

**SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL**  
**Thursday, 10th July, 2008**

Present:- Councillor McNeely (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Blair, Cutts, Falvey, Gouly, Havenhand, Nightingale, P. A. Russell, Walker and F. Wright. together with Alex Armitage (Parish Councils), Bernadette Bartholomew (Parish Councils), Derek Corkell (RotherFed) and Andrew Roddison (RotherFed)

Councillor Akhtar was in attendance at the invitation of the Chair.

Councillors Austen and Gosling were in attendance for Minute No. 19.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gamble and Lakin and Mr. Carr.

**13. COMMUNICATIONS**

The Chair welcomed Alex Armitage and Bernadette Bartholomew to their first meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.

It was reported that Paul, Director of Neighbourhood Development, 2010 Rotherham Ltd., had recently had a heart attack.

Resolved:- That the scrutiny Panel's best wishes be conveyed to Mr. Webb for a speedy recovery.

**14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest made at the meeting.

**15. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS**

There were no questions from the public and press.

**16. PRIORITIES AND WORK PROGRAMME**

This item was deferred until the next meeting.

**17. AIR QUALITY TEAM**

Lewis Coates, Public Protection Manager, gave a powerpoint presentation as follows:-

The Local Authority's Role

- Part IV Environment Act 1995
  - o Required Government to produce a National Air Quality Strategy
  - o Placed a duty on local authorities to review and assess air quality in their areas

#### Why is air quality important?

- Air is cleaner in overall terms than at any time since the industrial revolution
- Traffic pollution is now a major source as opposed to industrial sources
- AND it still causes serious adverse effects
- Air pollution is estimated to reduce the life expectancy of every person in the UK by an average of 7-8 months
- There is still more to do to reduce the risk to health and the environment

#### What does Review and Assessment mean?

- REVIEW air quality
  - What are the current levels of pollution
  - Monitoring of air quality
- ASSESS air quality
  - Assess against the National objectives
  - Modelling of air quality
- Declare Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) where relevant
- Produce Air Quality Action Plans

#### Air Quality Monitoring

- 10 automatic monitors
- over 100 passive sampling locations
- monitoring for nitrogen dioxide, fine particles, ozone and sulphur dioxide

#### Air Quality Modelling

- Rotherham has an internet based Airviro dispersion model
- Modelling can be carried out for future years
- Assessments of transport measures and planning applications

#### Declaration of Air Quality Management Areas

- In the UK there are 494 AQMAs spread across 225 local authorities
- Rotherham has declared 6 AQMAs
- 3 areas near the M1: Brinsworth, Catcliffe and Wales – traffic pollution
- 3 areas in the town centre: Fitzwilliam Road, Wellgate and Wortley Road – traffic pollution

#### Fitzwilliam Road Air Quality Management Area

- Rotherham East ward is the most deprived Ward in Rotherham with almost all neighbourhoods affected
- 4,460 residents live within the AQMA
- More residents report suffering from limiting long term illness than the Rotherham average
- 2 schools are in the AQMA
- 47% of households have no car

What can be done to improve air quality?

- Air quality improved in Brampton Bierlow
- X78 buses on A630 Fitzwilliam Road
- Vehicle emission testing
- Care4air campaign

Industrial Pollution Control

- Environmental Protection Act 1990
- Pollution Prevention and Control Act 1999
- Environmental Protection Permitting Regulations 2007
- 111 processes (4 Part A2, 54 Part B, 54 PVR, WOB, Dry cleaners)
- Guidance specifies 2 visits/year for Part A2 and B processes and 1 visit/year for PVR, WOB and Dry cleaners
- Predicted outturn 222 inspections
- Requests for service from the public 578 in 2006/07, 516 in 2007/08
- Overall reduction by 11%
- 96% of industrial processes achieve compliance

Discussion ensued with the following issues raised/clarified:-

- Across the Borough, the overall air quality had improved
- As more car owners converted from petrol to diesel there would be an increase in nitrogen dioxide fallout within 6 m of the road
- There were certain species of trees which absorbed pollution
- PM2.5 was also measured
- Due to the increase use of diesel there would be areas that would require careful monitoring
- There was passive monitoring equipment situated along the A631 Maltby to Rotherham where there were issues with regard to air pollution but did not meet the national standard
- Although Brampton Bierlow was no longer an Air Quality Management Area, passive monitoring still took place

Lewis was thanked for his presentation.

## 18. **RMBC HOUSING STRATEGY 2008/11**

Amanda Coyne, Policy and Planning Officer, gave a powerpoint presentation as follows:-

Housing Strategy 2008-11

- Last Housing Strategy ran out in April, 2008 – was awarded fit for purpose status by Government
- Major changes in housing, nationally and locally since 2005
- 12 months of consultation and development
- Fourth draft now produced
- Cabinet Member agreed the Strategy on 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2008
- Web publication of the main Strategy by the end of August, 2008

- Hard copy Strategy summary document

What's it for?

“every resident should have a decent home that meets the needs of their household”

- Good or bad housing has an effect on other issues – health, education, economic success, sustainability
- Changing role of the strategy housing authority
  - All tenures
  - Influencing and intervening – not providing

Main Housing Issues

- More homes in all tenures
- Tackle poor housing conditions and multiple deprivation
- Decent Homes standard – public and private
- Lack of affordable rural housing
- Housing and support needs of vulnerable groups
- Preventing homelessness and extending choice
- Future management and growth of Council housing
- Addressing fuel poverty
- High quality design and environmental sustainability

3 Priorities/Themes

- Balancing housing markets
  - Delivery phase 2 of Housing Market Renewal – investing £27M in regenerating neighbourhoods and homes
  - Developing hundreds of new affordable homes every year for rent and low cost home ownership
  - Remodelling housing estates such as Eastwood in partnership with 2010 Rotherham Ltd.
  - Ensuring that new housing meets the highest standards for design and environmental sustainability
  - Developing more affordable housing in rural areas
  - Working with planners to maximise the amount of new housing provided through planning gain (S106)
  - Exploring new delivery vehicles for developing social housing
- Quality housing and place making
  - Working with Rotherham 2010 to complete the Decent Homes Programme for all Council homes
  - Investing £34.2M in private sector housing programmes-targeting vulnerable households and the private rented sector
  - Helping home owners to improve their homes through Home Appreciation Loans and Home Improvement Agency activity
  - Producing masterplans and design guides for urban centres including Maltby and Dinnington
  - Investing in neighbourhood centres and green spaces to ensure their long term sustainability
  - Increasing Safer Neighbourhood Team activity to targeted

- estates
  - Increasing energy efficiency referrals by 20%
  - Developing more carbon neutral homes
- Inclusion and access
  - Extending Key Choices to other tenures
  - Providing high quality housing advice and guidance
  - Developing a gateway service for all emergency accommodation
  - Building all new affordable homes to Lifetime Homes standards by 2011
  - Providing more Supported Living schemes for people with learning disabilities
  - Commissioning more new housing that meets BME needs
  - Continuing to develop innovative extra care schemes for older people
  - Providing and developing a new local authority site for gypsies and travellers

Discussion ensued on the presentation with the following issues raised/clarified:-

- At a recent meeting with the 3 local MPs discussion had taken place on the need for Council housing.
- An option was being explored with the Housing Corporation in terms of securing grant money to assist in purchasing properties on the open market at affordable rates to enable the Council to then let them at an affordable rent. This also included houses that had been subject to Right to Buy
- Within the Strategy was the need to look at the housing needs of older people
- Work was taking place to bring forward housing options that were truly affordable e.g. 25% stake with the ability to buy additional stakes and % in the property as income allowed

Amanda was thanked for her presentation.

Resolved:- (1) That the Housing Strategy 2008-11 be supported.

(2) That future agendas include affordable housing and shared ownership.

(3) That the action plan arising from the Strategy be submitted to the next meeting of the Panel.

## 19. GARAGE SITE REVIEW AND IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

In accordance with Minute No. 87 of 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2007, Paul Walsh, Programme and Asset Manager, submitted a report setting out the position statement with regard to the outcomes of the review to date

detailing the current position relating to the garage site investment programme together with work being undertaken by 2010 Rotherham Ltd. A powerpoint presentation was given illustrating:-

- A breakdown of the 451 Borough-wide, 302 purpose built and 149 plot sites by Area Assembly Area
- Recommended 81% retention and 19% decommission
- Findings supported investment
- Decommissioned sites supporting regeneration activity including affordable housing
- Recommendations to be submitted for approval
- Garage Site Investment Programme
  - o 2006/07 - £649,061
  - o 2007/08 - £570,000
  - o 2008/09 - £570,000 allocated
  - o Annual Investment Programme
  - o £500,000 Capital (HIP)
  - o £75,000 Revenue (HRA)
  - o Year on Year Programme
- Investment Programme
  - o Renewal of defective garage doors and frames
  - o Repairs to roofs
  - o Repair of defective brickwork
  - o Repair of defective tarmac to garage forecourts
  - o Repairs to boundary treatments
  - o Clearing drainage gullies
  - o Repairs/improvements to access ways
  - o Additional works on a site-by-site basis
- Sites to be Decommissioned
  - o 19% of sites to be decommissioned – 33% purpose built and 67% plot sites
  - o Sites appraised
  - o Planning and transportation opinion sought
  - o Further consultation and approval to be sought
  - o Timing of decommissioning to be agreed
- Decommissioning Sites
  - o Consultation
  - o Strategic appraisal and valuation
  - o Planning appraisal
  - o Options for future use
  - o Timing issues
  - o Approval process

- Site Management Issues
  - o Liaison between Neighbourhood Investment and 2010
  - o General condition of sites/inspections
  - o Site management protocols
  - o Addressing derelict/damaged garages
  - o Enforcing Tenancy conditions
  - o Demand and usage
  - o Ongoing review
  
- Next Steps
  - o Monitor delivery of Garage Site Investment Programme
  - o Submit review recommendations to Cabinet Member for approval
  - o Submit report to Regeneration and Asset Board
  - o Further address management issues with 2010
  - o Work with RSLs to deliver existing housing development on sites
  - o Work with RSLs to develop proposals for further decommissioned sites to support affordable housing delivery
  - o Work with EDS colleagues to release sites to the market

A discussion ensued with the following issues raised/clarified:-

- o Whitehill garage site cleared some years ago but nothing had happened to it since and had become a dumping ground
- o Letters would be sent and visits made to garage tenants advising them of decommissioning but also offering them a solution to their parking problem
- o Ward Councillors and 2010 Rotherham Ltd. would be kept informed
- o A number of the garage sites would support housing

Resolved:- (1) The report and presentation be noted.

(2) That Ward Councillors be involved in discussions about the future use of garage sites in their Wards.

(3) That the report containing the final recommendations for proposed decommissioned sites be also submitted to this Scrutiny Panel.

## **20. CUSTOMER ACCESS STRATEGY**

In accordance with Minute No. 33 of 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2008, meeting of the Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee, consideration was given to a report presented by Mark Evans, Customer Services Client Manager, which introduced the refreshed Customer Access Strategy that had been updated to cover the period 2008-2011, which had been endorsed by the Corporate Management Team on 9th June, 2008.

Members were informed that the Council adopted its first Customer Access Strategy in 2005. To ensure that the Strategy remained appropriate going forward the Council made a commitment within its

2007/08 Year Ahead Statement to carry out a review of the Strategy.

At the same time the ICT Strategy had also been refreshed and both documents had been developed concurrently to ensure that there was a co-ordinated and strategic approach to delivery.

Delivering the overall vision of the Customer Access Strategy had been built around five strategic objectives. These were:-

- Strategic Objective 1 Improving the customer experience – Using customer information to shape service delivery around our customers needs so that they are delivered responsively, accurately and cost effectively.
- Strategic Objective 2 Refocusing our priorities - Ensuring that we are an efficient and effective Council. One that continually reviews its processes and technological requirements to deliver cost efficient quality services in a timely manner that are appropriate to our customers needs.
- Strategic Objective 3 Joined-up service delivery - Proactively seeking out opportunities to work collaboratively with our partners to improve continually access to information and services provided to our customers.
- Strategic Objective 4 Marketing and promoting ways to access our services - Encouraging self service where this is appropriate, for those who are able to contact the Council in this way, and publishing our achievements.
- Strategic Objective 5 Learning, development and training - Providing empowered, well-trained, professional and knowledgeable staff to support the delivery of services and assist customers to be confident and competent users of ICT based access.

Delivery of significant elements of this Strategy would be supported by the refreshed ICT Strategy which would be funded from the existing ICT Capital Programme and existing Council budgets. Any additional funding for the Customer Access Strategy would be identified in the implementation plan and individual business cases developed as appropriate.

The Committee considered the Customer Access Strategy in detail and discussed the feasibility of delivering and developing processes for the giving of any amendments to details once.

Discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were raised and clarified:-

- The emphasis of the Strategy was to extend all access channels not close them. There were no plan to close local offices



- There were big differences between local offices on how members of staff dealt with members of the public. Mystery shopping had been introduced by Neighbourhoods and Adult Services with its introduction being considered corporately. The Rotherham Access Audit Group was to undertake mystery shopping across Customer Service Centres and telephone contact centre. A quarterly report would be received in their experiences
- The technology element of the Strategy would be strongly supported by the investment that had already been agreed by the Council. There were additional costs that the Strategy was likely to require which would be presented to Council on a case-by-case basis.

Resolved:- That the Customer Access Strategy 2008/2011 be supported.

## 21. NEIGHBOURHOODS HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2007/08 OUTTURN REPORT

Mike Clements, Service Accountant (Neighbourhoods), submitted a report showing that the Housing Revenue Account's (HRA) financial outturn position for 2007/08 was a deficit of £2.111M. This was met by HRA balances which had reduced to £6.480M.

The key income and expenditure variances were set out in the report. The principal reasons for the overall reduction in the HRA balance were:-

- An additional revenue contribution made to support capital expenditure (RCCO) of £1.028M to fund the cost of upgrading the ROCC IT system to support the implementation of handheld technology for repairs operatives. The cost would be funded over the next 3-4 years on an Invest to Save basis by the efficiency savings achieved by 2010 Rotherham Ltd.
- Supervision and Management costs, particularly the cost of District Heating schemes (£0.455M principally due to increased gas prices) and the cost of administering abortive Right to Buy applications (£0.150M) which could be offset against receipts from the sales in the same way that the cost of administering completing sales could
- The cost of interest on debts to be repaid was greater than expected (£0.416M)
- The Management Fee to 2010 Rotherham Ltd. was increased by £0.198M to fund additional pension costs in line with the Management Agreement

Discussion ensued on the report with issues raised and clarified regarding:-

- Monthly monitoring reports were to be submitted to the Cabinet Member
- In the new financial year there would be no repeat of the ROCC IT expenditure, but there may be some increase in the management fee with regard to pension related costs. The district heating charges

where to be re-evaluated as the gas contract was about to be re-let

Resolved:- That the report be noted.

## 22. NEIGHBOURHOODS GENERAL FUND OUTTURN 2007-08

Mike Clements, Service Accountant (Neighbourhoods), reported that the Neighbourhoods General Fund Revenue Account had outturned at a net underspend of £136,000, as follows:-

Neighbourhood Services – An overspend of £51,000 due to under recovery of Crematorium and Cemeteries income.

Neighbourhood Standards – An underspend of £239,000 made up of an overspend of £78,000 regarding closed landfill sites needing urgent work due to Environmental, Legal and Health and Safety issues together with a number of underspends mainly due to staff vacancies. There had also been unbudgeted income relating to Patented Grant (£21,000) and the Gambling Act (£50,000).

Community Safety – An underspend of £419,000 due to the effect of staff vacancies and an underspending on Neighbourhood Wardens. There had also been unbudgeted grant income of £50,000 relating to anti-social behaviour.

Neighbourhood Management – An overspend of £17,000 due to a below budget level of interest income received relating to Housing Association mortgages and Home Improvement Loans.

Community Services – An overspend of £455,000. The 2 main reasons were income related SIPs of £153,000 not achieved as charges for communal room hire in sheltered accommodation were not reviewed and an overspend by the Independent Support Service of £285,000.

Neighbourhood Development – Outturned on budget as anticipated.

Discussion ensued on the report. Members raised concerns at the large differences between over and underspends between the various sections and how the budgets could have been so out of kilter. It was clarified:-

- There was agreement that any underspend on the Community Leadership Fund could be rolled over into the next financial year. Some of the issues were due to timing issues
- The overspend in Neighbourhood Services (Crematorium and Cemeteries) was a historic problem where revenue expectation was set too high
- The underspend in Community Safety was due to allocation of additional funding which was not planned for. It had been adjusted for the new financial year
- A review of the Warden Service and also the designation of

sheltered housing and bungalows was underway. One of the impacts of the previous property review led by EDS was that a number of properties had been de-designated. And income associated with them, therefore, changed. The main reason for the overspending, however, was that the overall level of income did not coincide with expenditure based on the current service model.

Resolved:- That the report be noted.

### **23. HOUNG INVESTMENT PROGRAMME OUTTURN 2007/08**

Mike Clements, Service Accountant (Neighbourhoods), submitted the final outturn position for the 2007/08 Housing Investment Programme (HIP).

By 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2008, £86,851M had been spent against the approved Programme of £33,040M, an overall underspend of £1.188M. This included an overspend of £2.233M on schemes managed by 2010 Rotherham Ltd. and an underspend on Council managed schemes of £3.422M.

For the schemes managed by 2010 Rotherham Ltd., £75.596M had been spent which equated to an overspend of £2.233M against the approved Programme. The main reasons for the overspend were:-

Decent Homes – Phase 2 – overspent by £1.871M

Flood costs - £1.118M

The main variances to the remainder of the Programme managed by the Council (£14.677M) were:-

Pathfinder Projects – Budget £5.099M Expenditure £4.181M

Gypsy and Traveller Site – Budget £1.6M Expenditure Nil

Unsustainable and Non-Traditional Properties - Budget £860,000  
Expenditure £277,000

Non-Traditional Investment – Budget £250,000 Expenditure £369

Sheltered Housing Modifications – Budget £900,000 Expenditure  
£158,000

Fair Access to All – Budget £2.865M Expenditure £3.967M

Resolved:- That the report be noted

### **24. CABINET MEMBER FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS**

The Panel noted the decisions made under delegated powers by the

Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods held on 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2008.

Resolved:- That the report to be submitted to the Cabinet Member in October, 2008, on the impact of the New Stray Dog Provisions and new arrangements be also submitted to this Scrutiny Panel.

**25. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th June, 2008, were noted.

**26. PERFORMANCE AND SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE**

The minutes of the Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee held on 25<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> June, 2008 were noted.

**27. NEW ARRIVALS WORKING PARTY**

The minutes of the above Working Party held on 13th June, 2008, attended by Councillors Sharman (in the Chair) , Akhtar and Hussain, be noted.

**28. MEMBERS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY GROUP**

The minutes of the above Advisory Group held on 13th June, 2008, attended by Councillors Wyatt (in the Chair), Gosling and Pickering, be noted.