

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL
3rd June, 2010

Present:- The Mayor (Councillor McNeely) (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Blair, Cutts, Ellis, Nightingale and Walker.

Councillors Akhtar and Pickering were in attendance at the invitation of the Chair.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gamble, Hodgkiss and P. A. Russell.

1. COUNCILLOR MICHAEL CLARKE

The Chair referred to the recent death of Councillor Michael Clarke and the tragic events that had occurred in Cumbria.

The Panel held a minute's silence as a mark of respect.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made at the meeting.

3. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no members of the public and press present at the meeting.

4. COMMUNICATIONS

(1) The Panel congratulated the Chair on her recent appointment as Mayor.

(2) The Chair welcomed Councillor Ellis to her first meeting of the Panel and all those who had chosen to remain Panel Members.

(3) It was noted that Co-optees would be appointed at the next meeting.

5. THE YEAR AHEAD

Councillor Akhtar, Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhoods gave the following powerpoint presentation:-

Key Areas of Responsibility

- Neighbourhood Management
- Area Assemblies
- Strategic Housing e.g. Private Sector housing investment/statutory enforcement powers
- Housing Management (through 2010 Ltd.)
- Homelessness
- Adaptations

- Sheltered Housing
- Building Council housing
- Community Safety and Safer Neighbourhood Teams
- Regulatory function e.g. Licensing and Trading Standards

Top 10 Key Achievements 2009/10

- Achieved targets for 100% KPIs – 2nd year running
- 13% reduction in level of crime – 3,000 fewer victims
- Retained Customer Service Excellence Standard
- Delivered 373 affordable homes during 2007/10
- Secured £7.4M to build 127 Council houses
- 994 empty properties brought back into use
- Reduced use of temporary accommodation by 60%
- 94% of Council stock meets Decent Homes Standard
- Attained the Crime and Justice Pioneer Area Status and launched the 'Policing Pledge' with South Yorkshire Police

Significant Challenges

- HRA Business Plan and Financial Management within the ALMO
- Future of the ALMO
- New TSA Regulatory Framework for social housing
- Resources for improving the quality of life within neighbourhoods
- Single Conversation
- Delivery major housing programmes including new build Council housing
- Perception of Crime and Disorder

The Year Ahead

- Get agreement for a new investment plan to continue the regeneration of Rotherham
- Tackle anti-social behaviour – reduce enviro-crime and noise nuisance
- Build 172 new Council houses
- Tackle deprivation through the 3 'Local Ambition Projects'
- Reshape the Sheltered Housing Warden and Care Enabler Services
- Complete the Decent Homes Programme
- Undertake a housing stock options appraisal

The following issues were also highlighted:-

- New Government – new challenges – the HCA was to claw back funding – hopefully would not affect the Programme
- Cabinet Member Portfolios still to be agreed but likely that Waste Collection would be coming to the Directorate and this Scrutiny Panel
- Discussions regarding the Single Conversation with the HCA were ongoing. Consultation with stakeholders and partners had been completed and a plan would be in place shortly

Councillor Akhtar was thanked for his presentation.

6. THE YEAR AHEAD

The Chair reported that she would like the Panel to look back at the impact of Scrutiny since its inception 10 years ago; the reviews undertaken, what impact the recommendations had had, if they had all been implemented and if not why not.

The Climate Change Review at the last meeting had proved very interesting but too big a subject to be discussed as a whole so the various strands would be discussed throughout the year.

The Chair also suggested the private rented sector, housing opportunities for young people and under occupancy.

The Panel was then invited to put their suggestions forward:-

- Garages
 - o Funding
 - o Why the ringfencing was removed
 - o Actual costs
 - o Private garage owners/Council tenants
 - o Demand
 - o Garages used for storage
 - o Decommissioned sites that there were no longer funding for
- Anti-social behaviour with regard to Council tenancies
 - o Need for closer working relationship with CYPS
- Noise nuisance
 - o Licensing and Planning
- Housing Market Renewal
 - o Funding in light of the new Coalition Government
 - o Possible option B's for proposed development
 - o How to manage public expectations
- Decent Homes – Environmental Works
- Sheltered Housing Warden and Care Enabler Service

7. REVIEW OF COUNCIL ACTIVITIES AROUND CLIMATE CHANGE

Following on from the 22nd April Scrutiny Panel meeting (Minute No. 91 refers), a report of the inquiry into Council activity to combat climate change was considered.

Discussion ensued on the actions arising from the meeting.

With regard to Sustainable Schools and Education, it was noted that a

Working Group had been set up to look at the Schools' Vegetable Patch Program linking in with community allotment plots and was to be considered as a community cohesion project. Consideration would be given as to which part of the Borough to pilot the project.

Resolved:- (1) That the Regional LGA Board be requested to look at the possibility of the region switching to desalinisation and also the possibility of Rotherham becoming part of the nation quick charge network for electric vehicles.

(2) That the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Panel be requested to consider:-

(a) "are we incorporating learning more into our schools to build new industries in the region for the future?"

(b) the feasibility of dedicated school buses along the model adopted in Europe and the United States.

(c) the feasibility of utilising school roofs to generate energy via solar panels

(3) That the Director of Independent Living ascertain from 2010 Rotherham Ltd. the position with regarding to installing water meters in all Council properties in a drive to improving water efficiency within the region.

(4) That the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel be requested to consider the possibility of a timed switch off of street lighting at night and the timing of waste collections in the Borough i.e. late night collections.

(5) That the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel be asked if the Council was doing enough as a Fair Trade organisation.

(6) That with regard to sustainable procurement practices, that the Rotherfed Co-optees be requested to discuss with their organisation how current work could benefit Rotherfed and vice versa.

(7) That a report be submitted on what the Council did to raise public awareness/education with regard to climate change.

8. UPDATE ON 2010 ROTHERHAM LTD. VOID TURNAROUND PERFORMANCE

Further to Minute No. 56 of 10th December, 2009, Jane Davies-Haire, Landlord Relations Manager, reported on the detailed work that had been carried out by the Neighbourhoods and Adult Services Performance Team and 2010 Rotherham Ltd.'s Empty Homes and Performance Teams on void turnaround performance. A new calculation methodology was also

proposed from 1st April, 2010.

As at December, 2009, 3 of the 7 recommendations had been complete and the remaining 4 on target for completion. A summary of progress was as follows:-

Recommendation 3 – That clear criteria are published about the circumstances in which decorating vouchers will be issued to new tenants and that the allowance of £25 per room is reviewed

2010 Rotherham Ltd. had reviewed and clarified the process and clear information was made available to tenants via the website (a decision was taken to retain the decorating allowance at £25). Complete.

Recommendation 4 – That in line with good practice demonstrated by high performing ALMOs consideration is given to a reward scheme to encourage tenants to leave properties in good condition

The “Fond Farewell” scheme had been up and running since October, 2009, and was still being evaluated. If it was identified that the scheme was saving money over and above that paid out, then consideration would be given to extending the scheme.

Recommendation 7 – That action taken towards the recommendations of 2010 Rotherham Ltd.’s Empty Homes Service Review ‘Every Day Counts’ be monitored and reported back to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel in due course

A further 2 of the 16 actions had now been completed (14 in total) – review of decoration allowance and review of all new procedures. The 2 remaining actions (incentives to stay and review of the process of backdating tenancy commencement dates) were still to be completed.

A database of all properties that had been empty for over 16 weeks had been compiled and was monitored/updated weekly. A target was set to reduce the number of properties empty for longer than 16 weeks from 116 in November, 2009 to 75 by the end of March, 2010. As at 31st March, 2010, the figure stood at 76 with a further target set of 25 by March, 2011.

As a result of concerns raised by Members, the Council had carried out a series of reality checks and reported to 2010 that performance did not include voids requiring Decent Homes and other major works. 2010 had conducted an internal review of processes and agreed that the overall “turnaround” figure should include all void properties.

As a result of the new methodology to be used, performance would appear to drop in 2010/11 compared to previously reported figures. Sub-indicators and targets would be developed so that it would be possible to monitor separately performance on routine ‘simple’ voids and on more complex voids. 2010 was to produce a detailed report setting out the new

methodology and, once approved, would be implemented as from 1st April, 2010.

2010 had put a significant amount of additional resources into reducing the overall number of empty Council-owned properties and as at 1st April, 2010, 248 properties stood empty compared with 386 at the end of September, 2009. Of the 248, 50 were not available for letting due to Neighbourhood Investment Service decisions (19), non-traditional properties undergoing major refurbishment works (21) and Warden flats requiring further assessment before being let (10).

Discussion ensued on the report with the following issues/comments highlighted:-

- New methodology made sense
- Proposed required major structural work could legally be excluded from the figures
- Push nationally to illustrate rent loss through voids rather solely turnaround times
- Every property was treated on an individual basis
- Standard of re-lets – representatives of Rotherfed to carry out spot checks?
- Why can there not be 24 hour turn round of a property given that in many cases there were pre-termination notice so any problems resolved at the pre-termination inspection?
- Decent Homes coming to an end so there should be no more complex voids

Resolved:- (1) That it be noted that the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review have now been addressed by 2010 Rotherham Ltd.

(2) That it be noted that the methodology used by 2010 Rotherham Ltd. to calculate void turnaround times would change as from 1st April, 2010.

(3) That the evaluation of the Fond Farewell Scheme be submitted to this Scrutiny Panel when completed.

(4) That a report be submitted on private sector landlords and void properties.

9. CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

The Panel noted the decisions made under delegated powers by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhoods held on 1st, 15th and 31st March, 6th and 19th April, 2010.

It was noted that the Proposed Housing Investment Programme (HIP) 2010/11 (Minute No. J.156 of 15th March, 2010), had not been submitted to the Scrutiny Panel for consideration.

Resolved:- That the following reports be submitted to the Panel:-

Bereavement Service

Dog Control Orders – Review of Stray Dog Arrangements (J158 of 31st March, 2010)

Proposed Changes to the Board of 2010 Rotherham Ltd. (J159 of 31st March, 2010)

Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring to 31st March, 2010 (J171 of 31st March, 2010).

10. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

The minutes of the meeting held on 22nd April, 2010, were agreed.

11. PERFORMANCE AND SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

The minutes of the Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee held on 26th February, 12th and 26th March and 16th and 30th April, 2010, were noted.