

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 26 March 2014

PRESENT: Councillors Chris Weldon (Chair), Penny Baker (Deputy Chair), David Barker, Simon Clement-Jones, Sheila Constance, Richard Crowther, Denise Fox, Qurban Hussain, Roy Munn, Jillian Creasy (Substitute Member).

Tenants' Representatives

Gillian Ashberry, Robin Clarke and Tracey Kerrigan

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sioned-Mair Richards, Rob Murphy and Philip Wood. Councillor Jillian Creasy attended as a substitute for Councillor Rob Murphy.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

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

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interests.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 30th January 2014, were approved as a correct record.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 There were no petitions received or public questions submitted.

6. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ALLOCATIONS POLICY

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Assistant Director, Council Housing Service, which provided an update on the implementation of the new Allocations Policy. The report was presented by Jasper South, Assistant Director, Council Housing Service, who made particular reference to the seven key issues involved and progress made in addressing these.

6.2 Members made various comments and asked a number of questions, to which responses were provided as follows:-

- A full customer satisfaction survey was to be completed in the next four

weeks, but anecdotal evidence suggested that the implementation of the new policy had been well received. It was early days to judge the effect on empty properties, as it was felt that the new policy was still in the settling down process. There had been an improvement in turnaround times but a drop in demand for three-bedroomed properties had been noticed which, it was felt, was due to the implementation of the Under-Occupancy Welfare Reform provisions (Bedroom Tax).

- It appeared that no day to day problems were being caused by the IT (Information Technology) which was being used to support the new policy.
- It was accepted that the risks associated with implementation needed to be managed carefully and measures were being put in place to monitor these on a monthly basis.
- All sheltered accommodation was allocated for those aged over 60 and no changes were planned in this respect.
- The policy allowed for medical need to be assessed and attempts were made to ensure that appropriate offers of accommodation were made to those with particular requirements. It should be borne in mind though, that the Council had to work with the housing stock available, so it might not be possible to locate the elderly and disabled near to their family or support networks. Having said that, efforts were always made to find the best match possible in terms of accommodation and area. It should also be noted that there was a budget for adaptations where appropriate.

6.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Jasper South for his contribution to the meeting;
- (b) notes the contents of the report and the responses to questions;
- (c) recognises that the Implementation of the Allocations Policy is at an early stage; and
- (d) requests that:-
 - (i) an update report on the Implementation of the Allocations Policy be presented to the Committee in 6 months' time, to include examples of how the associated risks had been managed; and
 - (ii) local tenant representatives, who had been involved in the consultation process, be invited to the Committee meeting at which the above update report was to be presented.

7. SOCIAL HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

7.1 The Committee received a report of the Interim Director of Council Housing which

provided Members with details of the new contract for Repairs and Maintenance Services to tenants' homes, which had been agreed between the Council and Kier Services and which would start on 1st April 2014, and run for 3 years (with the option to extend by up to 2 more years). The report was presented by Janet Sharpe, Interim Director of Council Housing, who referred to the procurement process, the consultation involved and the aims of the contract.

7.2 Members made various comments and asked a number of questions, to which responses were provided as follows:-

- It was important to ensure value for money but not compromise on quality. A target of 5% efficiency savings had been set but this would not be achieved at the expense of the quality of the service.
- There would only be marginal savings with the 5 years plus 2 years option, so 3 years plus 2 years had been agreed as the duration of the contract.
- There were 6/700 Council officers working within the contract and the day to day workers would transfer to Kier under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE). All the submitting contractors were large national organisations who had previously worked in Sheffield, but Kier had management in place which would create stability for the workforce.
- Issues such as multiple visits for repairs, the empowering of operatives and dealing with more difficult repairs were intended to be addressed in the contract. This would be achieved by creating a multi-tasking workforce with the appropriate skills and tools, improved analysis, and the monitoring of salary and bonus arrangements using key performance indicators. It was intended to move to a salary system only over the next 3 years to support a cultural change from a system where the bonus scheme reflected the number of visits to a property. The aim was to have a more modernised workforce to the benefit of customers.
- The intention was to ensure that planned work was done whilst achieving the best value for money. The number of visits to complete a repair was proving to be a barrier, so the approval process was being looked at to see how far operatives could make their own decisions. Technology was being used to achieve this, but it was appreciated that this change would take time, as systems which had been in place for ten years would have to be changed. Operatives would need to be confident as to their decisions and their managers would need to know that budgets were not being exceeded.
- The workforce should be trained to identify situations where asbestos was an issue, so that the Council's database of such locations could be updated. Under the new contract, Kier would procure responsive skills to deal with asbestos in a more flexible manner.
- In relation to adaptations, it was felt that a more holistic approach was

required with regard to both public and private works.

7.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Janet Sharpe for her contribution to the meeting; and
- (b) notes the contents of the report and the responses to questions.

8. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 2014/15

8.1 The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Communities, which provided a summary of the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan and the principles that underpinned it. The report was presented by Liam Duggan, HRA Business Plan Team Manager.

8.2 Members made various comments and asked a number of questions, to which responses were provided as follows:-

- Tenants had been involved in the process by means of a session at the Tenant Conference which had been held in October 2013. This provided direction as to the chosen path to be taken and how resources were to be focused.
- Right to Buy sales were presently at around 150 per annum, with approximately 100 new units per annum being built in the next six years. It was likely that more would be lost under Right to Buy and consideration needed to be given to this issue. It should be noted that the Council could only retain a small part of the proceeds of Right to Buy sales and officers were well aware of the need to reach a breakeven point.
- The reduction in the bulky waste collection service was funding increased action on flytipping in the form of increased education and enforcement activity. This had been trialled successfully in the East of the City and would next start to be rolled out to other parts of the City.
- The Decent Homes programme would finish within the next two weeks. The next programme would begin in April 2015. This would be an elemental replacement programme which would focus on properties omitted from the Decent Homes programme. There were no compensation arrangements in place for tenants who had undertaken their own improvements.
- In relation to the next investment programme, feedback from the service design workshops had revealed that tackling partial omissions was a lower tenant priority than properties which had had no Decent Homes work. There were actually 1,700 properties with no work having been done and these would now be prioritised, together with a parallel commitment that anyone moving into a home which was not up the Sheffield standard, would have any necessary works undertaken within 12 months. Partial omissions would then be next in line.

- The consultation on HRA usually started in September, with a session at the Tenant Conference in October, followed by a review in November and a January briefing on proposals, prior to these being presented to Cabinet.

8.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Liam Duggan for his contribution to the meeting;
- (b) notes the contents of the report and the responses to questions; and
- (c) requests that an update report be presented to the Committee following the Tenant Conference in October and that tenant representatives be invited to that Committee meeting.

9. WELFARE REFORM UPDATE

9.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the contents of the March 2014 Welfare Reform Update report.

10. RIGHT TO BUY

10.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the contents of the Right to Buy Update report.

11. SOUTH YORKSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

11.1 The Policy and Improvement Officer gave a brief update on the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel meeting, which was to be held on Monday, 31 March 2014. Councillors Sheila Constance and Sioned-Mair Richards would represent the Committee at the meeting. The Panel had asked which community safety topics the Committee would be looking at in 2014/15. The Committee had already requested that the Safer Communities Partnership and the Partnership Resource Allocation Meeting (PRAM) be included in its 2014/15 Work Programme, and a steer was sought as to whether there were other topics to make the Panel aware of.

11.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee requests that Anti-Social Behaviour be included in its 2014/15 Work Programme.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

12.1 The next meeting of the Committee will be held on a date to be arranged.