

**SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL**

**Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee**

**Meeting held 11 September 2012**

**PRESENT:** Councillors Chris Weldon (Chair), Penny Baker (Deputy Chair), Nikki Bond, Simon Clement-Jones, Richard Crowther, Jayne Dunn, Denise Fox, Martin Lawton, Shaffaq Mohammed and Chris Rosling-Josephs

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**1. WELCOME AND HOUSEKEEPING ARRANGEMENTS**

1.1 The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and outlined basic housekeeping and fire safety arrangements.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

2.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Barker, Sheila Constance and Peter Rippon.

**3. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

3.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

**4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

4.1 Members declared the following personal interests in Item 7 on the agenda – Lettings Policy Review:-

- Councillor Denise Fox – Member of the Sheffield Homes South East Area Board;
- Councillor Chris Rosling-Josephs – Member of the Sheffield Homes South East Area Board;
- Councillor Richard Crowther – Member of the Sheffield Homes North West Area Board; and
- Councillor Jayne Dunn – Member of the Sheffield Homes North West Area Board.

**5. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

5.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee held on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2012, were approved as a correct record.

## **6. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS**

6.1 Martin Brighton raised the following questions and responses were provided as follows:-

- (a) Could the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee arrange for the answers to all the questions he raised at the meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2012, to be included in the minutes?

The Chair apologised that Mr Brighton had not received answers to all the four questions raised at the last meeting, and requested that relevant officers respond to Mr Brighton at the earliest possible opportunity. The Committee Secretary added that responses to questions raised by members of the public, which were not answered at meetings, would, at the questioner's request, be incorporated on the Council website with the agenda papers for the Committee's next meeting.

- (b) Further to the submission of source discs for the Multiple Indexes of Deprivation at the Committee's last meeting, and the consequent responses provided at Council and Cabinet meetings, which indicated that such information was opinion and not fact, why was the Council allowed to dispute such facts and what could this Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee suggest in terms of action to put right what was done wrong and to prevent a repeat of this happening again?

The Chair stated that justification of the responses provided at the Council and Cabinet meetings were not a matter for this Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee to deal with, but he would ensure that relevant officers were made aware of his comments.

- (c) Could the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee please take note that, in his opinion, a two-tier rent system was not acceptable to tenants, following the issue of early introduction of rent conversions?

The Chair stated that the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee would bear this in mind.

6.2 Mick Watts referred to the monitoring report on the Housing Revenue Account, which was considered by the Cabinet at its last meeting, indicating that there was reference to a £1 million underspend, and questioned why this was the case as he believed that the Council should be allocating as much as possible from its budget?

Richard Palmer stated that he would provide a written response on this issue to Mr Watts.

## **7. LETTINGS POLICY REVIEW**

### **7.1 Choice Based Lettings**

7.1.1 Sharon Schonborn, Allocation Policy Review Manager, Communities Portfolio, gave a presentation on the subject of Choice Based Lettings.

7.1.2 Members of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee raised a number of questions and the following responses were provided:-

- The new ICT system would not only produce cost savings and efficiencies, but would also provide other benefits, such as full-site language conversion, an amended website which would be easier to navigate and for customers to manage their own applications. The new system, which was currently used by a number of other local authorities, had proved to be very beneficial.
- Support would be put in place for those people who either struggled with, or had no access to ICT facilities. They would still be able to submit bids for properties using the phone, mobile, digital TV or internet. In addition to this, the new ICT system included a facility for building up a profile in terms of tenants' needs, and would be able to submit a bid automatically, on their behalf, when a suitable property became available. It was envisaged that due to the improvements the new ICT system would bring, this would free up resources for officers to provide assistance for those tenants who struggled with, or did not have access to ICT facilities.
- As part of the Communications Strategy, every tenant would receive details of the new system in writing. Information would also be available electronically.

7.1.3 RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee:-

- (a) notes the information contained in the paper now submitted, together with information reported as part of the presentation and the responses provided to the questions raised; and
- (b) Requests officers to (i) pursue Option 1 – Keep Choice Based Lettings as the advertising and matching mechanism, using the new ICT system to manage the process more effectively, and for officers to commence working on developing this option with immediate effect and (ii) attend a future meeting of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee to report in more detail on the Communications Strategy.

### **7.2 Bidding**

7.2.1 Sharon Schonborn gave a presentation on the subject of Bidding.

7.2.2 Members of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee raised a number of questions and the following responses were provided:-

- At the present time, there was nothing in the Lettings Policy to say that those tenants who had refused a large number of offers should be penalised. Tenants were able to bid based on their waiting time, therefore there were no limits in terms of the number of bids they could make.
- Findings from other local authorities had indicated that limiting the number of bids had not brought any major problems. It had made tenants more focused in terms of their bids.
- Offers had not included details of penalties in this paper, but would bring other suggestions to the Committee's Policy Development meeting to be held on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2012, which will be included in Banding and Registration documents for this Committee's consideration at a future meeting.
- In terms of penalties for tenants who refuse a number of properties under the new Policy, whilst there were to be further discussions on this issue, one possibility would be to reduce their priority.

7.2.3 RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee:-

- (a) notes the information contained in the paper now submitted, and the information as part of the presentation and the responses provided to the questions raised; and
- (b) requests officers to pursue Option 3 – Extend the restriction to apply to all applicants, therefore restricting all applicants to three bids per cycle; retain the facility for staff to place additional bids, where necessary, for priority applicants in order to fulfil the Council's duty to applicants with urgent housing needs.

### 7.3 **Adaptations**

7.3.1 Sharon Schonborn gave a presentation on the subject of Adaptations.

7.3.2 Members of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee raised a number of questions and the following responses were provided:-

- When tenants were bidding for properties that had been adapted, consideration would be given to the needs of all the applicant's family members.
- There were approximately 5,000 properties in the City which had been the subject of some level of adaptations, with the vast majority being at such a level that could easily be amended or removed. There were no

records to indicate where all these properties were. Approximately 200 of these properties had received major adaptations and the location of such properties was known to Sheffield Homes. The introduction of the new ICT system should provide an improved level of detail in terms of advertising the location/features of properties which had been adapted.

- Under the new proposed Policy, heavily adapted properties could be taken out of the Choice Based Lettings system, with that flexibility worked into the wording.
- The newly improved website would not only be easier to navigate, but would contain more details to enable tenants to make more informed choices.
- Properties that had been adapted would be let in their present condition, but arrangements may have to be made to amend or remove any adaptations if they were proving difficult to let. Such properties would be dealt with on a case by case basis.
- Any adaptations undertaken to properties have to be agreed by the landlord.

7.3.3 RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee:-

- (a) notes the information contained in the paper now submitted, together with information reported as part of the presentation and the responses provided to the questions raised; and
- (b) requests officers to (i) pursue Option 2 – Retain and develop the adapted features already in the Policy, building in the additional flexibility to take highly adapted properties out of Choice Based Lettings and match manually, and (ii) (A) include reference in the Policy to the needs of tenants with children in the household who have disabilities, and (B) develop the register by taking steps to identify the locations of those properties which had received adaptations, including the nature of such adaptations, and to report back on both these issues at the Committee's Policy Development meeting to be held on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

## **8. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR REVIEW**

- 8.1 Simon Mitchell, Safer Neighbourhood Manager, gave a presentation on the Anti-Social Behaviour Review, focussing on the establishment of the Partner Resource Allocation Meeting (PRAM) which, it was hoped, would provide a more co-ordinated way of dealing with ASB.
- 8.2 Mr Mitchell referred to the present levels, and the public perceptions, of anti-social behaviour (ASB) together with the good examples of partnership working, but reported on a number of important gaps in terms of how vulnerable people were dealt with, how intelligence was dealt with, issues

regarding leadership and accountability, and the gaps in terms of strategy and delivery. He reported on the aims and objectives of the PRAM, together with the potential impact it would have in terms of how the relevant partners dealt with ASB in the City.

8.3 Members of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee raised a number of questions and the following responses were provided:-

- Whilst it was accepted that the Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs) operated differently, with some being more effective than others, it was not the intention that the PRAM would replace the NAGs. It would be the responsibility of each Safer Neighbourhood Officer to devise a procedure for dealing with the priorities as identified by the PRAM.
- It was expected that the PRAM would identify any priorities that had not been picked up by the NAGs. One of the failures of the NAGs was that there was no formal record of any minutes/actions following meetings, therefore it had been identified that there was a need for a system to identify where there were collective risks. It was hoped that the PRAM would be the relevant body to identify such risks and request the relevant bodies to resolve such problems.
- Elected Members were requested to get involved in the PRAM process through their local Safer Neighbourhood Officer. The PRAM would task such Officers and it was expected that the Officers would devise the most effective way of keeping any relevant partners together and sharing information.
- Elected Members would still be encouraged to contact their local Safer Neighbourhood Officer or Area Inspector to report problems of ASB under the PRAM process.
- The NAGs would continue to deal with issues in their respective Community Assembly areas, whereas the PRAM would be looking at City-wide issues. Agencies would still be expected to deal with issues first, but if they were not able to for any reason, they would refer them to the relevant NAG.
- Issues relating to noise nuisance were part of the Integrated Services and there was a need for a clear steer as to how the Police could use its resources in terms of dealing with noise nuisance and other forms of ASB. Plans were being made to equip front-line officers in the City to be able to deal with issues such as noise nuisance, but there was a need to ensure that the PRAM was established first. A pilot scheme had been planned in terms of how the Police and other agencies would deal with noise nuisance and dog fouling.
- As part of the PRAM process, there would be efforts to strengthen links with the Multi Agency Support Teams (MASTs). It was hoped that the PRAM would be able to identify specific problems in terms of ASB in schools.

- It was planned that reports of anti-social behaviour would be sent to relevant Ward Councillors.
- Whilst it had been a slow process in terms of engaging the Registered Social Landlords due to the high numbers, the South Yorkshire Housing Association had expressed an interest to become part of the PRAM process and it was hoped that other such landlords would also engage in the process within time.

8.4 RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee:-

- (a) notes the information reported as part of the presentation, together with the responses provided to the questions raised;
- (b) expresses its thanks to Simon Mitchell and Inspector Paul McCurry for the presentation now made; and
- (c) requests that a report on the progress of the Partner Resource Allocation Meeting be submitted to a meeting of the Committee in six months' time.

**9. POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER/POLICE AND CRIME PANEL**

9.1 The Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee received and noted a report of the Executive Director, Communities Portfolio, containing details of the forthcoming changes to the policing governance landscape through the Police and Crime Commissioner and Police and Crime Panel, together with details of Sheffield's response to the reforms.

**10. POLICY UPDATE**

10.1 The Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee received and noted a report of the Scrutiny Policy Officer providing an update on policy changes introduced by the Government during July and August 2012.

**11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

11.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee would be held on Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> November 2012, at 2.00 pm in the Town Hall.