

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

**Meeting held 26 March 2015**

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

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**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sheila Constance and Richard Crowther.

**2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

2.1 The Chair reported that appendices 3, 5 and 6 for agenda item 14a ‘ Call-in of decision on Future Options for the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service’ were not available to the public and press because they contained exempt information described in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and if Members wished to discuss these appendices the public and press would need to be excluded from the meeting.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

3.1 Councillor Josie Paszek declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Item 14a (Call-In of the Decision on ‘Future Options for the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service’) as she had been a member of a task and finish group which had contributed to the decision-making process. She indicated that she would leave the room during consideration of that item.

**4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2015, were approved as a correct record.

**5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS**

5.1 The Chair, Councillor Chris Weldon, indicated that the questions posed by Mick Watts on repairs and housing in general would be covered by officers at the relevant part of the meeting and added that he would also be provided with a written response which would be published with the agenda for the Committee’s next meeting.

The Chair also informed the Committee that further correspondence had been received from Mr Martin Brighton who was not satisfied with the response to his question submitted to the Committee’s last meeting. The Chair’s view was that the questions had been adequately answered and that Mr Brighton be referred to the Council’s complaints procedure if he remained dissatisfied.

## **6. THE IMPACT OF WELFARE REFORM ON SHEFFIELD'S RESIDENTS - UPDATE MARCH 2015**

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Director of Policy, Performance and Communications, which provided an update on the impact of welfare reform on Sheffield's residents and included latest information, an understanding of how people were being affected by welfare reform and an update on hardship schemes. The report was introduced by Nicola Rees, Policy and Improvement Officer, who made particular reference to Under-Occupancy (Bedroom Tax), Council Tax Support, the Household Benefit Cap and the introduction of Universal Credit and the Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

6.2 Also present for this item were Councillor Mazher Iqbal, Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health, Maxine Stavrianakos, Head of Neighbourhood Intervention and Tenancy Support, and John Squire, Finance Manager.

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

- The 45 tenants who had been provided with Sheffield Credit Union Budgeting Accounts were all Council tenants. The delays in taking this up were because Universal Credit had not yet rolled out and it was expected that this would take off when that had been fully introduced. It should be noted that the use of these accounts had stopped evictions taking place.
- Thirteen people had been moved so far using the 'man and van' service.
- In relation to the migration to Universal Credit, it should be borne in mind that other authorities did not have the same demographic as Sheffield. Officers were liaising with colleagues in Manchester and Liverpool, so that lessons could be learnt from its introduction there. In addition, officers had attended events involving the Councils in Wigan and Oldham. There were also pathfinders throughout the country with Chesterfield and Barnsley now going live.
- It was understood that delays for PIP claimants had been caused by delays in arranging medical assessments and poor availability of assessment venues.
- Investigations would be made to look into the numbers of EU Migrant Workers who were destitute as a result of increased restrictions on benefits claims.
- The number of people receiving Council Tax Support fluctuated throughout the year and an analysis would be conducted to examine the causes of these fluctuations.
- The CRESR (Sheffield Hallam University Centre for Regional, Economic and Social Research) report would feed into work being undertaken to integrate welfare reform and policy strategy.

- Work was being undertaken through the Welfare Reform Implementation Group and the re-organised Citizens' Advice Bureau to try to mitigate the effects of the welfare reforms. In addition, circulars were sent out to all Councillors providing them with information on the effects of the welfare reforms.
- The Department of Work and Pensions would be contacting claimants in receipt of Disability Living Allowance in relation to them making a claim for PIP.
- References in the report to tenants meant the number of households.
- The Poverty Strategy and Welfare Reform Implementation Group's Strategic Direction work were different workstreams and it was planned to look at how the Strategic Direction work on Welfare Reform could be integrated with the Poverty Strategy.
- No Council house tenants had been evicted in Sheffield as a result of the Under-Occupancy (Bedroom Tax) provisions.

6.4 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Councillor Mazher Iqbal, Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health, Nicola Rees, Maxine Stavrianakos and John Squire for their contribution to the meeting;
- (b) notes the contents of the report and responses to questions; and
- (c) requests that:-
  - (i) 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; and
  - (ii) Members wishing to take up the offer to visit the teams working on the impacts of Welfare Reform contact Matthew Borland, Policy and Improvement Officer.

**7. CALL-IN OF DECISION ON 'FUTURE OPTIONS FOR THE HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE SERVICE'**

(NOTE: At this point Councillor Josie Paszek left the room.)

7.1 The Committee considered the decision of the Cabinet made on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015, relating to future options for the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service.

7.2 Signatories

The Lead Signatory to the call-in was Councillor Steve Ayris and the other signatories were Councillors Richard Shaw, Simon Clement-Jones, Penny Baker and Colin Ross.

7.3 Reasons for the Call-In

The signatories had confirmed that they wished to scrutinise the decision relating to future options for the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service, to ensure that such a significant decision was made in the best interests of tenants and leaseholders who used the service.

7.4 Attendees

- Councillor Harry Harpham (Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods)
- Janet Sharpe (Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services)

7.5 Councillor Steve Ayris addressed the Committee as Lead Signatory and emphasised the importance of the decision for customers.

7.6 In response, Janet Sharpe stated that customers were always an important part of the Housing, Repairs and Maintenance Service (the Service) with over 200,000 orders being processed each year. It was important to ensure that the service was clearly integrated and flexible so that duplication was avoided. She highlighted the need for customers to receive a good quality service and added that work had been undertaken with them in relation to the decision. An officer team had also undertaken a review of the service. She considered that the insourcing of the service provided the best opportunity and that any short-term risks were outweighed by the long-term benefits. Councillor Harry Harpham emphasised the importance of tenants and leaseholders in driving the service.

7.7 Questions from Members of the Committee

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

- A decision needed to be made at this stage on the future of the service due to the timescales for procurement and so that the detailed work in providing a better, stronger service could be undertaken. It would also run alongside the change being delivered in terms of Housing+.
- If the contract was retendered, there were risks involved and an insourced service would be more flexible to change. A strong management team would work with Kier to deliver the service. Furthermore, an insourced service would have a closer alignment with other Council services.
- The risks should not stop the Council moving to an insourced service and appropriate risk management would be put in place.

- Monitoring of the existing contract was undertaken by the client teams and any new structure would be delivered using a strict management and performance management framework. In addition, the new service would be part of the Council structure.
- The experience of other authorities going back to the market had been taken into consideration and that of other authorities making similar decisions to this one. The Association for Public Service Excellence's Performance Management Framework had also been taken into consideration, as had the experiences of those local authorities who had a successful in-house repairs and maintenance service. These together had provided an important understanding of costs and performance management.
- Officers had looked at the sampling in the Association for Public Service Excellence's report in relation to customer service ratings, with measures being reported for each operative. In addition, TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment Regulations) would apply to ensure a productive workforce and rigorous performance management standards would be adopted.
- Consultation had been carried out at Area Housing fora, through a partnership group focusing on repairs in connection with the Local Area Partnerships and through the tenant led Future of Council Housing Services Group. Statutory consultation with leaseholders would also be undertaken.
- A workstream was currently looking at customer access through the single call centre. Over the past few months far more calls had been identified and it was important to ensure that the right number of staff were available to take these calls and also to identify repeat calls. It was hoped to operate a dedicated housing and repairs call centre.
- At present, the Council call-handlers got the relevant information from the caller, so they could pass it to the right team. An appointment would then be made or there would be direct contact with Kier. It was acknowledged that the passing over process needed improvement.
- Officers now had more confidence in the information provided about the number of calls received at the Council call centre.
- The Investment and Repairs Partnership Group, which included tenants and leaseholders, worked on investment issues and reported back in the local areas. In areas where there was no Tenants' and Residents' Association, a broader consultation would take place and could involve the use of drop-in centres. The Council's Communication Bus could also be considered for use in the consultation process. In addition, the Future of Council Housing Group could be involved and the experience of other local authorities who had an insourced repairs and maintenance service could be considered. Consultation could be tailored to different areas of the City and social media

could also be used.

7.8 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report together with the comments made and responses provided;
- (b) notes the decision of the Cabinet made on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015, in relation to the insourcing of the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017;
- (c) recommends that no action be taken in relation to the call-in decision; and
- (d) requests that:-
  - (i) a report be presented to a future meeting of the Committee to include full costings of holding a ballot of tenants and leaseholders on insourcing the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service, together with other fully costed consultation options; and
  - (ii) tenant representatives be invited to the meeting at which the above report is to be considered.

## **8. SOCIAL HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE CONTRACT**

(NOTE: At this point Councillor Josie Paszek re-joined the meeting.)

- 8.1 As a preliminary to this item, Vicki Barrow, a disabled Council tenant, informed the Committee of the extreme difficulties which she had had in getting Kier to undertake repairs to rotten wooden cladding at her property which was affecting her kitchen wall and floor tiles. She highlighted the difficulties experienced in contacting Kier, in that she had made approximately 70 phone calls and had only received a telephone call back on one occasion. Furthermore, she emphasised that the mould being caused by these problems had caused her asthma to deteriorate. In response, Janet Sharpe, Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services, stated that she would make contact with Ms Barrow and also get one of her managers to contact her with a view to resolving these problems. She added that one of the reasons for the delay may be because a specialist damp-proofing company needed to be used.
- 8.2 The Committee then received a report of the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services which presented the Committee with information to enable it to consider the progress made on implementing the requirements of the contract for Repairs and Maintenance Services between the Council and Kier.
- 8.3 Janet Sharpe took the Committee through the report which highlighted key issues in the current arrangements.
- 8.4 Janet Sharpe also referred to the Casework Overview document which had been provided by Councillor Sarah Jane Smalley and which had been circulated to the

Committee. Councillor Smalley explained that the Casework Overview document contained examples of the number of visits made, related instances of poor service, things being missed and language issues and requested more information on performance management in relation to the quoted cases. In response, Janet Sharpe referred to the large volume of complaints received each year and the importance of the correct identification of the repairs required and having the right person to deal with them. She added that robust contract arrangements were in place, which included penalties for any breach. Improvement measures were in place with Kier and there was a commitment within that organisation to improvement.

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

- The annual housing stock survey involved a survey of the condition of 15/20% of the Council's housing stock.
- A 30 year asset management plan informed what was undertaken as planned maintenance. This would include items such as roof replacements.
- In order to minimise condensation, information was provided to tenants on insulation, high performance heating and ventilation. One of the main issues was drying clothes on heating and the use of extraction fans had been considered in some situations.
- Information on capital planned schemes was obtainable through the Local Area Housing Fora.
- It was acknowledged that leaks could create condensation, but it should be borne in mind that making properties airtight could also create problems.
- The making of a contribution towards the cost of extractor fans to combat condensation would be a policy decision. However, in the case of the reported complaint, it may be possible to see if the relevant Area Housing Manager could investigate this and consider whether it was a special case.
- It should be noted that the Council Complaints Procedure also applied to Kier.
- In some properties, extractor fans would be put in as part of a refurbishment, but there was a cost issue, so the design of windows was being looked at.
- Where a job was reported, it was attached to a property reference number and the client team would check to see if this was a new repair or an existing one. The jobs were monitored so that any trends could be identified.

8.6 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Janet Sharpe and Vicki Barrow for their contribution to the meeting;

- (b) notes the contents of the report and responses to questions; and
- (c) requests that:-
  - (i) reassurances be provided on how the reported issues relating to condensation, call handling and the number of repeat visits to properties are being addressed;
  - (ii) the questions raised in the Casework Overview document provided by Councillor Sarah Jane Smalley be addressed and circulated to the Committee; and
  - (iii) a further report on the Social Housing and Repairs Maintenance Contract be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

## **9. SHEFFIELD'S PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR**

- 9.1 This item was deferred to a future Committee meeting due to time constraints.

## **10. POLICE AND CRIME PANEL UPDATE**

- 10.1 Councillor Roy Munn, who was a member of the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel, reported on the Police and Crime Panel meeting which was held on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2015. At that meeting, Councillor Mazher Iqbal was appointed as Chair and there were no members of the public in attendance. The Panel also considered the renewed Police and Crime Plan 2013/17, the aim of which was that South Yorkshire would be and feel a safe place to live, learn and work. The Plan had three strategic priorities which were protecting vulnerable people, tackling crime and anti-social behaviour, and enabling fair treatment, and was victim focused. There was also an emphasis on understanding vulnerability. The Panel decided not to appoint a Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner and also considered its Work Programme. In conclusion, Councillor Munn suggested that the Police and Crime Commissioner could be invited to a future meeting of the Committee.

- 10.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Councillor Roy Munn for his contribution to the meeting;
- (b) notes the information reported; and
- (c) requests that:-
  - (i) the Policy and Improvement Officer circulates a link to the Police and Crime Plan to Committee Members; and
  - (ii) consideration be given to the inclusion within the Committee's Work Programme of a themed meeting on Police and Community Safety which would include an update on the reorganisation of local policing.

**11. WRITTEN RESPONSES TO PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

11.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the contents of the Written Responses to Public Questions report.

**12. PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ALLOCATIONS POLICY**

12.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the contents of the Progress on Implementation of the Allocations Policy report.

**13. REVIEW OF THE PARTNER RESOURCE ALLOCATION MEETING (PRAM)**

13.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the contents of the Review of the Partner Resource Allocation Meeting (PRAM).

**14. RIGHT TO BUY UPDATE REPORT**

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

**15. COUNCILLOR CHRIS WELDON**

15.1 Members noted that Councillor Chris Weldon was standing down as a Councillor in May and expressed their appreciation of the excellent work which he had undertaken as Chair of the Committee. They also extended their best wishes to him for the future.

**16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

16.1 The next meeting of the Committee would be held on a date to be arranged.

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