

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 8 October 2015

PRESENT: Councillors Tony Damms (Chair), Steve Ayriss (Deputy Chair), Penny Baker, David Barker, John Campbell, Keith Davis, Tony Downing, Denise Fox, Aodan Marken, Roy Munn, Richard Shaw, Zoe Sykes and Geoff Smith (Substitute Member)

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Richard Crowther, with Councillor Geoff Smith attending as his substitute.

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 interest.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10th September 2015, were approved as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of an apology at Item 1 (Apologies for Absence) for Councillor Zoe Sykes.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 In response to a series of questions from Alan Kewley regarding the operation of the Local Area Partnerships, the Safer and Sustainable Communities Partnership and the Partners and Communities Together (PACT) meetings, the following points were made:-

- The Local Area Partnership managers would be asked when it would be appropriate for a presentation to be made to the Committee.
- A range of Community Safety issues would be covered at the Committee's February 2016 meeting.
- Information on meetings of the Safer and Sustainable Communities Partnership was available on the Sheffield First website.

5.2 The Chair, Councillor Tony Damms, advised Mr Kewley that if he required a written response, he should put his questions in writing to the Policy and Improvement Officer.

6. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN - ANNUAL REVIEW

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Communities, which provided an annual review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan, giving details of progress against some of the key themes, as well as looking forward to this year's review and the identification of risks.

6.2 The report was introduced by Janet Sharpe (Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services) and presented by Liam Duggan (Manager, Housing Business Plan Team). The first half of the report considered each chapter of the Business Plan in turn and progress made over the last 3 years. Whilst the second half considered the impact of the Government's recently announced rent reductions, as set out in the Chancellor's Summer Budget, on the HRA and the Council's response to it.

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

- Discussions with officials from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) had revealed that proposals on security of tenure would be contained within the forthcoming Housing Bill. In some parts of the country there was already a preference for fixed term tenancies, for a period of say five years, which were not renewed if the property was not felt to be appropriate for the tenants. The Chancellor's Summer Budget announcement indicated a move away from lifetime tenancies and the Bill would need to be carefully considered once tabled. When the contents of the Bill had been considered, a further report would be presented to the Committee.
- In relation to income, the Council was heavily dependent on rents, both for properties and garages. This was supplemented by a small amount of service charges for such items as burglar alarms, furnished accommodation, the district heating charge and communal services for leaseholders. One opportunity for income generation would be to apply service charges to tenants.
- Officers had started to plan for the installation of photovoltaic panels on Council housing roofs, but the announcement by the Government, on 27th August, of its intention to dramatically reduce the subsidy (Feed in Tariff) rates payable for new photovoltaic installations, from January 2016, presented a significant viability risk to the Business Plan. Requests from tenants to have them installed through private firms were always agreed and officers were working with colleagues in Legal Services, with a view to developing a scheme for the installation of photovoltaic panels using private firms.
- The lifecycle for heating systems was 30 years and 15 years for boilers, although systems were sometimes declared obsolete when parts were no longer available.

- The Gateway Project had provided housing for 600 vulnerable individuals and families who were asylum seekers and the Government had asked the Council to take 50 families of Syrian refugees, with funding being provided.
- If damage to properties by previous tenants was wilful, a record of this was taken and attempts were made to recover the costs. It was hoped that the Housing+ operating model would improve the gathering of evidence in this regard.
- If Members wished to submit questions in advance of meetings of the Committee, this would be very helpful. Any Members wishing to do this should do so through the Policy and Improvement Officer.
- It was easier to house refugee families rather than individual asylum seekers and systems were in place to support them.
- The commitment to build 75 new Council homes, made in 2013, had been extended to 1000 new/replacement Council homes by 2019/20, which were to be let at both social and affordable rent. These included 184 new build by the Council and some acquired through developers.
- A contractor going into administration was a rare occurrence and checks were made to assess their viability.
- In relation to vacant properties, people were not allowed to bid for what they were not entitled to. However, if no bids were received, then a first come first served system operated, but affordability was a concern, as were Bedroom Tax issues.
- A representative from the Gateway Project could be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to explain its operation.

6.4 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Janet Sharpe and Liam Duggan for their contribution to the meeting;
- (b) notes the contents of the report and the responses to questions; and
- (c) requests that officers:-
 - (i) give consideration to devising an efficient, streamlined system for tenant, resident and leaseholder consultation; and
 - (ii) liaise with the Policy and Improvement Officer to arrange an appropriate time to present an item to the Committee on the detail of the forthcoming Housing and Planning Bill and its effects.

7. POLICE AND CRIME PANEL UPDATE

7.1 Councillor John Campbell reported on policing issues in South Yorkshire and informed the Committee that the trial of local policing in Barnsley had gone well, with the Police looking to introduce this throughout South Yorkshire. No figures were available on the cuts in Police Community Support Officers, but these would be shared equitably across South Yorkshire. South Yorkshire Police was also looking to improve its social media presence by using Twitter, Facebook, You Tube and Instagram.

7.2 The last meeting of the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel had considered the Police and Crime Commissioner's Draft Annual Report for 2014/15, which included coverage of the priority areas of reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, protecting vulnerable people and improving visible policing.

7.3 In response to Members' questions, the following points were made:-

- The Police and Crime Commissioner recognised there was a lack of confidence in the use of the '101' contact number and its effectiveness would be considered as part of the Community Safety item which the Committee was to consider at its February 2016 meeting.
- The Police and Crime Panel had not discussed in detail the availability of Police Officers to attend local community meetings, but it was felt that this would improve when the local policing teams had become established. Councillor Campbell agreed to raise this at the next meeting of the Police and Crime Panel and report back.
- An improved social media presence would provide people with an opportunity to contact the Police and for issues to be shared.
- The minutes of the Police and Crime Panel meetings were available on its website.

7.4 RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the information reported.

8. WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

8.1 The Committee received a report of the Policy and Improvement Officer which provided details of the Committee's draft Work Programme for 2015/16.

8.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) approves the draft Work Programme 2015/16 as detailed in the report; and
- (b) notes that:-
 - (i) the Challenge for Change item on Vacant Property Management would be dealt with by means of a written report;

- (ii) updates on the operation of Sheffield Money would be presented to the Committee in the form of written reports; and
- (iii) Councillor Aodan Marken would report to the Policy and Improvement Officer on the Prevent meeting at the appropriate time.

9. RIGHT TO BUY UPDATE

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

10. PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR UPDATE

- 10.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the contents of the Private Rented Sector Update report.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 11.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday, 3rd December 2015, at 4.00 pm, in the Town Hall.

(NOTE: This was subsequently changed to 4.15 pm on Thursday, 3rd December 2015, in the Town Hall.)