the Bedroom Tax may choose to take in a lodger. The Council had produced a leaflet with advice and information, however, it was difficult to monitor the amount of rent tenants charged their lodgers. Tenants were required to seek Council permission before taking in a lodger
- There were technical differences between sub-letting a property and taking in a lodger

The Chair thanked Tom and Jane for their presentation and Members for their attendance.