

BRIEFING	TO:	Improving Places Select Commission
	DATE:	19 December 2019
	LEAD OFFICER:	Janet Spurling Governance Advisor, Assistant Chief Executive's Directorate 01709 254421
	TITLE:	Outcomes from Workshop on Area Housing Panels Review

1. Background

- 1.1** On 24 October a sub-group of Members of the Improving Places Select Commission (IPSC) undertook a focused workshop session to consider emerging proposals for Area Housing Panels from 2020-21.
- 1.2** Cllrs Mallinder (Chair), Jepson, Jones, McNeely, Reeder and Sansome and Mrs Mary Jacques and Mrs Wendy Birch (Co-optees from RotherFed) participated in the review session.
- 1.3** Cllr Beck (Cabinet Member for Housing) introduced a briefing paper and outlined the emerging proposals from the consultation. The importance of the customer voice was reiterated. The Council held accreditation from Tpas (tenant engagement specialists) and was seen as an exemplar of good practice for its tenant engagement work.
- 1.4** The following officers were also in attendance to provide further information for IPSC:
- Paul Walsh, Head of Housing Operational Services
 - Asim Munir, Tenant Involvement Co-ordinator
 - Lyndsey Mould, Housing Operations Manager
 - Jessica Sarracco, Tenant Involvement Officer

2. Key Issues

- 2.1** The briefing paper provided an overview of the following issues:
- Focus of the review and response to the consultation
 - Future tenant engagement geography and offer
 - Ward pilots
 - Future budget arrangements
 - Budget roll forward proposal
 - Budget and project governances
- 2.2** The Head of Housing Operational Services gave a presentation highlighting key issues in the development of the new model. It was reiterated that the aim was to move towards a more agile way of engagement, which was easily recognisable to tenants whilst reflecting ward needs. Three ward pilots testing different ways of working had commenced in September 2019. Examples of projects were outlined to the sub-group.
- 2.3** The funding model from 2020-21 would be based on a base budget of £4,000, with a further budget top up then being applied, based upon the percentage of Council homes

within the Ward, which was funded from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). There was a proposal for an option to roll forward unspent budget (within a four year cycle) and there was scope to align/match fund from other sources.

3. Key Points Discussed

- 3.1** The following is a summary of the main issues discussed during the workshop.
- Role of Elected Members – providing a community leadership role and ensuring tenants' voice is reflected.
 - Consultation responses and how these were reflected in the emerging proposals.
 - The range of options for receiving bids for funding including on line applications as well as more 'traditional' methods. Ward Housing Hubs would be flexible to ward needs – there would be different models of engagement, including online platforms, ward walkabouts, meetings etc. Area panels would cease to operate, to be replaced by Ward Housing Hubs.
 - Opportunities for cross ward working - however, focus should be on ward priorities – closely aligned to neighbourhood working.
 - The annual review of housing stock – funding would be adjusted annually reflecting stock numbers in the Ward.
 - Steps to encourage people's involvement – particularly in areas where there has been low engagement and there has been a struggle to identify projects or spend money. It was noted that there was a need to engage with a greater number of tenants who had not been previously engaged in Area Housing Panels.
 - RotherFed would remain principal first point of contact for tenant involvement.
 - Approval for projects would be made through support from ward councillors and tenants through the Ward Housing Hubs, supported by Council officers.
 - Reiteration that projects would align with ward priorities and would need to meet HRA funding criteria.
 - Clarity was sought about budgets and areas of spend. This would be project specific, but generally speaking funding for smaller scale projects could be accommodated within the Ward Housing budget, but larger scale projects would have to be funded through the Housing Capital Programme.
 - Customer access still to be further developed through digital channels, however with recognition that there may need to be other channels available for people who may have difficulty with digital access. Most younger tenants have access to the internet through mobile phone contracts. Free access to wifi was available in local libraries and was also being rolled out in some of the Housing neighbourhood centres.
 - Need to publicise the benefits of ward based working and successes. There was also a need to move swiftly on projects, with regular updates provided to ward members and groups on progress.
 - Awareness raising would take place with officers to update them of new

	<p>arrangements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process for conflict resolution was discussed, particularly in two member wards. Any issues arising would be considered by the Cabinet Member for Housing, as portfolio holder and Head of Housing Operational Services, as senior officer for tenant involvement and associated budget. • Closer working with Parish/Town Councils was welcomed; however, clarification was sought about how this would be facilitated.
3.2	In summary, the Chair thanked the officers and Cllr Beck for the briefing and concluded that Members were assured by the emerging proposals to disestablish the existing Area Housing Panels at the end of the 2019-20 financial year and replace these with 25 Ward Housing Hubs. The Housing Hubs would have an annual base budget of £4,000 per Ward, with the remainder of the annual budget provision being allocated to Wards, based upon the percentage of Council homes within each Ward.
3.3	The outline process for approval was noted as well as the proposed provision to roll the budget over should there be an underspend.
3.4	The timeline was also noted and that a report would be submitted to Cabinet in the near future.
4. Recommendations from the Workshop	
4.1	That the review process undertaken and consultation feedback received to date be noted.
4.2	That the emerging proposals for Ward Housing Hubs and the work to be undertaken to test this approach be noted.
4.3	That the emerging recommendations with regard to Ward Housing Hubs, future budget setting and management and project governance be noted.
4.4	That the comments from the workshop be fed back to OSMB as part of its pre-decision scrutiny of the new proposals.