

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Thursday 4 February 2016 at 4.00 pm

**To be held at the Town Hall, Pinstone
Street, Sheffield, S1 2HH**

The Press and Public are Welcome to Attend

Membership

Councillors Tony Damms (Chair), Steve Ayris (Deputy Chair), Penny Baker, David Barker, John Campbell, Richard Crowther, Keith Davis, Tony Downing, Denise Fox, Aodan Marken, Roy Munn, Peter Rippon, Richard Shaw and Zoe Sykes

Substitute Members

In accordance with the Constitution, Substitute Members may be provided for the above Committee Members as and when required.

PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE MEETING

The Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee exercises an overview and scrutiny function in respect of the planning, development and monitoring of performance and delivery of services which aim to make Sheffield a safer, stronger and more sustainable city for all of its residents.

A copy of the agenda and reports is available on the Council's website at www.sheffield.gov.uk. You can also see the reports to be discussed at the meeting if you call at the First Point Reception, Town Hall, Pinstone Street entrance. The Reception is open between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm, Monday to Thursday and between 9.00 am and 4.45 pm. on Friday. You may not be allowed to see some reports because they contain confidential information. These items are usually marked * on the agenda.

Members of the public have the right to ask questions or submit petitions to Scrutiny Committee meetings and recording is allowed under the direction of the Chair. Please see the website or contact Democratic Services for further information regarding public questions and petitions and details of the Council's protocol on audio/visual recording and photography at council meetings.

Scrutiny Committee meetings are normally open to the public but sometimes the Committee may have to discuss an item in private. If this happens, you will be asked to leave. Any private items are normally left until last. If you would like to attend the meeting please report to the First Point Reception desk where you will be directed to the meeting room.

If you require any further information about this Scrutiny Committee, please contact Matthew Borland, Policy and Improvement Officer, on 0114 2735065 or email matthew.borland@sheffield.gov.uk.

FACILITIES

There are public toilets available, with wheelchair access, on the ground floor of the Town Hall. Induction loop facilities are available in meeting rooms.

Access for people with mobility difficulties can be obtained through the ramp on the side to the main Town Hall entrance.

**SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY AND POLICY
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE AGENDA
4 FEBRUARY 2016**

Order of Business

- 1. Welcome and Housekeeping Arrangements**
- 2. Apologies for Absence**
- 3. Exclusion of Public and Press**
To identify items where resolutions may be moved to exclude the press and public
- 4. Declarations of Interest**
Members to declare any interests they have in the business to be considered at the meeting
- 5. Minutes of Previous Meeting**
To approve the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3 December 2015
- 6. Public Questions and Petitions**
To receive any questions or petitions from members of the public
- 7. Community Safety**
Presentation by Detective Chief Inspector Simon Wanless, South Yorkshire Police and Maxine Stavrianakos, Head of Neighbourhood Intervention and Tenant Support, Sheffield City Council
- 8. Police and Crime Panel Update**
Councillor John Campbell to report
- 9. Work Programme 2015/16**
Report of the Policy and Improvement Officer

For Information Only

- 10. Written Responses to Public Questions**
Report of the Policy and Improvement Officer
- 11. Right to Buy Update**
Report of the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services
- 12. Update on the Private Rented Sector**
Report of the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services
- 13. Challenge for Change: Vacant Property Management**
Report of the Challenge for Change Tenant Scrutiny Group

14. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on Thursday 7 April 2016 at 4.00pm in the Town Hall

ADVICE TO MEMBERS ON DECLARING INTERESTS AT MEETINGS

If you are present at a meeting of the Council, of its executive or any committee of the executive, or of any committee, sub-committee, joint committee, or joint sub-committee of the authority, and you have a **Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI)** relating to any business that will be considered at the meeting, you must not:

- participate in any discussion of the business at the meeting, or if you become aware of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interest during the meeting, participate further in any discussion of the business, or
- participate in any vote or further vote taken on the matter at the meeting.

These prohibitions apply to any form of participation, including speaking as a member of the public.

You **must**:

- leave the room (in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct)
- make a verbal declaration of the existence and nature of any DPI at any meeting at which you are present at which an item of business which affects or relates to the subject matter of that interest is under consideration, at or before the consideration of the item of business or as soon as the interest becomes apparent.
- declare it to the meeting and notify the Council's Monitoring Officer within 28 days, if the DPI is not already registered.

If you have any of the following pecuniary interests, they are your **disclosable pecuniary interests** under the new national rules. You have a pecuniary interest if you, or your spouse or civil partner, have a pecuniary interest.

- Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain, which you, or your spouse or civil partner undertakes.
- Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from your council or authority) made or provided within the relevant period* in respect of any expenses incurred by you in carrying out duties as a member, or towards your election expenses. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

*The relevant period is the 12 months ending on the day when you tell the Monitoring Officer about your disclosable pecuniary interests.

- Any contract which is made between you, or your spouse or your civil partner (or a body in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest) and your council or authority –
 - under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and
 - which has not been fully discharged.

- Any beneficial interest in land which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, have and which is within the area of your council or authority.
- Any licence (alone or jointly with others) which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, holds to occupy land in the area of your council or authority for a month or longer.
- Any tenancy where (to your knowledge) –
 - the landlord is your council or authority; and
 - the tenant is a body in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest.
- Any beneficial interest which you, or your spouse or your civil partner has in securities of a body where -
 - (a) that body (to your knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of your council or authority; and
 - (b) either -
 - the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or
 - if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.

If you attend a meeting at which any item of business is to be considered and you are aware that you have a **personal interest** in the matter which does not amount to a DPI, you must make verbal declaration of the existence and nature of that interest at or before the consideration of the item of business or as soon as the interest becomes apparent. You should leave the room if your continued presence is incompatible with the 7 Principles of Public Life (selflessness; integrity; objectivity; accountability; openness; honesty; and leadership).

You have a personal interest where –

- a decision in relation to that business might reasonably be regarded as affecting the well-being or financial standing (including interests in land and easements over land) of you or a member of your family or a person or an organisation with whom you have a close association to a greater extent than it would affect the majority of the Council Tax payers, ratepayers or inhabitants of the ward or electoral area for which you have been elected or otherwise of the Authority's administrative area, or
- it relates to or is likely to affect any of the interests that are defined as DPIs but are in respect of a member of your family (other than a partner) or a person with whom you have a close association.

Guidance on declarations of interest, incorporating regulations published by the Government in relation to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, has been circulated to you previously.

You should identify any potential interest you may have relating to business to be considered at the meeting. This will help you and anyone that you ask for advice to fully consider all the circumstances before deciding what action you should take.

In certain circumstances the Council may grant a **dispensation** to permit a Member to take part in the business of the Authority even if the member has a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest relating to that business.

To obtain a dispensation, you must write to the Monitoring Officer at least 48 hours before the meeting in question, explaining why a dispensation is sought and desirable, and specifying the period of time for which it is sought. The Monitoring Officer may consult with the Independent Person or the Council's Standards Committee in relation to a request for dispensation.

Further advice can be obtained from Gillian Duckworth, Director of Legal and Governance on 0114 2734018 or email gillian.duckworth@sheffield.gov.uk.

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Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 3 December 2015

PRESENT: Councillors Tony Damms (Chair), Steve Ayriss (Deputy Chair), Penny Baker, David Barker, John Campbell, Richard Crowther, Keith Davis, Denise Fox, Aodan Marken, Roy Munn, Peter Rippon, Richard Shaw and Zoe Sykes

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 There were no apologies for absence.

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 8th October 2015, were approved as a correct record and, arising from their consideration, it was noted that:-

- (a) the operation of the Local Area Partnerships was being considered as part of a bigger review and enquiries would be made as to its progress; and
- (b) no specific date had been set for a representative from the Gateway Project to be invited to a future meeting of the Committee, but this would be followed up by the Policy and Improvement Officer.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 In response to a question from Alan Kewley regarding the operation of the Local Area Partnerships, the Chair, Councillor Tony Damms, confirmed that this was being considered as part of a bigger review and, only when this had been completed, would it be appropriate for a representative to report to the Committee.

5.2 Written answers would be provided to Mr Kewley in response to his further questions on the new Community Safety meetings and the operation of the Safer and Sustainable Communities Partnership, with the Chair adding that a representative of the Partnership would be invited to attend the Committee's February 2016 meeting, which would focus on Community Safety.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REVIEW

6.1 Sally Kilic reported on the Community Team Engagement Review which had been undertaken by a Task and Finish Group (the Group) established by the Housing and Neighbourhood Advisory Panel. The purpose of the Group was to review the current Community Engagement programmes/meetings and find out if they were viable as they currently were, or whether they could work in a better, and perhaps more cost effective, manner. The meetings included in the review were:-

- Citywide Forum
- Community Engagement Partnership Group
- Local Area Housing Forum
- Local Estates and Investment Forum
- Estates Working Group
- Investment and Repairs Partnership Group
- Sheltered Housing Forum
- Customer Service and Equalities Partnership
- Challenge For Change.

6.2 The main way in which information was obtained for the review was by means of a questionnaire which was handed out at the above meetings.

6.3 Sally Kilic went on to refer to the role of the Tenants' and Residents' Associations, which the Council was keen to see remain a key element of the community engagement structures, and also mentioned the good engagement practices of the Sanctuary Housing Association which the Group had examined. She also outlined the vision for community engagement which the Group had agreed, but added that there was no confidence in this vision at the moment. In conducting its review, the Group had also taken into account the cost of community engagement and how the Housing+ initiative could contribute.

6.4 Some of the Group's recommendations were as follows:-

- The number of Citywide Forum meetings should be reduced to three per year.
- The Community Engagement Partnership Group should meet every two months and should be used as a sounding board for the Tenants' and Residents' Associations.
- The Local Area Housing Fora should stay as they were, as should Challenge For Change.
- The Cleaner, Greener Partnership Group meetings should be reduced to three per year.
- There should be a 15 minute question and answer session at the start of every meeting, with the responses being minuted.

6.5 The Chair, Councillor Tony Damms, highlighted the need to address some of these issues and made particular reference to the amounts spent on community engagement in Sheffield compared with that of Rotherham, adding that any financial savings would contribute to improving Council properties. He also commented that it was often the same people attending meetings and asking the same questions. In terms of the actual meetings, he felt that the Local Area Housing Forum should be the basic building block and that the Housing and Neighbourhoods Advisory Panel should continue, whilst Challenge For Change needed more focus and purpose. He considered that the Citywide Forum didn't have much of a future and could be organised by tenants if they wanted it to continue. In contrast, the Tenants' Conference was productive and worth funding.

6.6 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Sally Kilic for her contribution to the meeting;
- (b) notes the information reported; and
- (c) requests the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services to work with tenants and officers to see what efficiencies could be made in the Council's Housing Service's Community Engagement budget.

7. HOUSING AND PLANNING BILL UPDATE

7.1 The Committee received a presentation, which was introduced by Janet Sharpe (Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services), on the implications for the Council of the Housing and Planning Bill, which was presently going through Parliament.

7.2 Liam Duggan (Manager, Housing Business Plan Team) gave the presentation, which covered the background, significant national policy announcements for social housing in 2015, the extension of Right to Buy, higher rents for higher earners and the review of lifetime tenancies. The presentation concluded by considering the major implications for housing in the joint Autumn Statement and Spending Review.

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

- The Secretary of State would arrive at a calculation as to what was a high value Council home and also consider how quickly such homes would turn over, and then set a bill for Sheffield each year, which would fund the extension of Right to Buy for Housing Association tenants. It would be up to the Council to decide as to how the funding for this bill was to be raised, which could involve selling properties or raising the funds by other means. Any late payments would attract interest.
- It was not yet known how higher earning tenants would be identified, but it could be through either disclosure by the tenant or via tax records from Her

Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

- One approach which the Council could adopt would be to sell off high value Council properties, so the basis for the Government's calculation would be reduced for the following year.
- The Housing Bill as drafted contained provisions, which required the Government to consult with Local Government before raising the charge relating to high value Council homes.
- Officers would be working with the Housing Associations in Sheffield, in relation to the approach to the extension of Right to Buy provisions and how social housing in the City might be best protected. At the moment, there was some uncertainty in the sector as to whether they would be fully compensated and what would happen if Housing Associations chose not to adopt the policy.
- The homes which would be considered high value by the Government were likely to be "normal" Council homes, but in areas where the local housing market was strong.
- It was not yet known how the Government would determine "high value".
- The homes which Housing Associations must provide, to replace those lost through Right to Buy, would not necessarily be homes for rent, but could be other tenures such as shared ownership.
- A property was classed as being vacant at the change of tenancy, but officers would check the detail of this.
- The London Borough of Barnet had introduced fixed term tenancies.

7.4 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Janet Sharpe and Liam Duggan for their contribution to the meeting;
- (b) notes the contents of the presentation and responses to questions; and
- (c) in view of the importance of these legislative proposals, extends an invitation to the attending officers to attend future Committee meetings, to provide updates on the implementation of the Housing and Planning Bill, as and when appropriate.

8. POLICE AND CRIME PANEL UPDATE

8.1 Councillor John Campbell reported on the last meeting of the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel, at which Councillor Sioned-Mair Richards had been appointed as Chair. The meeting had considered an update from the Police and Crime Commissioner on the ongoing investigations into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham. The revised Complaints Procedure was also considered, with a

flowchart being available from Councillor Campbell or on the Panel's website. The final part of the meeting covered ongoing complaints against the previous Police and Crime Commissioner. The minutes of the meeting would be made available on the Panel's website.

- 8.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the information reported and requests Committee Members to direct any questions for the Committee's next meeting on Community Safety to either Councillor John Campbell or the Policy and Improvement Officer.

9. WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

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

- 9.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) approves the draft Work Programme 2015/16 as detailed in the report; and
- (b) notes that:-
 - (i) a report from the Prevent Task Group would be presented to the Committee at the appropriate time; and
 - (ii) the Policy and Improvement Officer would circulate the link to the TellMAMA website, which was a national project which supported victims of anti-Muslim hate and measured and monitored anti-Muslim incidents.

10. RIGHT TO BUY UPDATE

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

11. SHEFFIELD MONEY

- 11.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the contents of the Sheffield Money report and that a review of Sheffield Money was to be undertaken every six months.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 12.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday, 4th February 2016, at 4.00 pm, in the Town Hall.

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South Yorkshire

POLICE

Introducing the new Local Policing Model

Briefing for partners

January 2016



South Yorkshire

POLICE

Financial Context

The funding challenge so far

- Significant budget reductions required from Government's Comprehensive Spending Review
- SYP has saved approximately £51m since 2011 – how?
- Decision to focus on redesigning non-operational support functions
 - Reduced management and streamlined processes
 - Centralised finance, policy, performance, crime management
 - Reduced enquiry desks, canteens, administration, corporate communications, professional standards, legal services, stores & tailoring, printing, criminal justice units, accommodation, expenses, vehicle hire



South Yorkshire

POLICE

Financial Context

The funding challenge so far, continued...

- Budget savings across all areas, recruitment/promotion freezes
- Voluntary enhanced redundancy, overtime reductions
- Regional and collaborative working

The Force's current financial position

- The Force needs to cut its budget by around £29m for April 2017 and £17m of this remains unidentified
- SYP's current total budget is £248m
- Approximately 90% of SYP's budget is spent on staff
- Frontline policing has been protected until now



South Yorkshire

POLICE

Requirements

Requirements for the new Local Policing Model:

- Neighbourhoods at the heart of South Yorkshire policing
- Four policing areas serving Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield
- Continue to deliver against performance targets
- Deliver £8.1m savings by March 2016
- Maximise the concept of right resource, first time
- Maintain emergency response



South Yorkshire

POLICE

Savings

How are the savings achieved in local policing?

- Approximately 145 police officers will be removed from local policing structures by disestablishing posts , as officers retire, over a two-year period
 - 3 chief inspectors (15% of roles)
 - 9 inspectors (15%)
 - 15 sergeants (8%)
 - 118 constables (7.5%)
- Consultation commenced with police staff employed as civilian investigators with at risk notices served



South Yorkshire

POLICE

Headline changes

The Local Policing Model delivers:

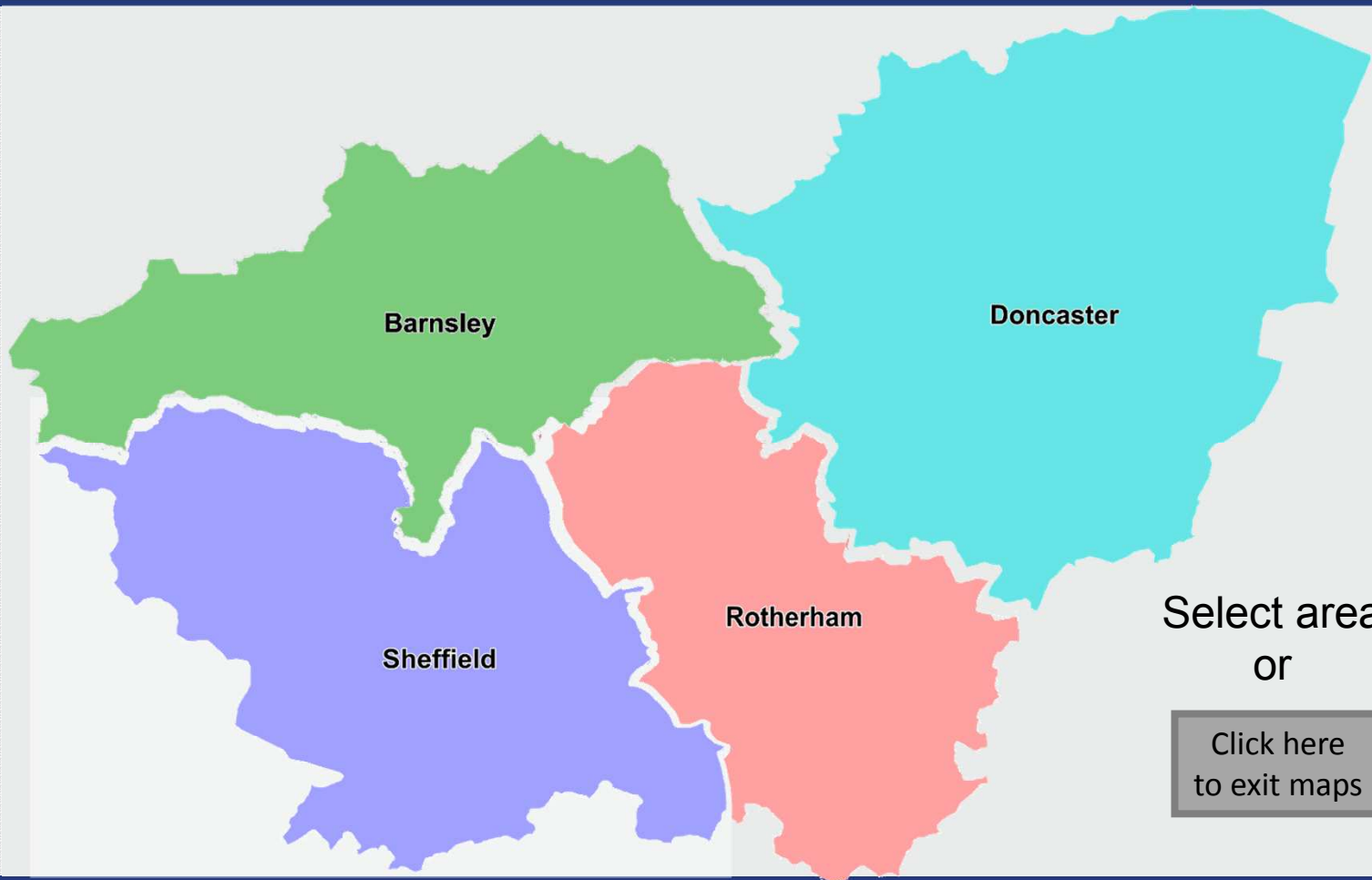
- Highly-visible, dedicated police teams available 24/7
- Named inspectors and PCSOs for every community
- Flexible resources to meet demands across an area
- Joint briefings and consistent structures to remove duplication
- New mobile technology to enable officers to work in the communities they serve for longer
- Support units in each area focussing on proactive investigations, antisocial behaviour, schools and offender management
- Ownership of crimes, offering a better service for victims



South Yorkshire

POLICE

Local Policing Units (LPUs)



Select area
or

Click here
to exit maps



South Yorkshire

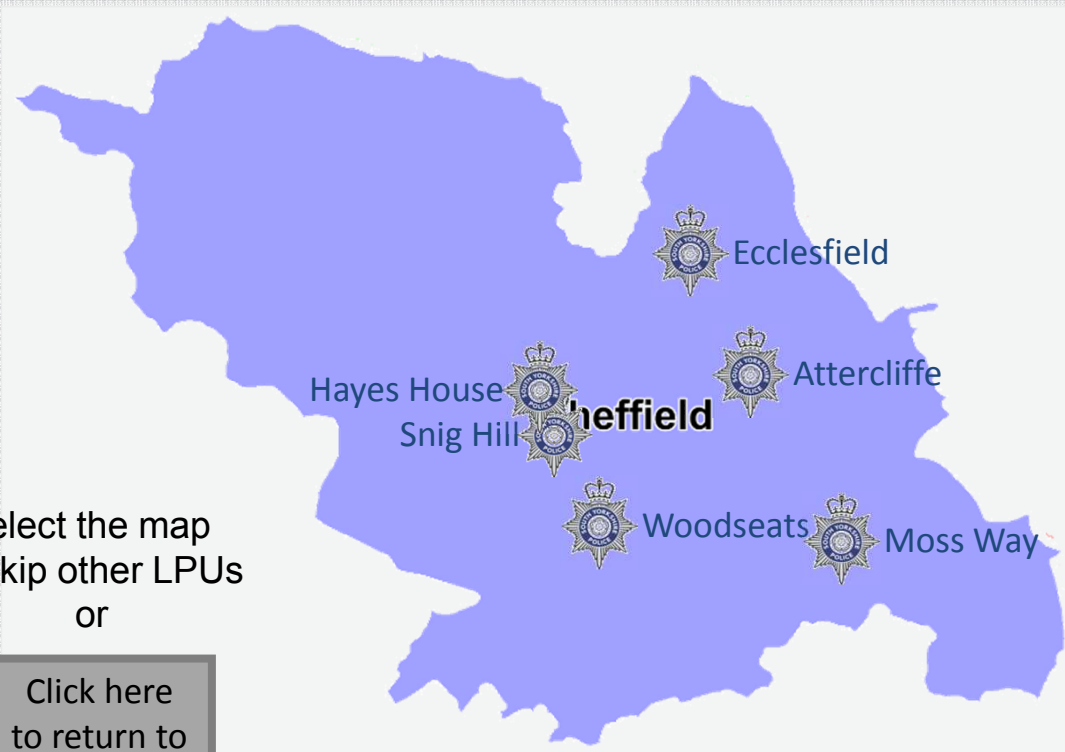
POLICE

Sheffield Local Policing Unit

Go live: **14 September 2015**

Sheffield Local Policing Unit (LPU) will be made up of:

- 6 Local Policing Teams (LPTs), split into Sheffield East & Sheffield West and each serviced by 5 shifts
- 1 Local Policing Support Unit (LPSU)

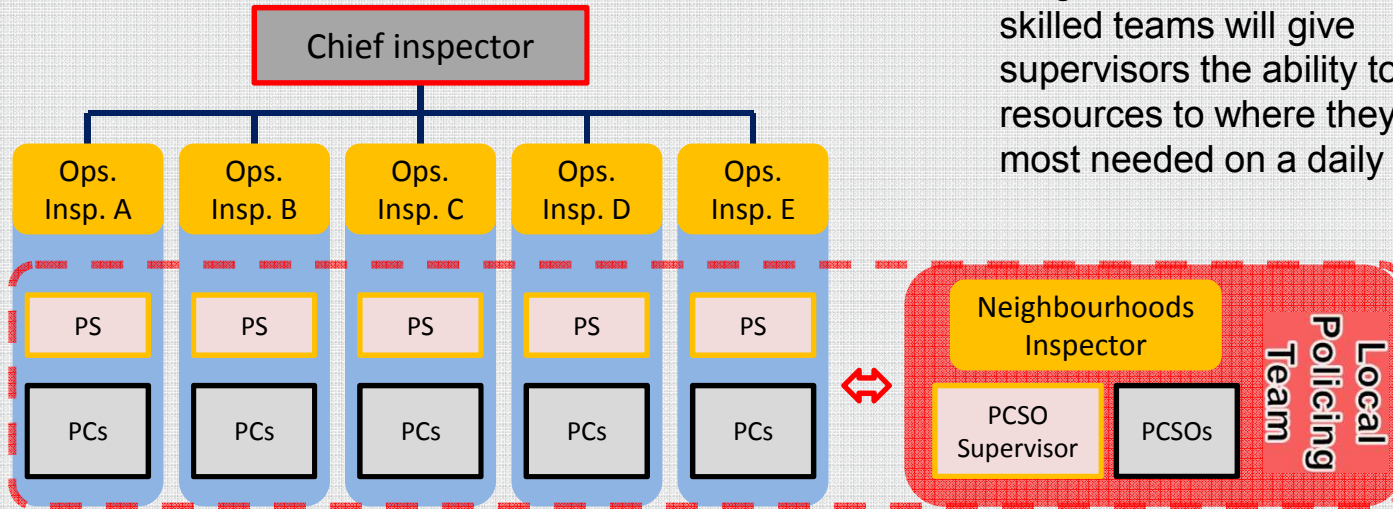


Select the map to skip other LPUs or

Click here to return to LPU screen



Local Policing Teams



Larger, more flexible multi-skilled teams will give supervisors the ability to move resources to where they are most needed on a daily basis

All officers will start their shift at their LPT base where they will be briefed together, avoiding duplication, and then deployed with new mobile technology to keep them in the communities they serve for longer

Each community will have a named inspector and dedicated PCSOs

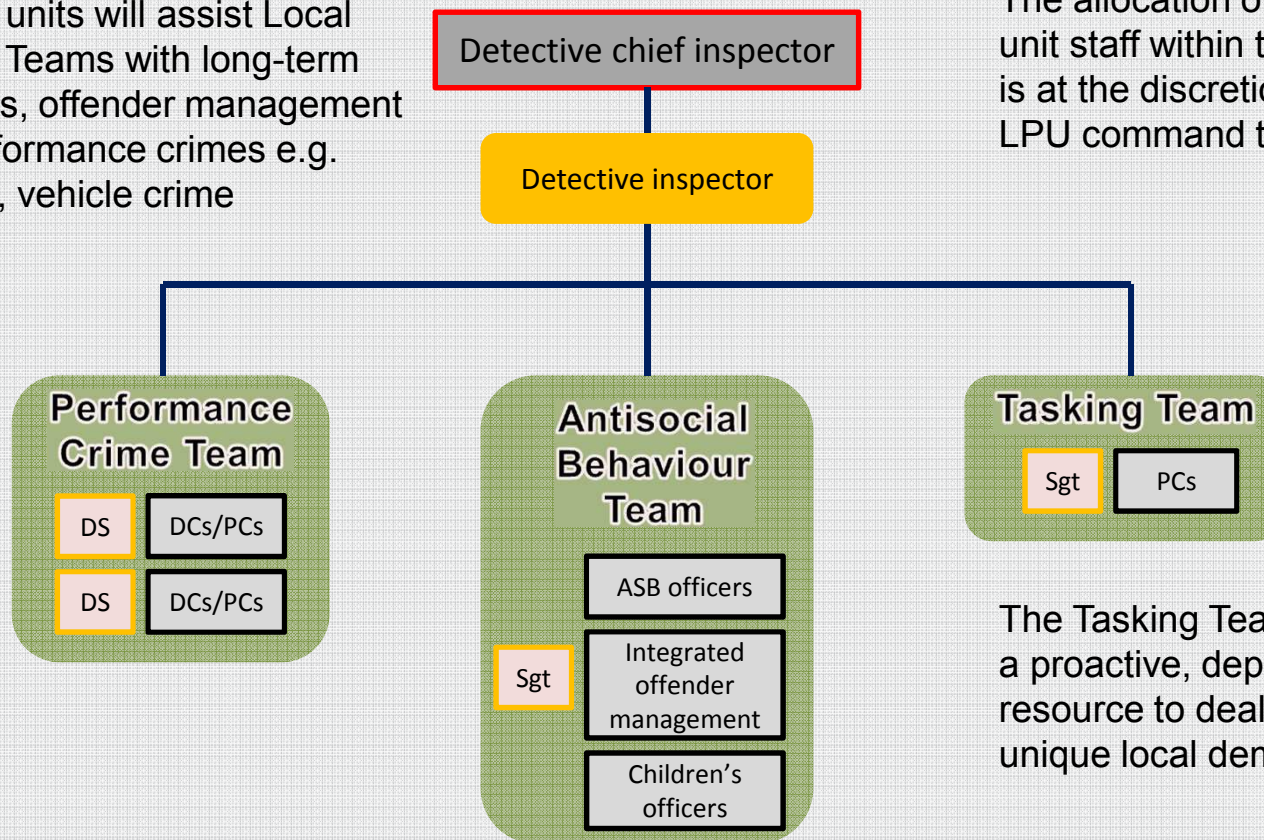
[Click here to return to LPU screen](#)



Local Policing Support Units

Support units will assist Local Policing Teams with long-term problems, offender management and performance crimes e.g. burglary, vehicle crime

The allocation of support unit staff within this structure is at the discretion of the LPU command team



The Tasking Team are a proactive, deployable resource to deal with unique local demand



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POLICE

Specialist support

Local Policing Units will work closely with new specialist resources:

Force Crime Unit

- Go live 2 March 2015
- Flexible resources dealing with serious and series crimes
- Two centralised hubs supporting Local Policing Units
 - Moss Way serving Rotherham/Sheffield
 - Robert Dyson House serving Barnsley/Doncaster

Public Protection Unit

- Go live 1 April 2015
- Increased capability and capacity to protect vulnerable people
- Locally based, centrally managed
- Additional 62 staff across the county



South Yorkshire

POLICE

Reducing demand

How will the Force maintain and improve its service with fewer people?

Going live Jan/Feb 2015

- New burglary and vehicle crime processes
 - Listening to victim needs
 - Clarity for call handlers, investigating officers and support services
 - Remove ineffective and time-consuming work on the frontline
- Rollout of tablet devices to keep staff in communities for longer

Next steps

- New drive-off process
- New missing person process
- Violent crime review
- New handheld devices to replace BlackBerrys



South Yorkshire

POLICE

District Review

Questions?

district_review_team@southyorks.pnn.police.uk

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Community Safety

Maxine Stavrianakos

Head of Neighbourhood Intervention
and Tenant Support

Sheffield City Council

Sheffield
City Council



Sheffield Safer and Sustainable Communities Partnership

- Statutory Community Safety Partnership
 - Lead by Police and Local Authority
 - Bring together expertise, knowledge, consistency of action
- Statutory requirement to have a local strategy for tackling community safety issues



Community Safety Priorities

- Joint Strategic Intelligence Assessment
- Partnership Plan 2014-17 priorities:
 - Victims
 - Vulnerable people
 - Re-offending
 - Cohesion
 - Crime and anti-social behaviour

Current performance

- Overall crime levels are unchanged over the last year and many crime types are reducing, BUT:
- Burglary and violence remain a challenge
- Hate crime increasing but numbers are small and reporting is being encouraged among all communities and protected groups

Meeting structure

Safer and Sustainable
Communities Partnership Board

Performance Planning and
Resources Group

Theme Groups

Partner Resource
and Allocation
Meeting

Neighbourhood
Action Groups

Partner Resource Allocation Meeting

- The Partner Resource Allocation Meeting
- (PRAM) was developed in 2012
- Responding to the Pilkington case and the review of how repeat vulnerable victims and ASB within Sheffield are dealt with.

Partner Resource Allocation Meeting

- Partnership working and data sharing
- Highlighting issues and cases
- Important touchstone



The Future

- Combined ASB/Community Safety Team
- Delivering a multi tenure service
- Co-located with South Yorkshire Police





Report to Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 4th February 2016

Report of: Policy & Improvement Officer

Subject: Work Programme 2015/16

Author of Report: Matthew Borland, Policy and Improvement Officer
matthew.borland@sheffield.gov.uk
0114 273 5065

A proposed work programme is attached at appendix 1 for the Committee's consideration and discussion.

The proposed work programme aims to focus on a small number of issues, in depth. This means that the Committee will need to prioritise which issues will be included on formal meeting agendas. In doing this, the Committee may wish to reflect on the prioritisation principles attached at appendix 2 to ensure that scrutiny activity is focussed where it can add most value.

Where an issue is not appropriate for inclusion on a meeting agenda, but there is significant interest from members, the Committee can request written briefings or presentations outside of formal scrutiny meeting time.

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

- Comment on the proposed work programme
- Identify priorities for inclusion on agendas
- Identify items for written briefings

**Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee
Draft Work Programme 2015-16**

Please note: the draft work programme is a live document and so is subject to change.

Topic	Notes	Date
Homelessness - Rough Sleeping	Full Council requested at its January meeting that a report on the issue of support for rough sleepers in the city be submitted to the relevant Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee for consideration.	7 th April
Annual Report	A short item to comment on a draft of the Committee's section of the Scrutiny Annual Report.	7 th April
Police and Crime Panel Update	Cllr John Campbell, one of the Council's representatives on the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel, to update the Scrutiny Committee on the Panel's work.	Every meeting
Welfare Reform	March 2015 meeting requested "officers continue to present update reports to the Committee in their current form, so that Members could request further information on specific items either when they received the report or at the subsequent meeting." The Committee may also wish to consider hearing from external organisations, e.g. Citizens Advice Bureau.	
Housing+ Model and its Implementation	A formal report on the implementation of Housing+ is proposed, following which a Committee visit would be arranged to see how implementation is working 'on the ground.'	
Local Area Partnerships	The Committee has previously requested a report be presented to the Committee, with the Cabinet Member and Lead Officer being invited to attend the meeting. In response to a public question at the Committee's December 2015 meeting regarding the operation of the Local Area Partnerships, the Chair confirmed that this was being considered as part of a bigger review and, only when this had been completed, would it be appropriate for a representative to report to the Committee.	
Housing Delivery	This has been identified by the Council as a performance challenge and was discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 30 th July 2015. The Economic and	

	Environmental Wellbeing (E&EW) Committee had a Task and Finish Group on this subject in 2014/15. Copies of the report back to the November 2015 E&EW Committee meeting and copies of the minutes have been circulated.	
Gateway Project	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. The October meeting discussion on the HRA Business Plan Annual Review agreed "a representative from the Gateway Project could be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to explain its operation."	

Written Briefings 'For Information'

(These briefings are circulated with meeting papers, and officers do NOT attend the meeting)

Challenge for Change: Community Engagement	September 2014 Committee requested: "a further report, focusing on progress made in relation to the twelve issues identified in the report, be presented to the Committee in six months' time, with the appropriate officers and tenants' representatives being invited to attend the meeting."	April 2016
Welfare Reform	In July 2013 the Committee requested "a one page update on progress with Welfare Reform issues be provided to Committee Members bi-monthly." In November 2014 the Committee requested "that future reports be set out to include comparative figures, so that trends could be identified."	Every meeting
Right to Buy Update	The Committee have received a bi-monthly update on Right to Buy since November 2013.	Every meeting
Sheffield Money	Full Council agreed that Scrutiny would receive regular reports on Sheffield Money. The Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee will also receive the same report. The Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee received the first report at its December 2016 meeting and agreed to receive a report every 6 months.	First meeting of 2016/17

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The Committee's remaining scheduled meeting date is **4.00pm Thursday 7th April 2016**

Selecting Scrutiny topics

This tool is designed to assist the Scrutiny Committees focus on the topics most appropriate for their scrutiny.

- **Public Interest**
The concerns of local people should influence the issues chosen for scrutiny;
- **Ability to Change / Impact**
Priority should be given to issues that the Committee can realistically have an impact on, and that will influence decision makers;
- **Performance**
Priority should be given to the areas in which the Council, and other organisations (public or private) are not performing well;
- **Extent**
Priority should be given to issues that are relevant to all or large parts of the city (geographical or communities of interest);
- **Replication / other approaches**
Work programmes must take account of what else is happening (or has happened) in the areas being considered to avoid duplication or wasted effort. Alternatively, could another body, agency, or approach (e.g. briefing paper) more appropriately deal with the topic

Other influencing factors

- **Cross-party** - There is the potential to reach cross-party agreement on a report and recommendations.
- **Resources**. Members with the Policy & Improvement Officer can complete the work needed in a reasonable time to achieve the required outcome



Report to Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 4th February 2016

Report of: Policy and Improvement Officer

Subject: Written responses to public questions

Author of Report: Matthew Borland, Policy and Improvement Officer
matthew.borland@sheffield.gov.uk
 0114 273 5065

Summary:

This report provides the Committee with copies of written responses to two public questions asked by Alan Kewley at the Committee’s meeting on 3rd December 2015.

The written responses provided by Julia Cayless, Safer and Sustainable Communities Support Team Leader were sent to Alan Kewley on 16th December 2015.

The responses are included as part of the Committee’s meeting papers as the way of placing the responses on the public record.

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	
Other	X

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

Note the report

Background Papers: None

Category of Report: OPEN

Question

PACT Meetings: These started as Partners and Communities Together, but became Police only and then gradually withered away. South Yorkshire PCC has introduced a new Engagement Strategy which requires involvement from various Partners, including Councils.

How does Sheffield City Council plan to participate in these new Community Safety meetings?

Written Response

South Yorkshire Police and the Office of the PCC are in the process of outlining a new framework of community safety meetings for Sheffield. By building on existing community meetings, it is felt that engagement with local people can be maximised. It is likely that groups such as TARAs will already be working well with these groups and through other relevant officers such as locality management and housing liaison officers, strong links between these groups and Sheffield City Council will be formed.

Question

Safer and Sustainable Communities Partnership: was set up as the Council's statutory Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, and publicity of meetings etc, was passed to Sheffield First. But their website is out of date and details of public meetings have not been available.

When will Sheffield Council ensure that the public is aware of these meetings and how they can participate?

Written Response

Community Safety Partnerships are made up of local organisations, primarily the police, the local authority, the probation services and the NHS. There is no statutory duty to allow the public to participate in the meetings, and public attendance and ability to ask questions is at the discretion of the Chairperson. Where it is possible to make details (for example, agenda and papers) of the meetings available in advance, they will be placed on the Sheffield First website.



Report to Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee

January 2016

Report of: Janet Sharpe – Director of Housing Services

Subject: Right to buy update report

Author of Report: Andrew Routley – Home Ownership Team Leader (2736338)

Summary:

The attached report provides information about the sales receipt generated from right to buy

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	X
Other	

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

The Committee is asked to note the update.

Background Papers: Not applicable

Category of Report: OPEN

1. Introduction

1.1 The following chart provides information as to the total right to buy receipt against the forecasted receipt for the financial year 2015 / 16

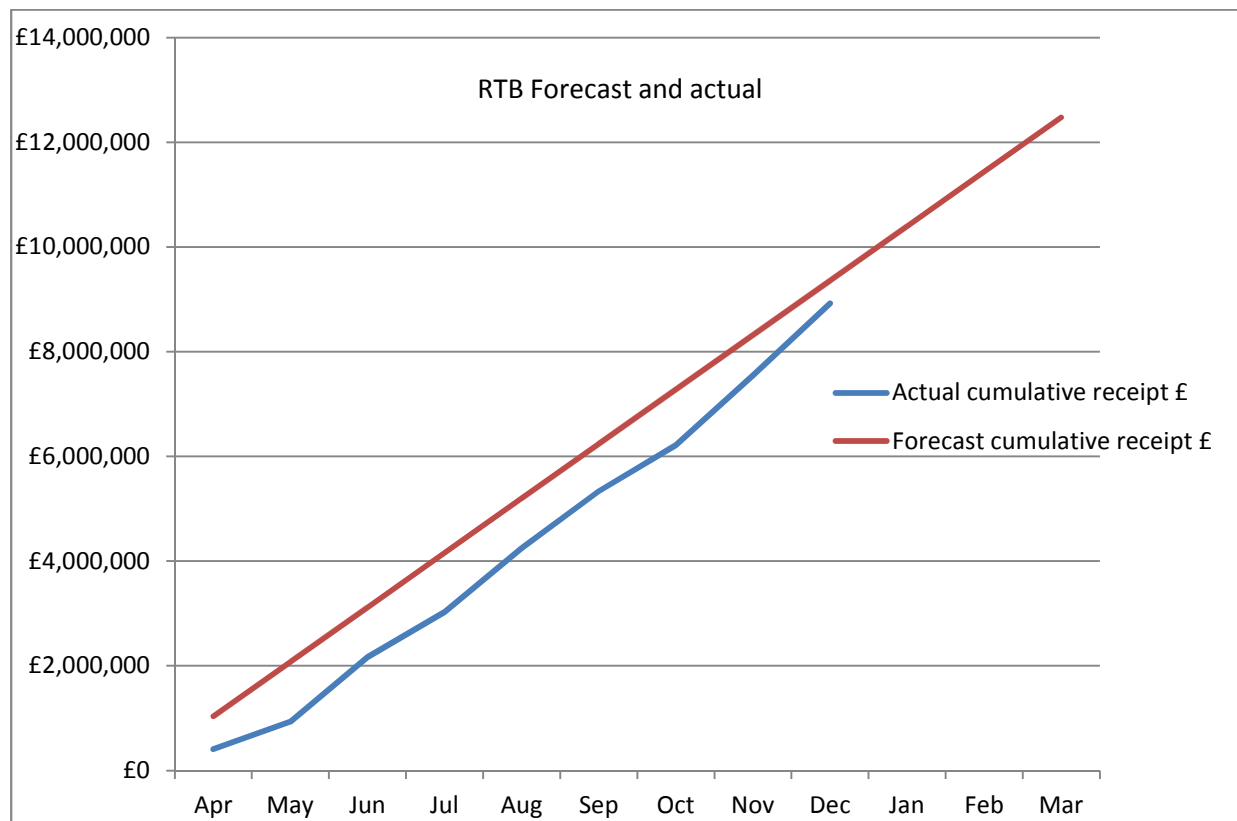
1.2 The forecast for right to buy sales for the year are:

Total sales 320

Average sale price £38,500

Total receipt £12,320,000

Average sales 26.6 per month



2. Activity

2.1 To date, end of December 2015 there have been a total of 225 sales.

April sales = 11
May sales = 15
June sales = 31
July sales = 24
August sales = 28
September sales = 25
October sales = 24
November sales = 34
December sales = 33

2.2 This is down on the forecasted position by 15, this is due to the low number of sales in April and May sales in the following months have remained around the average monthly forecast. November and December proved to be months with above average sales which has brought us more in line with forecasted position

2.3 The average sale price remains slightly higher than forecast (£38,500) at £39,665

3. Recommendation

3.1 The Committee is asked to note the update.

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Report to Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 4th February 2016

Report of: Janet Sharpe

Subject: January 2016 Update on the private rented sector in Sheffield

Author of Report: Michelle Houston, Service Manager
0114 2734680 or michelle.houston@sheffield.gov.uk

Summary:

Michelle Houston, Service Manager for Private Housing Standards previously attended Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee, and has provided reports. It was requested that a further update be provided in January 2016.

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	Y
Other	

The Committee are asked to note the contents of the report and to seek clarification or further information where required.

Background Papers:

Category of Report: OPEN/CLOSED (please specify)

Report of the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services

The Private Rented Sector in Sheffield

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. This is an update on activity as requested by Scrutiny in October 2015.

2. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SHEFFIELD PEOPLE?

2.1. The private rented sector is continuing to grow, and the local authority is the Regulatory and prosecuting body for the sector.

2.2. It is essential that we provide a safe and well managed private rented sector for the people of Sheffield. A person's home is integral to every other part of their life; wellbeing, education and social capacity.

3 UPDATES SINCE LAST REPORT

3.1 Task and Finish Group

3.1.1 The Cabinet Member set up a two part Member task and finish group which was held in October 2015, to explain the make - up of the current private rented sector and to discuss initiatives for the future.

3.1.2 In line with the views of the Scrutiny committee, Members appreciated the work the team were doing, and were supportive of additional resources to meet the growing demands.

3.1.3 As a result of this and other meetings, the Service Manager started work on defining others where targetted activity was needed.

3.2 Compliance inspections in Page Hall

3.2.1 All licences have been issued to landlords for their properties in the Page Hall licensing scheme.

3.2.2 Along with the licence itself, an individual schedule of work and conditions are attached which the landlord must comply with to satisfy the licensing requirements.

3.2.3 The maximum timescales that landlords had to comply was 12 months after licence issue. That timescale has just passed, so a programme of compliance inspections is now underway.

3.2.4 As of end December 2015, 20% of the properties were already fully compliant without any formal action being required.

3.2.5 Should landlords object to conditions, or refuse to carry out works – legal action will commence on the basis that they are in breach of their licence.

3.3 Targetted enforcement

- 3.3.1 It has long been recognised that the majority of landlords and agents in the city are good. Their properties are safe and well managed.
- 3.3.2 It is therefore inappropriate to use resources on areas that are self-regulating.
- 3.3.3 But a small number of landlords and agents are of extreme concern to us. We have evidence of serious property defects where health and safety is an extreme risk.
- 3.3.4 And perhaps more disturbing; that vulnerable tenants are being targeted by rogue, criminal landlords so that they can be taken advantage of financially and in a bullying manner.
- 3.3.5 We have communicated our vision to landlords; that we are willing to target and drive out those who refuse to accept their responsibilities.
- 3.3.6 We have briefed the Cabinet Member that targeted action has now commenced on one particular landlord/agent. Our concerns are sufficient that we must take action to protect tenants, and indeed property owners that may fall foul of his management services.
- 3.3.7 This is the first time we have embarked on such a campaign, and demonstrates our commitment to making the sector safer and better.

3.4 Sharing approaches and knowledge

- 3.4.1 We continue to be asked for our expert opinions on various matters, especially where we have paved the way in new initiatives.
- 3.4.2 Our Legal and Policy officer Dave Hickling is nationally recognised for his housing/tenancy law expertise. He was recently commissioned by Chesterfield and the Derbyshire councils to train their officers on occupancy status and legal enforcement; having already carried out similar lectures in Clacton and Hereford.
- 3.4.3 The Service Manager continues to be asked to speak at local and national conferences about the Sheffield approach; speaking at the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health conference in October, and the Association of Residential Letting Agents/National Estate Agents Association in January 2016.

4 Recommendation

- 4.1 The Committee is asked to note the updates in the report

Michelle Houston
26 January 2016

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Report to Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 4th February 2016

Report of: Challenge for Change Tenant Scrutiny Group

Subject: Challenge for Change: Vacants Report

Author of Report: Challenge for Change Tenant Scrutiny Group

Summary:

The customer scrutiny panel known as Challenge for Change (C4C) was set up in 2011 to perform an independent review of services delivered by the Council Housing Service. This report covers the group's project on Vacant property management. The overall purpose of the project was to examine the Vacants service to look at ways of improving the time it takes to turnaround vacant properties for the Council to save it money and improve the service from a customer's point of view.

The Group's report, including findings and recommendations is attached.

The report has been presented to the Housing and Neighbourhoods Advisory Panel (HANAP) and the Council Housing Service's "City Wide Forum" (a meeting for all council tenants in the city). Managers responsible for the Vacant service will report back to the C4C group on their progress in implementing the recommendations.

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	X
Informing the development of new policy	X
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	
Other	

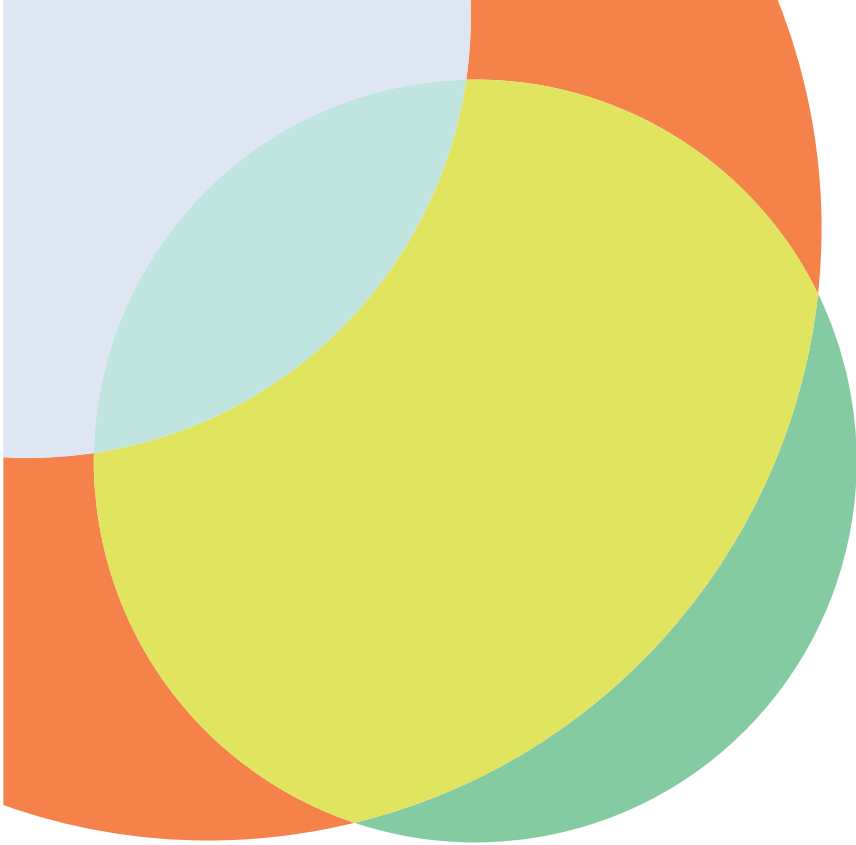
The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

To comment on the recommendations made in the Challenge for Change Vacants Report.

Background Papers:

List any background documents (e.g. research studies, reports) used to write the report. Remember that by listing documents people could request a copy.

Category of Report: OPEN



Challenge for Change

Scrutiny Report Vacants





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1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Four years ago, following approval from the then Board of the Council Housing Service, a customer scrutiny panel was established. Recruitment was open to tenants, leaseholders and customers. One of the main roles of the group was to review different parts of the Council Housing Service and make suggestions for improvement. It was decided to call the group Challenge for Change. Throughout this report, the scrutiny group will be called C4C.
- 1.2 The initiation of the project during Summer 2014 was completed by four main scrutineers: Linda Moxon, Max Richardson, Ian Alexander and Tony Watson. Help was also provided by Michelle Cook, Richard Bailey and Tony Merrygold.
- 1.3 C4C decided to focus on the Vacant Property Service as their topic. At the Community Engagement Partnership Group other topic suggestions were put forward to the group for scrutiny. These were Lettings and Anti-Social Behaviour. However as these were under review by their respective departments, the group decided to look at these at a later date. Vacants was chosen because the longer a house is empty, revenue is lost to the Council.
- 1.4 C4C considered many factors in its decision to scrutinise the service and the policy and procedures of Vacants. It had a clear remit to identify if it could make recommendations to improve the service from a tenant's point of view and to help the Council to be able to let vacant properties quicker so that they are not left empty and therefore losing revenue from rent collection.
- 1.5 In this report, C4C have detailed the findings following its investigations. C4C have spoken to all departments involved in Vacants.
- 1.6 C4C have additionally spoken to tenants and customers to gather their views and opinions on where Vacants could be improved.
- 1.7 C4C reviewed the Property Shop website and relevant leaflets to analyse whether the service is working and providing good value for money.
- 1.8 C4C have made several recommendations based on its findings, which can be found at the end of this document.
- 1.9 The overall purpose of the project was to examine the Vacants service to look at ways of improving turnaround time for the Council to save it money and improve the service from a customer's point of view.

2. Objectives

2.1 From C4C's initial research into Vacants, it identified the following objectives for this project.

- To understand how the co-ordination of all involved parties work, and what the issues are.
- To look at the Vacants Standards to assess how inspections are carried out by monitoring them and checking if standards are being met.
- To look at how much is spent on Vacant properties and in what capacity e.g. maintenance, repairs
- To review the policy for carrying out work on the external areas of vacant properties.
- To assess if the external appearance of a property affects whether a property is accepted or not.
- To review the turnover times to compare how they differ between areas and with other housing organisations.
- Understand the reason why some properties are difficult to let.
- Look at the policy on letting and see if this is flexible enough.
- To understand why some properties are being refused by tenants
- To understand the policy on furnishing properties.
- Are there incentives and how are they being used.
- The bidding process - what support is given to people of all ages.
- What advice is given to prospective tenants on the cost of living in an area, and the chances of getting the property.
- To understand how council housing is advertised, and how this affects the length of time a property is vacant.

3. Findings

3.1 C4C conducted a number of activities to help them understand the service and see in practice how many aspects of it are carried out. These were as follows:

- Review of the lettable standard, performance and satisfaction information
- Review of the Property Shop website and the bidding process
- Discussions and interviews with managers and staff across all parts of the service
- Visits to actual vacant properties
- Conversations with customers

C4C also called upon the first-hand experience of one of its members who during the course of this review was rehoused

3.2 C4C came to the opinion that the Lettable Standard is not of a high enough standard, particularly for hard to lets. C4C came to this conclusion through on site viewings, looking at the number of refusals from performance reports, and from conversations with staff.

3.3 Vacant properties ready for letting do not compare favourably with the private rented sector for the same property types. The impact this has is that it makes properties harder to let, which creates more refusals, increased rent loss and does nothing for the image of an area.

3.4 C4C considered the inspection sign-off of vacant repairs is not rigorous enough.

3.5 C4C visited a number of vacant properties that were ready for letting and found outstanding issues in some of the properties. These were issues that were easily identified. Externally materials left by Kier were not always cleared when work was completed.

3.6 C4C considers that this contributes to refusals and leads to unnecessary repairs. It does not help the reputation of SCC as a landlord.

3.7 C4C is of the opinion that first impressions of the external areas are very important when viewing a property. C4C identified when they visited properties as part of their investigations that both properties and gardens were not always up to the standard of other letting authorities. C4C found properties with dirty curtains in windows, graffiti and rubbish left on gardens which soon becomes a dumping ground for other people's rubbish. This could dissuade potential tenants and lead to fly tipping. C4C consider that this sets a poor example to incoming prospective tenants.



- 3.8 Cost of repairs – percentage of properties that are easy to let and require few repairs is balanced with hard to lets that need more work done on them.
- 3.9 Turnover times are average for the sector so there is some room for improvement to improve rent loss.
- 3.10 We recognised that there are hard to let properties, but few that have been vacant for more than 12 weeks and most require extensive work.
- 3.11 C4C, using information from a report which outlined the refusal reasons, found that how areas are perceived by tenants has an effect on why a customer may refuse to accept a property. Other issues identified in the report were transport links, schools, shops and local amenities. C4C consider that more could be done to “myth bust” by utilising promotional material, social media and local residents as ways to help create positive images of an area.
- 3.12 C4C scrutinised the Property Shop website and formed the opinion that it does not provide enough detail of the property itself, such as room sizes, which was identified in the report several times as a reason for refusal. It is considered that the website is not fully utilised to the extent that other social landlords using the same system website application appear to do. It is basic and unattractive and may be a cause for why customers are disappointed when they bid for a property as it does not meet their expectations based on the information on the website.
- 3.13 On reading the refusal reasons, C4C consider that maybe they are not always real and genuine as evidence was identified that tenants were bidding for a property in an area and then saying they did not want to live in that area. C4C feel that not all tenants genuinely want to move and that some are just exploring the system. This is time wasting and slows the process down for those genuine applicants.
- 3.14 Housing + has the potential to make for an improved and more joined up service e.g. staff could utilise their more detailed local knowledge. Better use of local knowledge could be used by all accompanied viewers; this could help reduce refusals.
- 3.15 Lack of understanding that there is flexibility on bedroom sizes for tenants not reliant on Housing Benefit restricts options for the elderly and disabled, which reduces downsizing and in turn the availability of larger desirable properties.
- 3.16 The furnished policy is reasonable and seems to work well.
- 3.17 The SCC “offer” does not always compare favourably in cost and quality terms with other providers. This could lead to potential applicants looking at other options, and brings into question SCC as a landlord.
- 3.18 The support provided in Area Housing Offices and the Property Shop varies from excellent to examples where advice given is not always accurate or sufficient; this could lead to customers being confused or misinformed.

4. Summary of Reality Checks

4.1 Furnished Accommodation.

We looked at the costs of furnishing properties annually and any associated issues that might run alongside this. We found that overall the average cost is about £1.6m annually, which covers the cost of the furniture, the administration and transport costs which go with this. In total, there are about 2000 furnished properties in Sheffield and approximately 100 temporary lets. The bands are bronze, silver and gold in terms of the packages that are available. Rules have been relaxed slightly in regards to the criteria in the South East - this has been done to assist Housing + Officers and tenants in this area. The Furnished Scheme is seen as a valuable tool and helps to bring vulnerable tenants out of furniture poverty and reduces the need for such tenants to take out high interest loans, which can lead to further tenancy issues. The cost of furniture was discussed: if a person is on benefits, often the cost is covered completely by this, and if they are still on benefits after four years, the furnishings are given to them completely free as it is felt that after four years, the cost of these items has been completely recouped. Furnished accommodation is not as hard to let and on visiting the warehouse, it was unbelievable the amount of stock that was there.

4.2 Property Shop, Advertising and Marketing

We visited the Property Shop to try to gain a better understanding of any issues that may face prospective tenants when they visit. Overall, the experience was a favourable one and it was found that properties are clearly advertised. Assistance is available when prospective tenants are bidding on properties, pointing out any barriers, for example, any steps for an elderly or infirm person. They do try to exceed customer expectations. It was felt that in order to improve the service, perhaps flats and maisonettes could be called apartments. It has been found that there is not enough demand for 60+ properties. Properties are advertised as soon as the keys come back in to avoid any lengthy vacant spells. The adverts that are placed are designed using a template and this could potentially infringe an officer from providing a more informative description of a property. It is generally felt that prospective tenants do not always read adverts; this has been an ongoing issue.

The excuses that are fed back as to why people do not accept a property vary; some are just not serious about moving, others have a far too high expectation. It was felt that although the cost of any major change to the template would be a barrier, perhaps where there is scope to display information in different ways, more could be done, for example the use of bold or capital letters and colour.



4.3 Accompanied Viewing Staff

We discussed with them the actual role, which is to assist prospective tenants by discussing with them the utilities, any repairs or redecoration that may be needed and how to sign up. It is felt that this is not a selling role, merely an advisory role to let the prospective tenant make the decision based on the information provided. It is felt that the base standard is not high enough, and that gardens could be improved to make life easier as first impressions count. It is felt that not everyone reads the advert correctly or researches an area. It is widely felt that the external appearance needs to be improved, as this could potentially help to let properties, as often people are put off if the exterior is in poor repair. We discussed with them the issue of timewasters and more needs to be done to deter people, such as removal from the list if they really are not serious about moving. Changing a property from unfurnished to furnished also was seen to be a problem, with the process seen as a lengthy one. It is felt that more needs to be done regarding placements, for example, why place an elderly couple in a downstairs property, with a young person above - this could potentially spell trouble. Overall, it is felt that a lot of people have far higher expectations than the properties that are available.

4.4 Personal Circumstances of a Tenant requiring a move

It was found that the council were really helpful and that every assistance was given with the request, which although was initially declined, options and alternatives were offered and discussed. It was felt that not much more could have been done by the council to assist as the tenant in question felt that the council had been more than helpful. With regards to the actual property that they eventually moved to, it was a prime example of the poor standard of some properties and it was easy to see why some people would be put off taking the property owing to the state of it. It had clearly not been cleaned for some time and the décor was disastrous, with only limited funds given by the council to assist with this, which actually only covered one room. The tenant was pleased with the potential of the property and has made substantial decorative improvements to the property in the short time that they have lived there and are very happy in their new home.

4.5 Housing Plus and SE Area Staff

The general purpose of this interview was to gather information as to how the Housing + officers are involved in letting properties and to gain a better understanding of the role that they have. It was discussed as to what the role entails and it is seen as a major step forward in improving the relations between tenants and officers as they are a single point of contact and this often assists prospective tenants in deciding if they want to take up the offer of the property. Sometimes this can be achieved by a second viewing of a property if a prospective tenant feels it is required and where resources allow for this. Housing + officers however do feel that their role is different to that of a letting agent in the private sector as they do not feel that they are “selling” a property, only providing useful information to a prospective tenant. Social landlords are distinct from the private rented sector. They also feel that furnished properties is a complex area and regularly work with external agencies such as St Vincent de Paul to assist where a prospective tenant has no or little in the way of furniture. A further part of the role is to help tenants sustain their tenancy.

4.6 Vacants Manager Meeting

We spoke to the Vacants Manager. We began by asking him if tenants were consulted on the change to the vacants standard, which he confirmed that they were. We then asked him how properties are inspected following any work that was required following a property being vacated. He informed us that random checks are undertaken, as part of the new Kier Contract, since October 2014. A 360 degree photographic view of every room is taken and this has proved to be very useful. Further to this, all accompanied viewing officers undertake further checks to ensure that the property is fit to let and nothing has been overlooked that needs to be completed prior to the uptake of the property. He went on to tell us that only stock photos are used when advertising a property due to concerns about the advertising standards authority and potential accusations of false advertising. Where a property is refused, it is sometimes felt that a prospective tenant uses excuses rather than the real reasons. Perhaps more needs to be done to explore the real reasons behind refusals. At present there are around 35 properties that have been vacant for 3 months or more and more needs to be done to reduce this; annual turnover is around 10%. He feels that as a social landlord, they are not really selling properties as often people have an urgent need of housing. However, there is an element of trying to get appropriate people into properties to reduce turnover. He does feel that more needs to be done to improve letting standards. With the increased cosmetic work that is being undertaken, this is deemed to be improving standards. Where a property is in a particularly poor decorative state, then financial help is available in the form of B&Q vouchers. Externally, not much is done, other than tidying gardens; maybe more can be done to improve appearances.

We asked him if he felt that making properties furnished would make them easier to let; it is felt not as this would put off some tenants who have their own possessions and do not need assistance in this area. Fixtures and fittings are being made available for the most vulnerable, which is definitely helping, but not everyone wants them. It has been found that with the hard to lets, relaxing criteria, to allow smaller families into larger properties, have assisted in letting them and also by decorating hard to let properties. This has also assisted in letting them. The upcoming review of age bandings is expected to assist with hard to lets as more people will potentially become eligible for them.

We asked what work is done to a vacant property. Kier use the minimum lettable standard as for all vacants under a cost ceiling of £3K. Any work required over that amount has to be approved by a member of the council. A lot of work has been undertaken between the council and Kier to improve communications and to ensure that vital work is not missed.

We asked about the removal of rubbish that KIER leave outside a property after a vacant repair. There have been some examples where a few days have passed after the work has been completed before the rubbish is removed – but there is no backlog.

4.7 Vacants Visits

We visited several vacant properties with officers from the Vacants team. We were shown a variety of property types at different locations across the city. Our general view

was that the properties we visited were in a lettable condition though we did note that there were some outstanding works and that the properties were undecorated and in general needed a good clean. At one property we found an old fashioned high level bathroom cistern which we were advised would be replaced after the tenant had moved in. We also found that a water stop tap had been boxed into a cupboard. One of the properties was still undergoing work and the staff told us that this was due to the fact that it had been substantially damaged. Another property that had been passed on inspection had a loose wall mounted radiator and an untidy communal garden. At an older persons flat we found a shower unit that would not switch off because it had been incorrectly wired.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Challenge for Change feel that the lettable standard may not be high enough and it is suggested that it needs reviewing with the involvement of tenants
- 5.2 The external appearance – gardens, property and vacant repair rubbish – is not satisfactory. This is creating bad first impressions and particularly dissuades potential tenants. It also sends a bad message to other residents about garden tidiness
- 5.3 The Property Shop website could be clearer, more attractive and more informative. This would help people make more informed choices and cut time wasting
- 5.4 Challenge for Change feel that the Housing + model has the opportunity to deliver a more joined up and improved service. This will help to create more sustainable tenancies
- 5.5 Greater effort needs to be made to promote areas in a more positive way by establishing better working relationships with all local media. The furnished offer is a good one and the service works well. It should be maintained and better advertised
- 5.6 The furnished offer is a good one and the service works well. It should be maintained and better advertised
- 5.7 Challenge for Change feel that efforts need to be made to achieve a better understanding of reasons for refusal

The photos below show a Council property before and after occupation by a new tenant



6. Recommendations

- R1.** Look into the costs of cutting grass/clean net curtains/washing windows/painting neutral colours and then target Hard to Let – areas or properties.
- R2.** Review the lettable standard in consultation with service users
- R3.** Introduce a more thorough inspection process both pre and post repair
- R4.** Agree a minimum garden standard as part of a lettable standard
- R5.** Learn more from what the best landlords do
- R6.** In Touch and The Bridge could be utilised to advertise hard to let vacants and promote areas and better use could be made of Area Housing Offices to advertise properties locally
- R7.** Adverts need more tailoring rather than stock advert – with more detailed and better information on local facilities. More use of positive / happy images
- R8.** Promote good things about an area to counter negative publicity, promote activities within the area that are appropriate for the age profile – lunch club, toddler groups. Use all Council services in a multi-agency approach
- R9.** Explore idea of using “estate champions” and TARA produced information leaflets. Encourage better press and PR to promote areas
- R10.** Use both external and internal photos and video tours / You Tube to show prospective tenants an idea of the style of the property
- R11.** Use clearer names to describe the area where properties are and more localised advertising
- R12.** Provide more information on the property and garden e.g. room sizes /steps
- R13.** The website could be more attractive with better use of photos
- R14.** Ask for refusal reasons a week after refusal as some customers may have provided an “on the spot” answer that is not genuine. Make better use/analysis of refusal data
- R15.** Talk to multiple bidders about their needs to help them bid more appropriately and make it clearer that you don’t have to bid for 3 properties per week
- R16.** Manage tenancies in a way that limits damage caused in properties including the use of annual tenancy visits
- R17.** Ensure that information about flexibility and discretion about bedroom sizes is made available to applicants
- R18.** Retain furnished accommodation as an option
- R19.** Look at how private landlords are letting properties in Hard to Let areas and think and act more like a letting agent
- R20.** Training of frontline staff could be enhanced to give them more property knowledge and FAQs should be produced for them

7. Budget

7.1 C4C were allocated a budget for the duration of the scrutiny project and spent well within it. Expenses were incurred as follows for the period from April 2014 to March 2015.

- Refreshments £310.24
- C4C members travel expenses £168.50
- Training £1093.20

8. Acknowledgements

8.1 The team would like to thank Gary Westwood and Tina Gilbert from Planning and Performance for their invaluable assistance with this project. Without their support, this project would not have got off the ground. They were also instrumental in arranging the manager interviews and other meetings we have been to as part of our investigations.

We would also like to thank the following for their co-operation with our investigations and for allowing us to attend meetings to gather information and also to them for attending our meetings to answer the many questions we raised.

Manager and Assistant Manager - Vacants Team
Manager - Access to Housing team
Manager and Housing+ Officers - South East Area
Staff from the following sections - Furnished Accommodation; Accompanied Views; Advertising and Matching and the Property Shop.



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Challenge for Change

Outcomes and recommendations Vacants



	What is the C4C Judgement?	What evidence do we have to support that judgement?	What impact is this having on customers?	What is our recommendation?
1	Don't think the lettable standard is high enough – particularly for hard to lets	On site viewing of vacants Refusal numbers Staff comments Doesn't compare favourably with private rented sector for same property types Challenger personal experience	Makes properties harder to let as more refusals Increased turnaround times Increased rent loss Image of an area	R1. Look into the costs of cutting grass/clean net curtains/washing windows/painting neutral colours and then target Hard to Let – areas or properties. R2. Review the lettable standard in consultation with service users
2	The inspection “sign off” of vacant repairs is not rigorous enough	Vacant visits – outstanding issues in some properties Challenger personal experience	Leads to unnecessary post-tenancy repairs Contributes to refusals Reputation of SCC as a landlord	R3. Introduce a more thorough inspection process both pre and post repair
3	Externals – both properties and gardens – could be better. Issue of “first impressions”, particularly with reference to KIER waste and abandoned items	Visits to properties Local knowledge and experience of C4C members C4C member's customer journey Challenger personal experience	Dissuades potential tenants “First Impressions” Leads to more flytipping Sets a poor example to incoming tenants	R1. Look into the costs of cutting grass/clean net curtains/washing windows/painting neutral colours and then target Hard to Let – areas or properties. R4. Agree a minimum garden as part of a lettable standard
4	Generally the vacants visited met the current standard	On site visits to a number of vacants across a range of areas and property types	Percentage of properties that are easy to let and require few repairs is balanced with hard to lets	
5	Recognise that turnover times are average for the sector – so there is room to improve	Research and information	More rent loss than there could be	R5. Learn more from what the best landlords do

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6	Recognise that there are hard to let properties but there are few that have been vacant for more than 12 weeks and most require extensive work	Research and information		<p>R1. Look into the costs of cutting grass/clean net curtains/ washing windows/painting neutral colours and then target Hard to Let – areas or properties</p> <p>R6. In Touch and The Bridge could be utilised to advertise hard to let vacants and promote areas and better use could be made of Area Housing Offices to advertise properties locally</p>
7	How areas are perceived is having an effect – other issues impact too such as transport/schools/ shops. SCC could do more to “myth bust” and help create positive images of areas	<p>Feedback on refusal reasons</p> <p>Managers acknowledge it</p> <p>Press</p> <p>Emphasis on –ves rather than +ves</p>	<p>Affects lettability</p> <p>Refusals</p> <p>Hard to lets</p> <p>Rent loss</p>	<p>R7. Adverts need more tailoring rather than stock advert – with more detailed and better information on local facilities. More use of positive / happy images</p> <p>R8. Promote good things about an area to counter negative publicity, promote activities within the area that are appropriate for the age profile – lunch club, toddler groups. Use all Council services in a multi-agency approach</p> <p>R9. Explore idea of using “estate champions” and TARA produced information leaflets. Encourage better press and PR to promote areas</p>

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8	The website does not provide enough detail, for example on the room sizes of a property. It is not utilised to the extent that other landlords using the same system appear to be. It is basic and unattractive	Website review and comparison with other landlords websites Refusal reasons Other landlords providing more detailed information e.g. room sizes Rehousing survey	May increase refusals as applicants knowledge is incomplete Loss of bids – due to lack of promotion	R10. Use both external and internal photos and video tours / You Tube to show prospective tenants an idea of the style of the property R11. Use clearer names to describe the area where properties are and more localised advertising R12. Provide more information on the property and garden e.g. room sizes / steps R13. The website could be more attractive with better use of photos
9	We feel that refusal reasons are not always real and genuine	Refusal reasons review	Doesn't provide the information that could help make improvements Opportunity to address real concerns is missed	R14. Ask for refusal reasons a week after refusal as some customers may have provided an "on the spot" answer that is not genuine. Make better use/ analysis of refusal data
10	We feel that not all applicants are wanting to move and that some may be just exploring the system	Refusal reasons review Anecdotal evidence from staff The number of "multiple refusers"	Time is wasted Slows process down for those "genuine" applicants	R15. Talk to multiple bidders about their needs to help them bid more appropriately and make it clearer that you don't have to bid for 3 properties per week
11	Housing + has potential to make for an improved and more joined up service e.g. staff could utilise their more detailed local knowledge. Better use of local knowledge could be used by all accompanied viewers	Interview with H+ staff from South East Area Other staff comments	Creates sustainability Reduce refusals Less turnover Better managed tenancies leading to better maintained homes	R9. Explore idea of using "estate champions" and TARA produced information leaflets. Encourage better press and PR to promote areas R16. Manage tenancies in a way that limits damage caused in properties including the use of annual tenancy visits

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12	Lack of understanding by applicants that there is some flexibility / discretion of bedroom sizes	Personal experience of applicants Data and information supplied by Access to Housing	Restricts options for elderly disabled and others who have changing circumstances Reduces downsizing and in turn availability of larger desirable properties	R17. Ensure that information about flexibility and discretion about bedroom sizes is made available to applicants
13	The furnished policy is reasonable and seems to work well	H+ staff comments Vacants manager comments Furnished team comments		R18. Retain furnished accommodation as an option
14	The SCC "offer" does not always compare favourably (in cost and quality terms) with other providers	Market research e.g. Rightmove/ Stocksbridge retirement project Website reviews	Turnaround time as potential applicants may look at other options Reputation of SCC as a landlord	R5. Learn more from what the best landlords do R19. Look at how private landlords are letting properties in Hard to Let areas and think and act more like a letting agent
15	The support provided in Area Housing Offices and the Property Shop varies from excellent to examples where advice given is not always accurate or sufficient	Mystery shops at the Property Shop e.g. inaccurate furnished advice Personal observation and mystery shops Challenger personal experience	Customers supported Customers could be confused/misinformed	R15. Talk to multiple bidders about their needs to help them bid more appropriately and make it clearer that you don't have to bid for 3 properties per week R20. Training of frontline staff could be enhanced to give them more property knowledge and FAQs should be produced for them



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