

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 27 November 2014

PRESENT: Councillors Chris Weldon (Chair), Steve Ayris (Deputy Chair), David Barker, Simon Clement-Jones, Sheila Constance, Richard Crowther, George Lindars-Hammond, Roy Munn, Josie Paszek, Lynn Rooney, Richard Shaw and Sarah Jane Smalley

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Sioned-Mair Richards.

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 25th September 2014, were approved as a correct record and, arising from their consideration, it was requested that a briefing note on the newly introduced anti-social behaviour legislation be prepared and circulated to Committee Members.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 Responses to questions from the Sheffield for Democracy representatives were provided as follows:-

Local Area Partnerships

The Chair, Councillor Chris Weldon, indicated that Members would be able to comment on the operation of the Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) when agenda item 11 was considered. He added that a review of their operating arrangements was taking place and that the Committee would receive a report on the outcome of this when it had concluded. It was emphasised that the Committee had always taken an interest in community engagement and had received reports on this where appropriate. At the present time, it was important for the Committee to ensure that communications were taking place and that best practice was supported.

Public Questions

The Chair apologised for the lateness of the response provided to the public questions received at the meeting held on 25th September 2014, which he considered to be unacceptable. He understood that the Council guidelines for responding to public questions was 10 working days and these would be followed in so far as it was possible. The Policy and Improvement Officer was asked to explore the possibility of having the written responses to public questions published for the public record.

5.2 In conclusion, the Chair informed the questioners that they would receive a full written response to these questions within the guideline response time.

6. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 2015/16

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Communities, which provided an overview of some of the recent developments affecting the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan and some of the considerations for the Business Plan Update 2015/16. The report was presented by Liam Duggan, HRA Business Plan Team Manager. Tenant representatives, Mick Daniels and Tony Watson were also present for this item.

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

- Following feedback from tenants about the Going Local proposals, the allocation of Going Local funding was now being described at a City-wide level. In 2012/13, some of this funding had been transferred to heating budgets, as there was a heating backlog. There was a large Going Local budget of £800,000 and tenants felt that this was the right thing to do. It was emphasised that money had not been taken away from tenants.
- It would be necessary to review the consultative budget as the guidance was old and it was administered differently in different housing areas.
- In relation to the Government relaxing its expectations on local authorities with regard to charging a social rent for high earners, part of the problem was that the Council had no data on tenants' income and the administrative burden of charging a market rate was not felt to be worth any potential benefits. It was also felt that this could lead to disincentivising mixed communities.
- Officers were not aware of any proposals for the Council to be empowered by Government to suspend Right to Buy policy locally.
- The final Business Plan Report would include reference to vacancy management, with there being a slight deterioration in performance last year due to issues such as the bedroom tax and changes to temporary accommodation, but with measures in place on some estates, the position was improving this year.
- There was a shortage of 4-bed Council properties, with less than 1% of

Council housing being of that type. However, it was not generally affordable for the Council to purchase these larger properties and then charge a social rent. Affordable rent might have to be considered in such situations. In addition, the benefit cap was more of an issue for large families.

- A strategy had been developed for buying properties on the open market and the policy was to charge a social rent where possible. Consideration was also being given to buying former Right to Buy properties.
- The model for photovoltaics was to install the panels as part of the roofing contract on new roofs. This avoided having to use further scaffolding and was of benefit to the householder in terms of the free energy. The feed-in tariff from the energy companies was money which the HRA would seek to recover. There were sensitivities around issues such as the amount of sunlight and maintenance, but the Council would be looking to recover the cost over a 25 year period.
- Officers were aware of the success of the use of photovoltaics in Kirklees and some had visited authorities which had installed them to assess how schemes operated.
- It was emphasised that the submitted report was part of pulling together the Business Plan and that the issue of vacant properties was not on the frontline of issues to be covered. At the consultation meetings, it was suggested that residents could identify such properties for officers' consideration but nothing had been heard further on this.
- There was a team in place which was leading on the issue of photovoltaics and building up a network of contacts, with updates being obtained from other authorities. In relation to the process for decision making, there had been consultation and discussion with tenants and Members, following which recommendations would be made by Cabinet, which would ultimately be considered by Council.
- The setting of the Going Local budget and principles would be covered as part of the Business Plan process, with the Housing and Neighbourhoods Service then drafting more detailed guidelines once the budgets and principles had been approved.
- Consultation feedback from tenants had included advice that external works needed attention in the communal areas in Gleadless Valley. The Business Plan contained a commitment to carry out work on entry doors, stair wells, safety and general repairs. In addition, consideration needed to be given in future to wider issues, such as linking the Streets Ahead programme with the external environment.
- There had been positive feedback from the Education and Enforcement pilot on the Lansdowne estate and permanent posts were being looked at in this regard.

- The purpose of the report was to pick out the big headings involved. It was in this format as the Committee had asked to see it at this stage, so that Members could comment prior to seeing the finished article.
- From a Business Plan perspective, it was important to look at financial performance and procurement savings in relation to repairs and ensure that this came through, but there was not so much on quality and performance in relation to the customer experience in this respect.
- In relation to the installation of photovoltaic panels, issues such as the economic situation, changes to feed-in tariffs and economies of scale would need to be seriously considered.

6.3 In conclusion, the tenant representatives commented on the new charging structure for Sheltered Accommodation, the Going Local budget, the residual levy, vacant properties, Bring Out Your Rubbish Days and the new Kier repairs contract.

6.4 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Liam Duggan, Mick Daniels and Tony Watson for their contribution to the meeting;
- (b) notes the contents of the report and responses to questions; and
- (c) requests that:-
 - (i) further work be undertaken with tenant representatives to ensure that the final Business Plan proposals reflect tenants' views and that steps be taken to ensure that tenants' questions were answered and that they were kept informed of developments;
 - (ii) officers provide statistics for vacant properties at local meetings; and
 - (iii) further consideration be given to the Sheltered Housing Service Charge to see if anything more could be done to soften the impact on tenants who would lose their transitional protection and, if nothing could be done, that an explanation of this be included in the Cabinet report; and
- (d) welcomes the proposals regarding photovoltaics, but recognises the affordability issues involved and seeks reassurance that this would not be detrimental to the Business Plan in future.

7. CHALLENGE FOR CHANGE: GRASS CUTTING

7.1 The Committee received a report of the Interim Head of Housing Investment and Repairs which provided an update on progress on the implementation of the recommendations arising from the Challenge for Change Grass Cutting report.

The report was presented by Jayne Foulds, Manager, Estates and Environmental Services Team. Also present for this item were Councillor Jayne Dunn, Cabinet Member for Environment, Recycling and Streetscene, David Hargate, Head of Parks and Public Realm, and tenant representatives, Mick Daniels and Tony Watson.

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

- It was not necessary for the tenant inspectors to be technically qualified and an information booklet was available to provide guidance on what was an acceptable grass cutting standard.
- The rate of charge for grass cutting was based on the best endeavours to keep the grass at a certain height, it was not based on terrain or the type of machine used.
- Operatives selected which grass cutting machine to use for a particular job, and endeavoured to use one machine for each piece of work, where possible, to maximise efficiency. This could be looked at if it was causing problems.
- The removal of grass clippings from the cut areas presented very significant operational and environmental challenges and was expensive.
- Litter picking was arranged between the Parks and Public Realm Service and Housing Services, in advance of cutting.
- As part of the North East pilot, Housing Estate staff had worked jointly alongside staff from the Parks Service to undertake improvement work on Housing land, such as small scale grass cutting, hedge cutting and managing shrubs. The pilot had revealed that efficiencies were possible if service operational constraints could be overcome. It had now finished, but it should be noted that some practices had continued across the boundaries between the Northern and North East areas of the City. As a result of open service delivery, the grounds maintenance service aimed to achieve the same standard for all of the City as from April 2015.
- The Parks Service held the information as to which Council service maintained which piece of grass and it had been the case that some Housing staff had worked as part of the Parks Team on grass cutting. There was no one person in Housing who could be contacted to find out who maintained which piece of grass, but it was pointed out that Amey was responsible for the grass verges.
- With effect from April 2015, responsibility for grass cutting would be with either the Parks Service or Amey.
- Officers worked closely with the Amey Client Team in relation to grass cutting, with problems caused by their equipment being left on grassed areas being

identified as an issue. At present, flytipping was being prioritised but was being linked with grass cutting. It was hoped to meet with representatives of Amey to discuss their regime.

- The grassed areas on estates should, in future, be maintained to their present level as specified by the Service Level Agreement.
- A work plan was in place so that the asset mapping system could be updated as information was reported in.
- The Council had data on who managed what piece of land, but it had not been possible to provide this in a paper format without the need to print large size maps that would be needed to provide the required level of detail.
- The recycling of grass cuttings was undertaken as much as possible, but there were transportation issues if cuttings were to be collected. This would be economical on a small scale, but charges would have to be made if all cuttings were collected.
- The issue of litter picking prior to grass being cut would be addressed.

7.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- (a) thanks Jayne Foulds, David Hargate, Mick Daniels and Tony Watson for their contribution to the meeting;
- (b) notes the contents of the report and responses to questions; and
- (c) requests that:-
 - (i) consideration be given to the provision of training for the Tenant Inspectors so it could be reassured that they were properly prepared for their duties; and
 - (ii) Councillors Harry Harpham, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods, and Isobel Bowler, Cabinet Member for Culture, Sport and Leisure, be asked to consider:-
 - (A) the way in which the Service Level Agreement operates, particularly in relation to charges and value for money; and
 - (B) the different specifications for grass cutting so that, where possible, some uniformity could be provided.

8. POLICE AND CRIME PANEL UPDATE

- 8.1 Councillor Roy Munn, who was a member of the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel, provided the Committee with an update on recent events, particularly his attendance at the national conference for Police and Crime Panels,

the appointment locally of a Chief Finance and Commissioning Officer in the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Police and Crime Panel meeting which was held on 19th November 2014. At that meeting, the new Police and Crime Commissioner, Alan Billings, outlined his priorities and identified Orgreave, Hillsborough and Child Sexual Exploitation as critical issues. Councillor Munn additionally reported that the Panel was to meet more frequently and that the Home Affairs Select Committee was considering ways in which Police and Crime Commissioners could be recalled.

- 8.2 In response to a Member's question, Councillor Munn indicated that the Panel was concerned about the performance of South Yorkshire Police in relation to events at Orgreave and Hillsborough and in connection with Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham, and that there was a need to get to the bottom of these issues. Councillor Munn also indicated that the Panel would like more operational information, but its remit was quite narrow, and that the Panel's Task and Finish Group on Domestic Abuse was off the agenda for the moment due to priority being given to the three aforementioned issues.
- 8.3 In conclusion, the Chair, Councillor Chris Weldon, commented that the Sheffield First Safer and Sustainable Communities Partnership Board did receive some operational information and that Members of this Committee, Councillors Steve Ayris and Sioned-Mair Richards, were Members of that Board.
- 8.4 RESOLVED: That the Committee thanks Councillor Roy Munn for his contribution and notes the information reported.

9. WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

- 9.1 The Committee received a report of the Policy and Improvement Officer which provided details of the Committee's Work Programme for the 2014/15 Municipal Year.
- 9.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-
- (a) approves the Work Programme 2014/15 as detailed in the report; and
 - (b) notes that:-
 - (i) the proposed date for the special meeting on Community Safety Issues was Thursday, 12th February 2015, and Members would be informed when this had been confirmed;
 - (ii) items on domestic abuse and the correlation between economic sanctions and food banks had been requested for consideration at future meetings; and
 - (iii) the Policy and Improvement Officer would circulate details to Members regarding the Task and Finish Group on House Building which had been set up by the Economic and Environmental Wellbeing

Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee.

10. LOCAL AREA PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

10.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the Local Area Partnerships and Community Engagement report; and
- (b) requests that when the review into this subject is completed, a report be presented to the Committee, with the Cabinet Member and Lead Officer being invited to attend the meeting.

11. REVIEW OF THE PARTNER RESOURCE ALLOCATION MEETING (PRAM)

11.1 That the Committee notes the contents of the Review of the Partner Resource Allocation Meeting (PRAM) report.

12. RIGHT TO BUY UPDATE NOVEMBER 2014

12.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the content of the Right to Buy November 2014 Update report; and
- (b) requests that future reports be set out in an appropriate table, which includes comparative figures, so that trends could be identified.

13. WELFARE REFORM - NOVEMBER 2014 UPDATE

13.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes:-
 - (i) the contents of the Welfare Reform November 2014 Update report; and
 - (ii) that the Policy and Improvement Officer would check on the provision of answers to requests for information previously made by the Committee; and
- (b) requests that future reports be set out to include comparative figures, so that trends could be identified.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

14.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee will be held on Thursday, 22nd January 2015, at 2.00 pm, in the Town Hall.