

**IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION**  
**Tuesday 18 March 2025**

Present:- Councillor McKiernan (in the Chair); Councillors Adair, Ahmed, Baggaley, Beresford, C. Carter, Havard, Jackson, Jones, Mault, Rashid, Stables, Thorp, Tinsley and Williams.

Also in attendance were Mrs. K. Bacon and Mrs. M. Jacques (Co-optees – Rotherfed).

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Beck.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-  
<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

**50. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 11 FEBRUARY 2025**

**Resolved:-** That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2025 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

**51. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest to report.

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

The Chair advised that there were no members of the public or representatives of media organisations present at the meeting and there were no questions in respect of matters on the agenda.

**53. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The Chair advised that there were no items of business on the agenda that would require the exclusion of the press or public from the meeting.

**54. TENANTS SCRUTINY PANEL REVIEW - SUPPORTING NEW TENANTS**

Consideration was given to the report which set out the detail of the outcome of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel following a review of how the Council supported new tenants and if this was improving sustainability of tenancies.

The Chair welcomed:-

- Councillor Sarah Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing.
- James Clark, Assistant Director, Housing

- David Ramsden, Chair of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel
- Sandra Wardle, Housing Options Service Manager

to the meeting and invited officers to provide a summary of the findings of the review and the associated action plan to support delivery of the recommendations.

Councillor Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing, elaborated on how this review provided an ongoing opportunity for customers to work pro-actively with the Council, to look at various aspects of landlord service delivery from a customer perspective and to develop recommendations and actions for service improvement.

The review focused on the support offered by the Council supported by Rotherfed to new tenants with a view to improving the sustainability of tenancies.

By way of a powerpoint presentation Sandra Wardle, Housing Options Service Manager, outlined:-

- The remit of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel - To consider various aspects of landlord service delivery, from a customer perspective and to develop recommendations and actions for service improvement.
- The methodology for the review.
- Progress of the nine recommendations (Appendix 2 of the report).
- A – Affordability Meeting.
- B – Key Choices Description.
- C – Virtual Viewings Re-evaluation.
- D – Viewings for Vulnerable Tenants.
- E – Welcome Pack.
- F – Welcome Visit Feedback.
- G – Clarity around the Furnished Scheme.
- H – Furniture Scheme Extension.
- I – Measuring Sustainability.

A discussion and question and answer session ensued and the following issues were raised and clarified:-

- After a tenancy sign up how long would it take before a tenant received a welcome visit.

The service confirmed this was usually within the first two/three months when an Area Housing Officer would meet with new tenant. An earlier visit could be arranged if this was flagged as part of the tenancy sign up.

- Positively the service were listening to tenants and actions were either complete or on track. In terms of virtual viewings was this a video download or an officer using a camera.

The service confirmed all virtual videos were provided by an external provider with each individual property and filmed externally and internally to show facilities. The video was then download to a YouTube channel, which was then sent to a perspective tenant to look at with family and friends and any support worker.

- What was the average cost per property for providing virtual viewings and was this cost effective against face-to-face viewings.

The service confirmed the provider was paid a fixed sum each month regardless of how many videos were taken. An exercise was to shortly be undertaken looking at options for virtual viewings and whether to continue with the current provider or to bring this in-house, which could be more expensive.

Virtual viewings served a purpose and often agencies involved with a perspective tenant could view a property as to its suitability without having to go out and visit. It was purely weighing up the advantages/ disadvantages of the various options.

The service dealt with approximately 1200 lettings a year so it may not be cost effective to shift to in-person as opposed to virtual viewings. This was not only about officer time, but there could be an impact on void times and rent loss having to wait to arrange viewings. Whilst in person viewings were not discounted it was about the financial impact on the Council.

- Was it normal for the Void Team to be still involved following a welcome visit once a tenant had taken up occupancy.

Welcome visits were undertaken by the Area Housing Officer where a number of questions would be asked and any property snagging issues identified. These were then fed back to the Property Team to address. This meant the Void Team received information to rectify any issues even when a tenant was in place.

Every effort was made to achieve a standard and the service were always learning.

- The Welcome Pack contents what did it include and was there an opportunity to include information on signing up for bin collections, bulking items, neighbourhood and Ward newsletters and potentially Rothercard.

The Welcome Pack contained a variety of information and included a survey that could be submitted anonymously. Many new tenants who had been waiting for properties a long time often did not feel they could speak up and complain or raise issues at the Welcome Visit. The anonymous survey allowed them to provide honest feedback.

A copy of the Welcome Pack contents would be circulated to all Improving Places Select Commission Members.

- To what extent were there any complaints about the condition of a property following virtual viewings.

Feedback was positive with odd complaints, but nothing any different to any viewings in person.

- Examples of other Local Authorities who used virtual viewings and how quickly this facilitated their void turnaround times and, therefore, sped up their relet process were shared. Hull City Council used Neighbourhood Champions to provide valid locality information and facilitated video footage often while tenants were still in situ as this provided a sense of what the property looked like. Prospective tenants then knew what they were bidding for.

Service representatives confirmed that each and every property had either been viewed by a tenant via video or in person. It was not appropriate for a tenant to sign up to a property without them having some information about it.

The service had a statutory duty to manage demand and expectations and led to more sustainable tenancies. Area Housing Officers did provide some local information, but the borough also provided housing for people who were new to the area and work took place with them.

- Was there an opportunity for the property video to be uploaded before the bidding process. There were occasions where people moved further down the waiting list if a property they had bid on was then turned down. Perhaps having a more informed decision about whether to bid or not would save time, but in may need more investment in the first place.

The service acknowledged that to have a video beforehand could potentially save time. Unfortunately, some properties were often not in a good condition to show to prospective tenants and work was required to bring the property back up to standard. The option could not be ruled out and would be explored further, but it was all about re-let times.

To clarify the waiting list positions, potential tenants were allowed to bid and it was only if they refused two offers of accommodation they would move down. Their position did not change on the housing register after one offer and where a property was not deemed suitable, this did not count as a bid. Positions were looked at on case-by-case basis.

- Were there occasions where a tenancy was obtained and tenants were disappointed about the condition of walls etc.

The Chair of the review confirmed feedback had been mixed. Some tenants reported the condition was fair, not as bad as they thought or worse. Whilst a video did show the property, the actual condition was not seen until viewed in person.

Service representatives confirmed not all tenants left properties in good condition. It made void turnarounds very difficult when plaster needed repairing to all walls.

- What was the process if a property was found to have holes in the walls.

Service representatives explained properties were not let with holes in the walls. It was acknowledged that a video recording could not show the true quality of wall condition. The service did not redecorate properties so there could be occasions where tenants had wallpapered, stripped off old wallpaper and found the plaster had come off. Tenants needed to report where repairs were needed and this could be ordered. Plaster missing from walls could be hazardous.

- Was the Council recompensated where tenants left properties in poor condition.

Service representatives confirmed that where tenants owned money or damaged property any claim back would be managed through former tenant arrears. It was much more difficult to deal with when some tenants left the borough.

It was often difficult to enforce the tenancy agreement, but if a former tenant wanted to rejoin the housing register, they would automatically be barred if they were already known to the Council. prospective want to join register, be automatically barred if we know about them. Those tenants who had unpaid debt, caused damage or used anti-social behaviour were not let a property in the future.

- Some existing tenants had reported rising damp issues and the team had gone in and only plastered half the wall. This was very hard for tenants to get resolved and were often left weeks which was very distressing for residents.

Service representatives confirmed they were aware and hoped the situation was now much improved. Cabinet had approved the Repairs Fund and Decorating Allowance. Repairs were about balancing what was appropriate. Further investigation would take place and feedback would be provided.

- Did the Welcome Pack detail how tenants could join scrutiny groups and were their local Councillor details included.

Service representatives confirmed this information was now all included.

- Did the Welcome Pack also include a key or a fob to access any communal facilities where this was available. A recent tenant had confirmed they had not been aware that they could use a neighbourhood centre and had not been given access. This was a barrier for neighbourhood centre use.

Service representatives confirmed that on sign up all were details on how to access any neighbourhood/community facilities were provided. This was not information for the Welcome Pack as it did not apply to all tenants. The service apologised if this had not taken place for a tenant and this would be followed up.

- Was there a possibility of using software for the provision of floor plans for tenants.

This would be a good idea if this was possible, but access to the software was restricted. It would still require someone to attend, measure and map the property and then have to be built in the void process.

- Frustrations could occur and an example was provided of where a person did not have online access so was included on autobid, but was still not successful. Trust had been lost with Key Choices.

The service wished to support such situations so asked if details could be passed on so the appropriate support could be provided.

- Did the Council benchmark with other housing providers and following the welcome visits was there any learning which could support sustainability.

Service representatives confirmed void times performed on average around thirty-three/thirty-four days and by comparison Sheffield were around one hundred days.

In terms of tenancy sustainment very few tenants were evicted. This year there had been three and the Council performed well in that it

collected all its rent. There was a need to evaluate and reflect more after a six-to-twelve-month period and this was something that would be looked at.

As part of the review Rotherham was compared to other authorities and was in the top 25%.

- Potentially an evicted tenant who had intentionally damaged property had moved to sublet with another tenant further up a street. Should something like this be included in the tenancy agreements. Service representatives suggested specific information like this should be forward onto relevant officers for investigation.
- There were some reports of tenants encountering ongoing problems with damp and mould despite this being treated and the tenants then redecorating. Were tenants advised that properties had previously been affected when accepting tenancies.

This would be investigated. The service regularly updated damp proofing and insulation when properties became empty. Tenants should be advised of a property's history as a matter of course.

- Following the take up of new tenancies were there any occasions where neighbour properties were asked how tenancies were going.

Service representatives confirmed they did not consult with neighbouring residents about a Council tenancy. Neighbouring residents would only be consulted if they were reporting issues such as anti-social behaviour or things like untidy gardens.

- From experience it might be worth considering speaking to neighbours to resolve early issues.

Service representatives would note the suggestion and think about the implications.

Resolved:- (1) That thanks be forwarded to all those involved in the Tenant Scrutiny Panel for their hard work and support.

(2) That the presentation and the outcome of the Tenant Scrutiny Review, the actions proposed to deal with each recommendation and progress to date be noted.

(3) That a further report detailing progress be presented to Improving Places Select Commission in twelve months' time.

(4) That an email copy of the Welcome Pack to be circulated to all Members.

(5) That further information be provided on the treatment of damp and

mould in affected properties and an update on progress on virtual viewings when this was available.

**55. CLIMATE EMERGENCY ANNUAL REPORT 2025**

Further to Minute No. 123 of the meeting of Cabinet held on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2025 consideration was given to the report which provided an update on the Council's Climate Change activity for the previous year which were appended to the report covering the seven policy themes of Monitoring and Measurement; Energy; Housing; Transport; Waste; Built and Natural Environment; and Influence and Engagement. A theme covering Adaptation was subsequently added to the action plan to recognise the work to prepare for climate impacts and mitigate those already being felt throughout the Borough.

The Chair welcomed:-

- Councillor Robert Taylor, Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy
- Andrew Bramidge, Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment
- Louise Preston, Climate Change Manager

Councillor Taylor confirmed this report, therefore, provided coverage of the eight policy themes and in addition included a summary of the Council's progress on nature recovery action. A forward plan for 2025/26 was also proposed.

The Climate Change Manager described how the report had been split into themes and detailed a number of actions proposed within the 2025/26 action plan providing opportunities for monitoring and the development of a Net Zero 40 Strategy covering the wider Borough identifying further outcomes for delivery in future years.

An update was provided on the positive action that had taken place, notably development of the carbon footprint, total borough omissions, procurement of goods and services and understanding the carbon omissions for the transport fleet and buildings.

The report as submitted set out in detail against all the themes, but further information was provided on the trialling of Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) by the Council in ten of its existing ICE vehicles over the last eleven months which had proven to be successful. Whilst the trial was confirmed as a suitable solution to reduce emissions of the Council's fleet with minimal service disruption, this was not a long-term solution to reduce the carbon footprint.

Housing Services were also continuing to administer the installation of energy efficiency measures to properties which was being well received. However, given the positive feedback received on the East Herringthorpe



homes, the Council had also included a 'net zero ready' standard within its specifications for all future newbuild Council homes delivered as part of the current Housing Delivery Programme.

Engagement and community engagement activity was taking place with local residents who were encouraged to take up grants and look at climate-based actions to reduce waste and save money.

Public Health and Adult Care have been involved in a trial to introduce climate change mitigation and adaptation into service plans. The next phase of this work which included formalising documentation and training Property and Facilities Services, have been included in the 2025/26 Action Plan.

A number of challenges were still being faced. The Council had not seen as greater reduction in carbon emissions and the heat network had not been delivered. A lot of work had been undertaken on the decarbonisation of buildings, but there remained the reliance on electricity. Solar would be used on buildings where it could, and the risks would be mitigated as much as possible.

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board had suggested that recommendations focus on outcomes of the overall climate change programme and provide a number of key performance indicators that could be better monitored moving forward and improve delivery information to residents, including:-

- Progress towards a net zero Borough by 2040.
- An increase in access to publicly available EV charge points.
- Healthier, warmer social homes.
- Improved recycling and waste management.

Consideration would also be given to all engagement opportunities and would link in with the Children's Capital of Culture Programme and development into Rotherham Show.

Every effort would be made to engage residents and business to support the 2040 Strategy transition to net zero.

A discussion and question and answer session ensued and the following issues were raised and clarified:-

- The possibility of establishing EV charging points within three miles and the fuel usage of cars across the region.

The Climate Change Manager confirmed data provided was not always easy to use. Part of work being undertaken on the back of Government fundings was to try and put provision in place before it was needed on the development of EV chargers. Every effort was being made to prioritise locations where feasibly chargers could be

put in. This was likely to expand as demand increased.

- Was the Council actively contacting business to include EV charging and were there any incentives available.

The Council's spend funding focus was on Council hubs, but over the year had reached outwards to engage with EV groups. In a lot of cases EV chargers provided a financial benefit to include. Currently there was a problem with EV charges and their equipment getting stolen.

- Page 87 of the report referred to four potential sites having been identified for habitat banking, but did not identify where the sites were.

Part of the biodiversity net gain was to receive sums into a pot to improve biodiversity at certain sites to improve and restore nature. Specific details of locations of the sites would be made available.

- Rotherham was ahead of the game with the installation of electrical charges but were there plans for all new properties to be more self-sufficient with solar panels and heat pumps. Would 2040 bring everyone together across the Borough and not just the Council.

The Strategic Director referred to the new NPPF management policies, where it was expected that some targets would be higher for builders to become net zero on new developments. There were limited powers for Local Authorities to hold developers to account.

- Reference was made to a Doncaster company that ensuring EV chargers, solar panels etc. were including as part of their developments.
- Were there any businesses asking for specific support, how many and what support could be provided.

The Climate Change Manager confirmed there was an increase in business requests. Since the launch of the Charter last year support was available to businesses or other organisations to see how they could decarbonate and take action. Requests for direct support was ad hoc at the moment, but information was available via RIDO for specific support.

- More recently there had been an increase in solar farm requests covering green belt land in the area. Was the Planning Service working with them to explore other options rather than green belt land. Other countries used railways, central reservations and car parks so were there alternative option locations that could be shared. Perhaps soil samples should be taken first before any formal consultation. There was also an increase in battery storage

requests in the area and given the fire in Liverpool were there any improved legislation to mitigate thermal runaway problems.

The Cabinet Member explained there were two different types of applications. The national decisions were outside of the local remit, but did consult with Local Planning Authorities as statutory consultees. Rotherham would be contributing to any applications which, of course, would be decided by Government. The smaller local schemes would form part of the normal planning process, and the decision made locally.

Thermal runways were developing situations. There was uncertainty with new technologies, and it was a learning experience.

- Disposal of lithium across the U.K. was an issue with them not being disposed of properly. Was there any opportunity to raise awareness for lithium product disposal locally.

This was a good point made, with no serious incidents locally. This was an opportunity to share information, and it was confirmed that the South Yorkshire Fire Authority were looking at this currently.

- Were there any plans for infrastructure for EV Chargers in areas where people had to park on the street.

This was being looked into. There were a few challenges in Rotherham with potentially trailing cables and there was specific legislation as to what could be included in the public highway. A working group was looking at this to see how this could be developed.

- How confident was the service in managing to get the private sector to deliver the district heating project.

This was market driven and outside the Council's control. It was a deliverable project, but it was uncertain when it would be delivered and how.

- Did the service have a Plan B?

More investigative work would take place. Some buildings were challenging like the Town Hall where technology may not yet be ready. Alternative solutions may have to be considered. No surveys have yet been undertaken.

- The delivery of the Herringthorpe properties was very much welcomed, but with the cancellation of some delivery elements due to cost, was other sites being considered.

Having discussed the issues with Housing Services development of

all the buildings was not feasible. There was no issue with the specific site. Options were already being considered and being fed into the net zero forward plan. The main difference was to be net zero ready. Investigations were continuing.

- Were there any plans around the existing Council house portfolio and making this energy efficient.

The Council was committed to the delivery of Band C properties with them being energy efficient for residents and more carbon effective. There were no other plans beyond that at this stage.

- Hydrogen technology within the transport fleet was welcomed, but this was not a long-term solution. There may be problems with EV transport companies not delivering if the complete infrastructure was not available or insurance was not available for drivers to take vehicles home. It was simply not cost effective and could be a barrier to taking the target forward. It was likely that there was too much focus on EV network and less attention being given to newer technologies.

The Climate Change Manager confirmed Rotherham had no hydrogen infrastructure, but was unable to comment if this would evolve in the future. However, it was noted the Advanced Manufacturing Park had hydrogen in place.

All options were being considered for the delivery of electric vehicles whilst making sure this was reasonable for the fleet and budget.

- If there was a request by a company to test new technology, would this be considered.

The Council would be receptive and consider the opportunity once it had been fully analysed.

- What kind of vehicles were using Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil and were there any specific requirements for fuelling these vehicles.

The transition to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) was easy to manage as only a small change to vehicles was needed in the form of filter replacements.

Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) had been used in minibuses. The Cabinet had approved the replacement of the fleet of refuse vehicles. There were no plans to purchase electric vehicles at this stage as they were double the cost of diesel vehicles. The expansion of Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) would be explored further.

- Was localised electricity generation being looked at such as solar

panels on car parks and on industrial sites.

The Local Area Energy Plan set out in detail information in order to see spatially what sites were available and what energy demand there was in future. Key areas would be identified for localised energy generation and opportunities explored further in due course. The final output for producing this type of data was 2027.

- Would this be included in Climate report.

Further options would be included within a separate report to Cabinet and then form an action as part of the Annual Climate Change report.

- Was there information available for residents for when wished to dispose or decommission solar panels in Rotherham to ensure they were disposed of in a responsible way.

It was assumed these would need to be disposed of through household recycling centres. Consideration would be given as to how to get this information out to residents.

- Had there been any consideration to EV charging for on-street parking. Portsmouth had been doing this kind of thing for a number of years.

The service were in discussion with a number of local authorities some of whom had rolled out trials of a gully system. Further research would be made into the system used in Portsmouth.

Resolved:- (1) That the Cabinet report approving the Climate Change Action Plan in Appendix 2 and the key achievements and opportunities summarised in Appendix 1 and Section 2 of this report be noted.

(2) That further information be provided on the sites for biodiversity habitable banking and for this to be shared with the Improving Places Select Commission.

(3) That consideration be given to the safe disposal of lithium and how guidance could be provided to residents.

**56. IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION - WORK PROGRAMME 2024 - 2025**

The Governance Manager introduced the work programme report and noted that the initial scoping information for the School Road Safety Working Group was being sought and collated. Similar work was also being undertaken by officers in another area within the Council with discussions taking place to determine how this could be linked to avoid duplication of work.

It was also noted that in terms of the Grass Cutting and Roads Maintenance Review the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board had asked for an additional meeting with the Assistant Director responsible prior to the group progressing.

Any further suggestions/ideas for review work were welcomed, which would not be picked up as part of the ongoing reviews. Suggestions included:-

- Collection of litter on roundabouts before the grass growing season.
- Maintenance of trees and bushes on borough gateways, including remediation for bushes that seem to attract and collect litter.
- A review of selective licensing.

Suggestions would be looked at and where appropriate added to the Work Programme going forward.

Resolved:- (1) That the update on the Work Programme be received and noted.

(2) That the Governance Manager be authorised to make any required changes to the work programme in consultation with the Chair/Vice Chair and reporting any such changes back at the next meeting for endorsement.

## **57. URGENT BUSINESS**

The Chair advised that there were no urgent items of business requiring the Commission's consideration.