

**ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL**  
**24th March, 2005**

Present:- Councillor Atkin (in the Chair); Councillors Clarke, Hall, Jackson, McNeely, Nightingale, Rushforth and P. A. Russell. together with Mr. D. Alderson (Housing Tenant Panel), Mr. D. Willoughby (Housing Tenant Panel) and Mr. J. Carr (National Society for Clean Air).

Councillors Cutts, Robinson and Turner were in attendance for Minute No. 135 at the invitation of the Chairman.

Councillor Ellis was in attendance at the invitation of the Chairman.

Apologies were received from Councillors Burke, Hodgkiss and The Mayor (Councillor F. Wright).

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

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

**134. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

No declarations of interest were made.

**135. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR THE "KEY CHOICES" CHOICE-BASED LETTING SERVICE**

In accordance with Minute No. 185 of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Environmental Services meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2005, the Panel considered a report of the Community Services Manager on the "Key Choices" Choice-Based Letting Service. A power point presentation was given as follows:-

- The Background – White Paper on the Future of Housing, Government Pilot and findings. The Government required all authorities to be operating such a scheme by 2010.
- ALMO Excellence Plan – the scheme had been identified as a pre-requisite in defining excellence in housing management by ALMOs by the Audit Commission
- Strategic Links – Regional Humberside Strategy for Yorkshire and Humberside (2003), Rotherham's Community Strategy, the Corporate Plan, the Housing Strategy and the Shadow Supporting People Strategy
- What is "Key Choices"?  
Rotherham's new approach to lettings  
Simpler, faster more transparent method



- Choice Based Lettings Week Two/Three
  - Week Two –
    - Advertisement produced
    - Mailing list produced
  - Week Three -
    - Tuesday mailing lists posted
    - Tuesday 4.00 p.m. – previous week’s adverts removed
    - Wednesday 10.30 a.m. – new adverts displayed
    - Property requests commence for 7 days
  
- Choice Based Lettings Week Three/Four
  - Week Three –
    - Wednesday 10.30 a.m. – 7 day advertising cycle starts
  - Week Four –
    - Tuesday 4.00 p.m. – property advertising cycle closes
    - Shortlist compiled and sent to relevant office
    - Application details verified, rent and recharges checked etc.
    - If eligible make offer and arrange viewing
  
- Choice Based Lettings Process Week Four
  - Property accepted – sign up to be arranged
  - Keys should be received from the previous tenant on the following Monday
    - Keys to void repair – Health and Safety checks
    - Property refused or withdrawn, offer to next eligible applicant on shortlist
  - If no requests received, re-advertise as Direct Home on a 1<sup>st</sup> come served basis
  - Send letter details to Housing Options Team to compile feedback information
  
- Property Request
  - In person or telephone the:-
    - Local Neighbourhood Office
    - Norfolk House ask for the Housing Options Teams
    - At the “Key Choices” Property Shop due to open in the Spring, 2005
  - RBT Connect (telephone only)
  - By e-mail to [keychoices@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:keychoices@rotherham.gov.uk)
  - By e-mail using the online property request form
  - SMS Text
  - Digital TV
  
- Support for Vulnerable People
  - Resettlement Officer – prevention and support
  - Allowing a representative to make requests for the customer (permission from the applicant)

Mailing lists in all formats to customers and support agencies  
Alerting customers to vacancies  
Home visits  
Accompanied viewing with carers or support workers  
Monitoring non-participation  
Awareness raising – hard to reach groups and support agencies

- On-going Evaluation
- Conclusion for “Key Choices” Lettings  
Embraces choice, simplicity and flexibility  
Greater sustainability of communities  
Increase choice and housing options  
Customer empowerment  
Improves image and market perception
- Property Shop Concept  
Show cases all properties available  
Hub of the promotion of Council dwellings  
Encourage and attract customer access  
Waiting list increases  
One-stop specialist letting service.

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

- The Property Shop would be based at 20 Moorgate Street, Rotherham.
- 3 officers had been recruited to the Team and had been in post since November, 2004. The Team would be working with all Neighbourhood staff.
- Neighbourhood staff would identify clients who may have had anti-social behaviour issues and as a consequence would have to have a package of measures. It would have to be demonstrated that they would add to the community and not continue in anti-social behaviour activities. Such cases would be the subject to a rigorous risk assessment and multi-agency approach before they got access to accommodation.
- The concept of neighbourhood management was working in the community and picking up on local issues and feeding them into the Local Lettings Policy at the same time as not deliberately barring certain people including those that were very vulnerable in society.
- There was a range of support services to engage with those people that did not necessarily come into Rotherham or had issues with IT. There was already a wealth of information that would help in the application forms and would be used to engage with those individuals and agencies. A weekly trawl would be conducted of all the information and newsletters sent to the various agencies to help engage with the customers themselves.

- With regard to inspection of properties, registered social landlords and private landlords worked on the same basis as the Council. Private landlords would only be those that were members of the Council's Accredited Scheme. No properties would be accepted if they were not from accredited private landlords.
- Within the weekly cycles, properties would be identified that had been let to clients with a waiting list application date of X so that others would know the application dates for that type of property and area.
- Lettings would be made on a weekly basis and allocated in date order. For people with an acute need there were 2 types of accommodation that could be accessed. One was Direct Homes where there was no waiting list and would be advertised on a 1<sup>st</sup> come 1<sup>st</sup> served basis. If someone expressed an interest for that unit of accommodation that person would get it. For those that were on the waiting list, the advertisement would go out and expressions of interest sought and received up to the Tuesday night. Short listing would take place on the Wednesday and sent back out to the Area Office on the same day or the Thursday. The Area Office would be in immediate touch with people with the earliest date of application first with an offer made. Feedback would be sent in the form of a letter to unsuccessful individuals as to why they had not been successful.
- Some difficulties were expected initially until members of the public got used to the new system.
- The overall level of asylum seekers and refugees in the Borough was reducing and would continue to do so under the new NASS contract arrangements that were taking place this year. Once an applicant had been granted indefinite leave to remain in the country their housing needs were dealt with either through homeless (they are not allowed to be included on the Authority's homeless register until they had a positive decision) or a very proactive approach through personal housing planning which looked at all the options open to the individual including private rented accommodation or Housing Associations.
- If a person refused a property after they had submitted an expression of interest they had to give good reason as to why. If a homeless person was made 2 offers of accommodation and both refused with no valid reason then the homeless application would be cancelled as the Authority would have discharged their duty to them.
- There was a lot of work taking place in relation to sheltered accommodation but there was a need to move towards a more assessed process which would enable it to be more effectively targeted at people that actually needed that type of accommodation. To access extra care sheltered accommodation would be via a multi-agency approach to ensure the resources were utilised and maximised to the fullest.
- Legally the Authority had to consider anybody that was in housing need. Individuals moved out of the Borough for employment

issues and elderly people that needed to come back to be near their support networks. Their reasons for returning would be looked at and assessed very critically e.g. why were they coming back, what support did they need, would their support networks give them the support they said. Where there was a demonstrated need was quite often an issue for direct access accommodation rather than accommodation where there was a waiting list.

The Community Services Manager was thanked for her informative presentation.

Resolved:- That the report be noted.

### **136. FUTURE OF TARRAN NEWLAND PROPERTIES, MALTBY**

The Head of Neighbourhood Development submitted a report presented to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Environmental Services on the outcomes of an independent structural assessment of the non-traditional Tarran properties at Maltby.

The report provided a clear picture of the condition of the properties concerned, the risk to the properties and their rate of deterioration bearing in mind that they had been built in the 1940's with a temporary lifespan. The consultants had provided 3 options for repair and refurbishment, together with costs, from a listed Decent Homes Repair Scheme through to full replacement of the structure. The costs were then compared with those of acquisition and demolition including the costs of acquiring the owner/occupied properties on the estate.

A number of factors had come into the recommendation and subsequently the decision. The cost of repair and refurbishment exceeded the costs of acquisition and demolition. Only the highest cost of replacement scheme offered any sustainability. The remaining 2 options offered 30 years and provided limited options in future years for the Local Authority and anybody else who subsequently offered the property on the open market. The report gave a very balanced view of the condition of the properties given the clear evidence of deterioration from the tests carried out and that a decision was required sooner rather than later.

The Cabinet Member had reaffirmed the decision made in July, 2004, with some additional recommendations to ensure residents living on the estate were fully involved in the future redevelopment of the area and every effort made to accommodate their wishes in terms of new accommodation.

Resolved:- That the Cabinet Member's decision on 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2004 (Minute No. 181) to reaffirm the decision of Minute No. 22 (19<sup>th</sup> July, 2004), to demolish the properties be noted.

### **137. HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2003-2008**

The Community Services Manager submitted a report on current progress against the action plan attached to the Homelessness Strategy 2003-08.

In August, 2004, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister published the results of an independent evaluation of local authorities' Homelessness Strategies which had been carried out by Housing Quality Network Services. Their overall assessment was that Rotherham's Strategy was an inclusive document which reflected an extensive multi-agency approach and showed a clear picture of homelessness in the area. It also identified a lack of direct consideration of the health needs of the homeless and the lack of identified involvement of homelessness staff within the review strategy process as areas of weakness. They would be looked to be addressed within the next financial year. The Authority was now working with over 100 agencies with the main aim of trying to reduce homeless and getting it into their own strategies. The Strategy would be reviewed and reshaped in line with the Authority's future requirements.

There had been limited opportunities for progress since the 2004 progress report due to the previous staffing levels/use of Agency staff within the Homelessness Team. However, the situation had been addressed with the restructuring of the Community Services Unit and the establishment of the Prevention and Support Team.

There were also areas where progress was behind target which would be addressed by the newly formed Team. The Homelessness Team was now the Prevention and Support Team with the emphasis on preventing homelessness rather than the present reactive team. The development of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme and the Housing Advice Team would also have a positive impact on the Homelessness Strategy.

However, there were a number of areas where significant progress had been made e.g. mediation, elimination of the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families, development of furnished tenancies. Ongoing monitoring was being undertaken to ensure that the progress was sustained.

Discussion ensued on the report. The following points were raised/clarified:-

- The Team was now fully staffed and undertaken rigorous training.
- There was a campaign being undertaken to change people's preconceived ideas/myths of a "homeless" person.
- Since April, 2004 to 25<sup>th</sup> February, 2005, 2,027 homeless people had presented themselves of which 1,000 had been given advice and a full investigation of 1,022. Full duty had been fulfilled to 520.
- Homeless applicants were subject to a very rigorous procedure.
- There were occasions where placements had to be made outside of the Borough as the Authority had no direct access accommodation but not until every possibility had been tried.

Some overnight accommodation had been developed, 10 units across the Borough and also 30 units of interim accommodation where people were placed whilst undertaking investigation as to whether the Authority had a duty to them. There were also 14 units for those suffering from domestic violence. If all those were full and a single person presented themselves, an out of Borough placement would be sought.

- The Authority was working with the Rotherham Homelessness Project that was in the process of developing the White Swan for some form of direct access provision.

Resolved:- That the report be received and the progress to date against the action plan be noted.

### **138. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE INDICATIVE ALMO INSPECTION AND THE ALMO EXCELLENCE PLAN**

The Service Improvement Manager submitted a report on the recommendations from the Indicative ALMO Inspection Report which had been included in the ALMO Excellence Plan to drive forward and monitor the service improvement of housing management and repairs services into an ALMO structure. The objective was to deliver an excellent customer service through Neighbourhood Management and was divided into 5 key points:-

- ALMO be established and in place by 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2005
- Tenants were at the heart of the decision process and played a principal role in shaping future service delivery
- Deliver a continuously improving, high performing, customer focused service
- The ALMO had a long term strategy for the delivery of neighbourhood management beyond the delivery of Decent Homes
- Ensuring the services demonstrated value for money to customers through the application of competition and procurement.

Since January work had been undertaken as part of the Performance Management Framework to ensure that critical tasks had been delivered. The Excellence Plan was considered by the ALMO Board on a weekly basis which consisted of key Task Managers and Heads of Service that also fed into the Programme Area Management Team. Also work had been carried out on the critical task co-ordinating framework where, on a daily basis, the tasks had been monitored and on a weekly basis fed back to the Cabinet Member of Housing and Environmental Services, the Executive Director of Neighbourhoods and the Chief Executive so there was scrutiny and challenge on all the tasks.

Within the Plan there were a number of dates that would be delivered by the end of March the majority of which were on target.

After April the ALMO Excellence Plan would look different as it would be



split into 2 parts, 1 that would belong to the ALMO to deliver and the other retained functions for the Council to deliver on.

Discussion ensued on the role of the Scrutiny Panel and the ALMO and the need to find the right mechanism.

Resolved:- That the ALMO Excellence Plan be noted.

### **139. 3RD QUARTER PERFORMANCE REPORT 2004/05**

The Performance Champion submitted the Programme Area's performance monitoring report for the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2004/05.

At the end of the quarter, 40 (89%) Key Performance Indicators were achieving their control target with action in place to ensure all the year end targets were achieved. 5 (11%) were not achieving their quarterly control targets. At the same stage last year, 76% of the Indicators were on target. The Local Public Service Agreement targets were all on target, Neighbourhoods being the only Programme Area to do so.

The area of significant improvement in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter related to Neighbourhoods' Local Public Service Agreement targets. 2 performance clinics during the quarter had been held to ensure that all the repairs Indicators were improved and were now back on target.

The latest 2003/04 quartile data was released by the Audit Commission in January, 2005, which provided a more reliable picture of how performance compared with the best authorities. Performance across the country was continually improving and encouraging that the Programme Area was maintaining pace with the top 25%. When compared to the new All England figures, 6 Indicators were in the top quartile, compared to 5 in the last quarter. The Indicator relating to rent collection had moved into the top quartile.

A comprehensive Learning and Development Plan had been developed to ensure that the ALMO made a positive contribution to the Council's priorities from day 1. As such, the Plan had a key role to play in terms of risk management and providing sufficient insurance against potential dips in performance.

Resolved:- That the report and progress made be noted.

### **140. CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

The Panel noted the decisions made under delegated powers by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Environmental Services held on 31<sup>st</sup> January, 14<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2005.

Resolved:- (1) That the Panel receive a report on the progress of the

Neighbourhoods restructure (Minute No. 154 of 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2005 refers).

(2) That the Panel receive a report on the Redevelopment Proposals for the Sheltered Housing Schemes (Minute No. 180 of 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2005, refers), with Members of the Social and Community Support Scrutiny Panel invited for this item.

**141. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR CLIENTS REVIEW**

The Chairman reported that a review was to be undertaken entitled "Anti-Social Behaviour Clients". Nominations were sought to be part of the review group.

Resolved:- That Councillors Atkin, Nightingale and P. A. Russell take part in the above review.

**142. ESTATE REGENERATION REVIEW**

The Chairman reported that the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel was currently undertaking a review on estate regeneration and had extended an invitation to the Scrutiny Panel to nominate a representative to join the review group because of the crosscutting nature of the subject.

Resolved:- That the invitation be not accepted.

**143. ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL**

The minutes of the meetings held on 15<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> February and 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2005, were noted.

**144. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ACTION GROUP**

The minutes of the meeting of the Members' Sustainable Development Group, attended by Councillors Wyatt (in the Chair), Hall and Kaye, held on 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2005, were noted.

**145. PERFORMANCE AND SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE**

The minutes of the Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee held on 11<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> February, 2005, were noted.

Discussion took place on Minute No. 107 (Frequency of Future Scrutiny Panel Meetings). It was felt that the meetings should remain on a monthly basis.

Resolved:- That the Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee be informed that the Environment Scrutiny Panel wished to remain with monthly meetings.