

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

---

**Thursday 19 July 2012 at 2.00 pm**

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

**The Press and Public are Welcome to Attend**

## **Membership**

---

Councillors Chris Weldon (Chair), Penny Baker (Deputy Chair), David Barker, Nikki Bond, Shelia Constance, Richard Crowther, Denise Fox, Martin Lawton, Peter Rippon, Chris Rosling-Josephs, Simon Clement-Jones, Anders Hanson and Shaffaq Mohammed

## **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](http://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, or you can ring on telephone no. 2734552. 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. Please see the website or contact Democratic Services for further information.

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 David Molloy, Scrutiny Policy Officer on 0114 2735065 or email [david.molloy@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:david.molloy@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  
19 JULY 2012**

**Order of Business**

---

- 1. Welcome and Housekeeping Arrangements**  
The Chair to welcome attendees to the meeting and outline basis housekeeping and fire safety 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 Meetings**  
To approve the minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 8<sup>th</sup> March and 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2012
- 6. Public Questions and Petitions**  
To receive any questions or petitions from members of the public
- 7. Lettings Policy Review**  
To receive a report on options for the Lettings Policy Review
- 8. Challenge 4 Change**  
To receive a report on Challenge 4 Change tenant scrutiny recommendations
- 9. Policy Update**  
Report of the Scrutiny Policy Officer
- 10. Draft Work Programme 2012/13**  
Report of the Scrutiny Policy Officer
- 11. Dates of Future Meetings**  
To note that future meetings of the Committee will be held on Wednesday, 11<sup>th</sup> September and Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> November, 2012 and Thursdays, 10<sup>th</sup> January and 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2013, at 2.00 pm in the Town Hall

---

## ADVICE TO MEMBERS ON DECLARING INTERESTS AT MEETINGS

---

A new Standards regime was introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2012 by the Localism Act 2011. The new regime made changes to the way that your interests needed to be registered and declared. Prejudicial and personal interests no longer exist and they have been replaced by Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs).

The Act also required that provision is made for interests which are not Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and required the Council to introduce a new local Code of Conduct for Members. Provision has been made in the new Code for dealing with “personal” interests.

Guidance on declarations of interest, incorporating regulations published by the Government in relation to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, has been circulated to you previously, and has been published on the Council’s website as a downloadable document at -<http://councillors.sheffield.gov.uk/councillors/register-of-councillors-interests>

If at all possible, you should try to identify any potential interest you may have before the meeting so that you and the person you ask for advice can fully consider all the circumstances before reaching a conclusion on what action you should take.

Further advice can be obtained from Lynne Bird, Director of Legal Services on 0114 2734018 or email [lynne.bird@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:lynne.bird@sheffield.gov.uk)

## **SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Meeting held 8<sup>th</sup> March 2012**

PRESENT: Councillors Chris Weldon (Chair), Jenny Armstrong, Joan Barton, Alison Brelsford, Jillian Creasy, Tony Damms, John Knight, Martin Lawton, Diane Leek , Chris Rosling-Josephs, and Steve Wilson.

.....

#### **1. WELCOME AND HOUSEKEEPING ARRANGEMENTS**

1.1 The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and outlined basic housekeeping and fire safety arrangements.

#### **2. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS**

2.1 There were no items identified where the public and press should be excluded.

#### **3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

3.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Anders Hanson and Frank Taylor.

#### **4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIPPING**

4.1 There were no declarations of interest or party whipping.

#### **5.. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

5.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2012, were approved as a correct record, with the exception of Item 3 – Apologies for Absence and Substitute Members, which was amended by the addition of Councillor Diane Leek to the list of Members submitting their apologies and, arising therefrom, the Chair referred to Item 8 – Sheffield Homes – An Update on Customer Scrutiny and the Implications of the Localism Act, specifically to the apparent confusion regarding the mistaken belief of the residents’ representatives who had attended the meeting, that the Committee would provide them with responses to a number of questions and concerns they had raised in connection with the former Tenant Scrutiny Steering Group. He stated that Peter Morton, Chief Executive, Sheffield Homes, had sent written responses to all the residents’ representatives, but they had indicated that they were not happy with such responses, and had subsequently requested a further meeting with himself. Arising from the concerns raised by the residents’ representatives, the Scrutiny Committee:-

RESOLVED: That:-

- (a) the concerns of the residents' representatives now reported be noted; and
- (b) in terms of the operation and governance of similar such groups, agreed that:-
  - (i) no other such groups should be established or disbanded without the full consent of the residents' representatives;
  - (ii) a Councillor be present at all future meetings of any such groups;
  - (iii) the addition of any further tenants to groups should be agreed by the consent of all existing group members; and
  - (iv) the final arbiter in terms of governance arrangements for such groups should be the City-wide Forum.

## **6. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS**

- 6.1 Mr Martin Brighton raised a number of questions regarding Indices of Multiple Deprivation in connection with Low Edges/Batemoor, allegations regarding the bypassing of Tenants' and Residents' Associations by Sheffield Homes, Community Policing and the forthcoming City-wide Tenant Consultation.
- 6.2 The Chair stated that the questions would be forwarded to the relevant officers, with a request that they respond in writing to Mr Brighton.

## **7. COMMUNITY SAFETY UPDATE 2012**

- 7.1 The Committee received a presentation from Inspector Paul McCurry, South Yorkshire Police/Head of Community Safety, Sheffield City Council, reporting on what the Police and the City Council aimed to do in order to make Sheffield residents be safe and feel safe. The main aims would be to reduce anti-social behaviour (ASB) and low level offending, work to create sustainable and cohesive communities, tackle substance and alcohol misuse and protect the most vulnerable. He stated that the work to be undertaken in achieving these aims involved using the Joint Strategic Intelligence Assessment, which comprised an overview of crime, disorder and substance misuse issues in Sheffield, and which the Police submitted to the Home Office on an annual basis.
- 7.2 Inspector McCurry reported on the new Community Safety Model, which was based on the Whole Household approach, which reduced duplication, created opportunities for information sharing across partner organisations and 'designs out' crime through physical planning, licensing, regulation and

community planning. The approach would help to provide ASB/Community Safety Structures that were fit for purpose and strengthened the role of the Safer Neighbourhood Teams in order to ensure effective delivery of services. The approach would also provide the Safer and Sustainable Communities Partnership with the best opportunity possible to fulfil its core objectives and to build capability and capacity within communities to tackle community safety issues. He referred to the three key strands of investment, which included prevention, crisis resolution and recovery, and reported on budget issues. He concluded by referring to the proposed collaboration with other partners, including the Health and Wellbeing Board, those delivering the Strong, Competitive Economy and Great Place to Live outcome areas and those responsible for the Successful Young People outcome area about addressing crime and ASB by young people.

7.3 Members of the Scrutiny Committee raised a number of questions and the following responses were provided:-

- Whilst the Council's Car Parking Services had the necessary powers to issue parking tickets, the Police were committed to looking at granting Police Community Safety Officers (PCSOs) similar powers. Whilst the PCSOs had certain enforcement powers, this did not include the power to arrest people, and they were generally tasked to respond to low-level crime.
- The Police did not wish to see any of the good practices adopted by officers in certain areas, such as the South East Community Assembly area, disappear when the Safer Neighbourhood Areas were altered to align with the Community Assembly area boundaries. It was unlikely that this would happen as investment by the Police would remain the same.
- A report on the ASB Review had not yet been submitted to the Cabinet. The key recommendations contained in the Review included having one, uniform service whereby frontline staff would deal with issues in the community and looking at how the Police would deal with ASB and community safety priorities, how partners responded and how to deal with ASB Orders. Following approval of the Review by this Scrutiny Committee, work had commenced on its contents and as part of this work, a place-based tasking pilot had been established in Southey. Further work under this initiative would involve looking at the Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs), and it was planned that any proposals would be reported back to a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.
- One of the three key strands of investment included the implementation of the Key Worker Model to replace NAGs. This model involved identifying a key individual who would work with a family, and who could be the link between all the different partners involved, and be responsible for pulling all the different services

together. In terms of making the operation of the NAG more efficient, particularly in the light of the likely reduction in the numbers of Safer Neighbourhood Officers (SNOs), attempts would be made to refocus the NAGs to look at issues regarding ASB. There was a need for the NAGs to be accountable to the Community Assemblies. Whilst the SNOs would be responsible for Community Assembly areas, there would still be flexibility in that, if required, they would help out in surrounding areas. The proposed changes would also include the addition of a new team of officers responsible for working on migration, cohesion and community safety. With effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012, there would only be seven Safer Neighbourhood Inspectors (SNIs) to align with the Community Assemblies, which would help to deal with efficiency savings.

- The changes would involve the transfer of the SNOs from the Community Assembly areas to a central team, although they would still be responsible for the same areas. The changes aimed for a more consistent approach and it had been identified that there was a need for a structure to pull all the SNOs together in order to look at key issues in the Community Assembly areas.

#### 7.4 RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Committee:-

- (a) received and noted the information reported as part of the presentation, together with the responses provided to the questions and comments; and
- (b) thanked Inspector Paul McCurry for the presentation now made.

### 8. POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONERS

- 8.1 The Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from Inspector Paul McCurry, South Yorkshire Police/Head of Community Safety, Sheffield City Council, providing an update on the position regarding the appointment of Police and Crime Commissioners.
- 8.2 Inspector McCurry reported on the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), the operation of the Police and Crime Panel (PCP), the implications of the new arrangements for Sheffield and how the Safer and Sustainable Communities Partnership (SSCP) was preparing for the new arrangements. The main role of the PCC was to bring the voice of the people into policing and to be accountable for it and to hold police forces and Community Safety partners to account, making them more efficient and effective, and reducing crime. The new arrangements would result in the abolishment of police authorities. He referred to the functions and powers of PCCs, the elections process, details regarding PCPs, including arrangements for the establishment of such Panels, their policy intent, regulation and funding. He concluded by reporting on how the SSCP was preparing for the introduction of the role of PCCs.



8.3 Members of the Scrutiny Committee raised a number of questions and the following responses were provided:-

- In terms of the elections, the Home Office would not be providing the necessary funding and there did not appear to be any limits in terms of how much people could spend on their election campaigns. To become a prospective candidate, all people had to do was to declare their intention to their local authority within a specific deadline. They would be required to produce a manifesto as part of the process, and if elected, would be held to account on this. There were a number of restrictions in terms of who could become a candidate. It was not known at this stage whether people would require nominations from a given number of people.
- Whilst there were procedures in place to deal with any issues arising from the elections, it was accepted that there was a need for an effective scrutiny process regarding the role of the PCC. Further information on this was to be released shortly.

8.3 RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Committee:-

- (a) noted the information reported as part of the presentation, together with the responses to the comments and questions raised;
- (b) expressed its concerns regarding the election process, particularly the apparent lack of clarity with regard to the candidates' spending limits and the position regarding the apparent lack of powers to depose a Police and Crime Commissioner during their term of office if it was found that they were not suitable for the job; and
- (c) In the light of the concerns now expressed, requested the Interim Director, Community Services, to seek further information on these issues.

## 9. **POLICY UPDATE**

9.1 The Scrutiny Policy Officer submitted a report providing an update on policy changes introduced by the Government during February and March 2012, relating to local housing demand and opportunities for community and voluntary organisations to apply for funding to help revitalise communities.

9.2 RESOLVED: That (a) the contents of the report now submitted be noted; and

- (b) Members be requested to forward any views on the contents of the report to the Scrutiny Policy Officer.

This page is intentionally left blank

**SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL**

**SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY AND POLICY  
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

**Meeting held 16<sup>th</sup> May 2012**

PRESENT: Councillors Penny Baker, David Barker, Nikki Bond, Simon  
Clement-Jones, Sheila Constance, Richard Crowther, Denise  
Fox, Anders Hanson, Martin Lawton, Shaffaq Mohammed, Roy  
Munn, Chris Rosling-Josephs and Chris Weldon

.....

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

2. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR**

RESOLVED: That Councillor Chris Weldon be appointed Chair and  
Councillor Penny Baker be appointed Deputy Chair of the Safer and  
Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee.

3. **DAY AND TIME OF MEETINGS**

RESOLVED: That meetings of the Committee be held on a bi-monthly basis  
on dates and times to be determined by the Chair, and as and when  
required for call-in items.

Signed ..... Date .....

Cllr Chris Weldon,  
Chair, Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development  
Committee

This page is intentionally left blank

## 1. Purpose of report

To set out interim findings and recommendations, in order to gain a steer from the Member Task Group on what options to consider developing in detail to include in a new draft Lettings Policy.

## 2. Introduction and background

The Allocations Policy Review Project Board and Project Team have worked with the Safer and Stronger Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish group over the past 6 months. Comprehensive consultation has been carried out between September 2011 and February 2012. Following the completion of the consultation, analysis has been undertaken and a report attached setting out interim findings and recommendations below on a number of key areas that officers would like an indication from Members with regard to whether they should be worked up in to detail policy recommendations for inclusion in a revised Lettings Policy. There are a number of other areas that still need to be considered such as bidding and management of adapted properties, and these will be brought to future meetings of the Task Group, which will continue to operate as a working group after the 2012 local elections.

For each key area of policy identified above this report gives information on:

- What the current policy is.
- What works well in the current policy.
- What the issues are with the current policy.
- What the consultation showed.
- What research and bench marking told us.
- Options for consideration with main advantages and disadvantages.
- Interim recommended option to develop in detail and initial business case for this.

Members are asked to give a steer on the initial recommendations so that officers can develop detailed proposals. Members are also asked to indicate if there are any alternative approaches they would wish to be developed in to policy options. Detailed proposals will include a full appraisal of financial implications, risks and impacts including Equality Impacts.

It should be acknowledged that in revising the Lettings Policy this will not resolve all of the issues that arise and may have a contributory part to play only for example in the management of anti-social behaviour. It should also be noted that for some issues there simply isn't a total solution available. For example whilst we should try to make the best match of a property to customer needs we have constraints imposed by the type of stock we have or where it is located. The option of Council Housing will in these circumstances provide a housing option but will not necessarily be able to fulfil either all of an applicant's needs or aspirations. Many of our tenants are likely to continue to need on going support beyond the initial letting.

## 3. Summary of interim recommendations

The report contains options to consider for 5 key areas. The report sets out 2/3 main options for consideration. To help Members to consider these, officers have indicated a recommended

option at this stage which it is felt would most merit being developed in to a full policy option. These recommended options are listed below:

1. Banding and Priorities - adopt a banding system that
  - recognises different levels of priority e.g. urgent need to move,
  - reduce the overall number of priorities,
  - introduces any new local priorities required e.g. local connection,
  - revises time restrictions on priorities,
  - retains a quota for applicants in general housing need with waiting time only.
2. Housing Registration and Management of Register– introduce policy that reflects the current and likely future availability of and demand for housing, maintain a more up-to-date and smaller register with better information gathered about prospective tenants, give better information to customers at point of registration and bidding and require more proactive engagement from customers and addresses issues of fairness. This could include for example adopting the following provisions which are common in other authorities:
  - Provide realistic advice on social housing and other housing options to customers prior to registration to make sure people understand the likelihood of being housed and what type of housing would most meet their needs or aspirations
  - More frequently review the register to remove people who are no longer interested in being on it or ensure they are only bidding for properties they are eligible for e.g. annual registration requirement
  - Require customers to provide proof of identity/household prior to either registration or prior to bidding
  - Take up rent references and tenancy references – to more effectively manage who is allocated a property and provide any necessary support to both the tenant and neighbours
  - Stop allowing people who are suspended on the register from continuing to accrue waiting time to encourage people to address issues e.g. rent arrears and anti social behaviour prior to any new tenancy and to differentiate this group more fairly from customers who have not had issues managing previous tenancies
3. Bedroom Eligibility Criteria – revise the criteria to ensure household are prioritised based on need as demand for all property types now outstrips supply, and to reflect the welfare reforms with relaxed criteria for specific circumstances e.g. older people’s housing, or have been unable to let property to eligible household.
4. Revise the system of age designation as is not effective in managing stock or tenancies and does not reflect current demand.. This has to be considered in the context of housing management options to deal with tenancy issues, meeting different customer needs and coupled with steps such as better understanding and assessment of incoming tenants. More work is required to establish the most suitable option for Sheffield ranging from removing all age designation to applying it only in more limited circumstances than currently.
5. Choice Based Lettings – retain CBL as the advertising and matching mechanism for properties as it is more efficient and transparent than officer allocation and popular with customers to be able to express preference for individual properties.

It should be stressed that there are many different approaches that could be taken and that the ideas and options presented in the report are not all mutually exclusive of each other so

elements from some could be incorporated with features of others. It is also of course the case that Members may not favour any of the options presented and officers would welcome an indication of any alternative ideas that Members would like to be developed in to detail policy options.

## 4. Key drivers and context for change

The key drivers for change that the Lettings Policy Review must address are:

- Perceptions around fairness, transparency and consistency.
- Simplicity and ease of use for customers.
- Make the best use of available stock and effective management of a scarce resource.
- Managing expectations when we have less stock and more demand than when the current policy was adopted when we had surplus stock and encouraged applications from both people who wanted housing in the near future and as an “insurance policy” in case a future housing need arose.
- Ensuring equalities are promoted in everything we do and that none of our practices are discriminatory.
- Legal compliance and a cohesive policy ensuring all the complex elements work together to contribute to achieve our aims and priorities for the city.
- Ensure sufficient priority is given to reasonable preference groups and any local priorities.
- Support aspirations and encourage attainment and financial inclusion.
- Contribute to a robust Self Financing model – delivering value for money and be cost effective.
- Respond to welfare reforms that will affect demand, customers ability to pay for accommodation and impact on rent arrears.
- Respond to the Localism Act.
- Support tenancy sustainability.
- Support community cohesion and promote mixed and sustainable communities.

## 5.1 Banding

### Current Policy

#### Key Features

Each vacant property is designated for letting to one of 5 Letting Bands.

These are:

- **Housing register** – people with priority are considered first for properties in this band. All properties are in this band unless specifically designated within one of the other bands. There are 23 priority groups. Priority is awarded for a fixed period of time ranging from 4 to 26 weeks and is reviewed periodically. Priority can either be ended by a property being secured, or cancelled either with or without a final offer. Priority assessments are on demand at request of customer.
- **Waiting time** – one in every four of each type and size of property on each estate can be set aside for the waiting time band. For these properties all applicants are considered in order of their waiting time on the housing register.
- **First Come First Served** – Where there has been no demand for a property it can be offered to the first applicant who meets the letting criteria. If no applicants meet the letting criteria then the criteria can be relaxed. People who accept these properties retain their waiting time.

- **Demolition** – Some demolition schemes will include provision for a demolition band so that people with demolition priority from the same area are considered first for vacant properties.
- **Overcrowding Band** – properties that have been released through release of High Demand Property priority will be allocated to people with Overcrowding Priority first.

### What works well in the current banding policy?

- The quota system works well and is popular with customers because it allows at least 1 in 4 properties to go to people who have not been awarded a priority. In reality more than 35% of properties go to waiting time as properties refused by those with priority or with no bidders then go to waiting time customers.
- Discharging the Council's duty in relation to homeless applicants works well in ensuring that customers are clear when our duty has been fulfilled and in moving customers through the system.
- A number of people who would otherwise be considered as homeless are given a priority and do not have to go through the homeless route e.g. Domestic Abuse.
- It was effective when we had surplus stock in highlighting groups the Council would help to move quickly beyond the statutory reasonable preference groups. It paid particular attention to local issues at the time the policy was adopted such as demolition that needed to be prioritised.

### Issues with the current policy

- Priority groups are all given the same level of priority so those in critical need of housing are placed alongside those with less urgent need to move.
- The current bands names are confusing.
- There are too many priority groups and many of these could be condensed into the reasonable preference groups. For some of our priorities there were zero or less than 3 awards in the past year – e.g. demolition for owner occupier, vulnerable 16/17 year old and dismissed service tenant.
- A local connection with Sheffield is not required or given any priority.
- People from outside Sheffield can move into supported accommodation and into Council housing and they are not encouraged to consider other housing options or account isn't taken of whether they need to be housed in Sheffield.
- Our policy does not recognise community contribution such as Foster Carers, volunteering, working in area.
- Our policy is not up-to-date in releasing of all properties that are now in higher demand where demand outstrips supply e.g. two bedrooms.
- Our policy would not be compliant with draft guidance on armed forces applicants by ensuring equal access to the housing register and therefore would need to change if this becomes statutory guidance.
- Time limits on bids are now unrealistic as demand has increased.

### Consultation Results

- The number of priorities and inability to put most urgent cases first was of concern.
- BME groups raised fairness as a concern. BME groups would welcome more clarity around levels of priority.
- People outside Sheffield being housed ahead of Sheffield people is a concern for customers and impacts on their perception of fairness. 65% felt that people living in Sheffield should take preference.



- People working on a low income would benefit from Social Housing as they struggle to afford other housing. Customers said it was not fair that there was no recognition of working and bringing a contribution to the community in this way.
- Social Housing should not be the tenure of last resort - people should value this scarce resource. Mixed and sustainable communities should be encouraged.
- Home owners should not be excluded from the Housing Register but could be given lesser priority and sale of property as a condition enforced.
- People with enough income/finance to resolve their own housing need shouldn't be totally excluded from the Housing Register but given lesser priority if they have the resources to resolve their own housing need.
- There is a lot of support for providing a level playing field for people leaving the Armed Forces
- Mixed views on the quota for waiting time. Some think that the current quota system is reasonable. Many would like to see the quota changed to 50:50, or at least increased.
- People working with vulnerable groups were concerned that the quota to priority groups should not be reduced. This was backed up by the questionnaire.
- Concerns expressed about the time limits on priorities as they no longer reflect how long it takes people to be given a suitable offer of housing. Some felt that the time limits are confusing and that there are too many different time limits. Others think time limits are necessary, help applicants to understand the system, and without them the costs of temporary accommodation would rise.

### Relevant Research

- The Project Team looked at over 30 other Councils' policies and all had a banding system that identified and prioritised by levels of urgency. Most authorities have 4 or 5 bands depicting levels of need but some have as few as 2 or as many as 6.
- Sheffield has a very high number of priorities and this reflects the time the policy was last reviewed when there was a surplus of stock. Need to reduce this to reduce administration (priorities need to be assessed) and to reflect the availability of stock and make it simpler to understand.
- Many of the separate priorities are in fact sub-sections of the statutory reasonable preference groups and therefore could fairly easily be streamlined.
- Analysis also shows that a relatively high number of cases are awarded as Special Case priority (204) which needs to be better understood given the large number of specific categories that do exist.
- Time limits on priorities do not reflect the realistic periods within which people are likely to be re-housed and therefore a lot of process/review activity results in extending a priority. This resource could be more effectively used for other activity or to help with savings. Customers feel penalised and forced to accept properties they are not interested in or refuse properties.
- Some Councils do have quota systems for general housing need (Sheffield's is relatively high at 25%), but those that don't ensure everything goes to priority first. The quota system is popular in Sheffield and works well. Some authorities are more flexible in being able to have local quotas or varying the quota according to issues in specific areas.
- A number of other authorities give lower priority to homeowners or those with capital/ability to meet own housing need.

- Many authorities are reviewing their policies in light of the new flexibilities of the Localism Act creates. Other authorities already recognise people working on a low income, contributing to the community by volunteering, fostering etc., and say that it brings a balance to communities.
- The new Code of Guidance on allocations indicates Armed Forces must be given priority. A number of other Councils have already addressed this.
- There is evidence that Sheffield imports from other authorities because of our policy by not requiring or prioritising local connection. This has been seen particularly in applicants coming through the supported accommodation route.

### Options

1. Keep the system as it currently is.
2. Adopt a banding system that recognises levels of priority, reduces the number of priorities, introduces other local agreed priorities and considers priorities first for all properties.
3. Adopt a banding system that recognises levels of priority, reduces the number of priorities, introduces other local agreed priorities, reviews time restrictions on priorities and retains a quota for applicants in general housing need with waiting time only.

### Option 1 – Keep the current system

#### Advantages

- Members and Staff are familiar with the current policy
- Customers are familiar with current policy
- Retains current quota for waiting time and ability to review this quota to reflect need
- All statutory reasonable preference groups are provided for
- Local priorities currently agreed e.g. Domestic Abuse do mean some applicants will not have to make homeless application
- No need to manage a change
- Allows close management of priority cases e.g. homeless where Council is incurring costs of Temporary Accommodation by monitoring of priorities and discharge of duty

#### Disadvantages

- Fail to differentiate between urgency of housing need and re-house most urgent promptly
- Does not simplify priority categories, remains out of date with obsolete or little used priorities retained
- Doesn't respond to consultation feedback
- Fail to align ourselves with neighbouring authorities so that we don't import cases with high levels of need, which will ultimately put a further strain on our resources
- Out of city applications links to perceptions fairness for customers
- Doesn't take advantage of freedoms to identify local priorities
- Won't address prioritisation of armed forces if this becomes a statutory requirement.
- Time limits on priorities will continue to be out of step with realistic re-housing times

#### Finance

- Costs £87 per priority assessment based on assessing 5,266 cases per year. This comes from an overall staff costing to manage and assess priorities of £462,142 per year.
- Full costs of keeping people in hospital/providing social care have not been calculated, but for example it costs £440 per day per person for out of town mental health placements.
- Drive to further reduce use of B+B/temporary accommodation to house homeless applicants when demand is increasing not supported if cases not prioritised.

### Option 2 - Adopt a banding system that recognises different levels of priority, reduces the

number of priorities, introduces other local agreed priorities and considers priorities first for all properties

### Key Features

- Stream line the number of priorities particularly where can condense into reasonable preference groups
- Determine bands that recognise levels of urgency and prioritise according to this e.g. top band would be small and contain only most urgent e.g. life threatening, hospital discharge that can't return safely home
- Identify any other local priorities e.g. local connection, community benefit
- Advertised all properties for priorities first and only allow properties not taken to go to waiting time applicants

### Advantages

- Priority cases re-housed more quickly and some may have much more choice about where they live
- The policy will be easier to understand with fewer priorities and may be easier to administer
- Temporary accommodation and other costs associated with longer waits for housing will go down
- We will be more aligned with our neighbouring authorities and not so prone to importing cases which will address some of consultation feedback
- We should see more mixed and sustainable communities developing if priorities include community benefit
- Uses new flexibilities and address requirement to prioritise armed forces

### Disadvantages

- People may still feel priorities are unfair but this will be true of any system where decisions are made about who should have a higher priority for housing
- Will be unpopular with customers who do not have a priority and currently bid with their waiting time
- System could increase priority chasing as perceived to be only means of getting Social Housing and best choice of available housing
- Won't necessarily promote mixed and sustainable communities if priorities take greater share of properties
- Some priorities e.g. community benefit could be difficult to define
- If adopted local connection would need to consider how people are supported to move for work
- Still retain unrealistic re-housing time targets

### Recommended Option 3

Adopt a banding system that recognises levels of priority, reduces the number of priorities, introduces other local agreed priorities and ability to pilot them, reviews time restrictions on priorities and retains a quota for applicants in general housing need with waiting time only.

### Key Features

- Stream line the number of priorities particularly where can condense into reasonable preference groups
- Determine bands that recognise levels of urgency and prioritise according to this e.g. top band would be small and contain only most urgent e.g. life threatening, hospital discharge that can't return safely home
- Identify any other local priorities e.g. local connection, community benefit, expand release

- high demand to two bedroom properties and ability to pilot or apply in areas as needed
- Retain a quota for waiting time applicants of at least 25% and ability to review this or vary locally
- Review time restrictions on all priority bands to either remove entirely, vary or make more realistic

#### **Advantages**

- The more urgent priority cases will be re-housed more quickly and some may have more choice about where they live
- The policy will be easier to understand with fewer priorities and may be easier to administer
- Temporary accommodation and other costs associated with longer waits for housing will go down
- This option will be more popular with waiting time applicants as they will still be able to bid and be housed with access to all property types and areas
- We will be more aligned with our neighbouring authorities and not so prone to importing cases
- Customer satisfaction levels could rise
- More sustainability and fewer refusals as we are able to manage expectations better and greater ability to manage local issues. If more sustainability is achieved then this will result in cost savings in rent loss from vacant properties.

#### **Disadvantages**

- People may still feel priorities are unfair but this will be true of any system
- Some priorities e.g. community benefit could be difficult to define
- Risk that priority cases may not move through the system more quickly as the time restrictions are removed/reviewed
- If adopted local connection would need to consider how people are supported to move for work

### **Business Case For Recommendation**

- Most critical cases can be prioritised resulting in potential savings and reduction in amount of human suffering/ harm.
- All other local authorities with CBL do prioritise applicants using a banding system of some description as the fairest way to allocate properties where demand outstrips supply
- Increasingly authorities are adopting local priorities.
- Current priorities are out of date and reflect time when more stock was available.
- Current time limits are unrealistic and are continually extended for that reason – however some time limits are likely to be needed.
- Currently our quota system has benefits - in reality 37% of properties go to waiting time. It is not necessary in Sheffield to prioritise all stock for priority applicants and would not be popular or fair.

## **5.2 Registration and Housing Register Management including bidding**

### **Current Policy**

Sheffield City Council operates an open housing register. Anyone over 16 can join, although they are not usually offered a property until they are over 18.

SCC works in partnership with the Housing Associations in the city, so if you join Sheffield City Council's housing register you can also be nominated for some Housing Association properties in the city.

Anyone who is subject to immigration control within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 is not a qualifying person and cannot be registered. Applicants are not required to provide documentary proof to support their application until they are matched to a property.

Applicants complete a registration form and are registered from date form returned. Owner-occupiers can join the housing register in the same way as other applicants. However, if they accept a Council property they must agree to take all reasonable steps to sell or dispose of their property within 6 months of the date they take the tenancy. The whole of waiting time from each new registration is taken into account when allocating a property. Customers can be on multiple registrations.

In some circumstances registrations are suspended. This means they will not be offered a property whilst suspended although they continue to accrue waiting time. For example if they behave anti-socially or have a history of rent arrears or other housing debts to the Council. If you accept a property your registration is used up.

The policy says the register will be regularly reviewed but a timescale is not set out and applicants are required to inform of changes of circumstances. There is a rolling review of the register but whilst this does remove applicants who do not respond or say they do not wish to re-register, the pace is too slow to bring the register up to date and significantly reduce the size of it. 12,000 new applications are processed every year. There are 90,000 registrations currently.

Once registered, customers are able to bid for any properties that are advertised including ones they are not eligible for.

### **What works well in the current policy?**

- Customers find it easy to register as they just have to complete and submit a form
- Help is given to customers who find it difficult to register
- Relatively little cost to initial registration because applicants are not seen in person to complete registration and checks are not undertaken at this stage
- The policy was very successful in attracting a lot of people to register when supply outstripped demand for certain property types and it was felt there was enough stock to encourage people to register in case they needed social housing at any time in the future
- The policy worked well when a larger stock portfolio existed and was sufficient to offer more people a realistic prospect of becoming a Council tenant

### **Issues with the Current Policy**

- Little active engagement in the application process required from customers after initial registration and therefore not clear how serious customers are about being a tenant.
- No tailored housing options advice given at the point of application – expectations not managed or realistic. This may contribute to younger tenants taking on a tenancy when they do not understand the implications and may lead to offers being refused (though this is also related to unlimited bidding).
- There is limited information about who our prospective tenants might be and therefore unable to target marketing or housing options. Rent and tenant references are not required so we are not always aware of issues that may have either prevented a tenancy being issued or may have resulted in support being given.
- The rolling review of the register and quality assurance activity in last year has reduced the size by several 1000 applicants to under 90,000. Documents are now scanned to assist with processing of applications. However this process is too slow to keep register up to date and to a manageable size – other councils specify in policy frequency of re-registration.
- The size of the register fuels local and national perceptions that there is a huge amount of unmet need in Sheffield and that it is imperative to join register as an insurance policy as you can only be housed with many years waiting time. It can be seen as unrealistic to continue to encourage adequately housed people to register as an insurance and to accrue waiting time when there is not enough stock to meet demand.
- It could be seen as unfair to have a policy that allows indefinite accrual of waiting time with no account taken of need during that time or efforts made by customers to meet their needs e.g. by bidding for properties. Customers who are not genuinely queuing until a property comes up that meets their needs are rewarded for the length of time they had the foresight or physical ability to join the register – this could be seen to favour older people who have been able to accrue more waiting time and could also be seen to discriminate against BME groups who are less likely to have lived with and had knowledge of the policy. This could cause more problems in the future as increasing numbers of customer accrue very long waiting times but may have less need of a property than other applicants bidding for the same property.
- Checks are not required at application stage or before bidding so it is not possible to ensure bidders for properties are eligible until matching and offer made. The new lettings ICT system will make eligibility rules for properties clear, but if policy changes to restrict bids to properties it will be important that registration details are up to date.
- Current requirements in policy to provide proof of sale of owner occupied property and notify of change of circumstances is not monitored and there are no sanctions.
- Current policy can suspend people but they still continue to accrue waiting time during the period of suspension.

## Consultation Results

- Support for more proactive management of the housing register from customers and staff alike. Via the consultation questionnaire 86% of the 500+ respondents said they would like to see us ask for more documentation.
- It was suggested that we find out more about the people on the register. More active management of the register was also suggested, from an annual review, to being more

proactive about changes in circumstances – although some were concerned that it would be easy to forget to do this and more vulnerable people would struggle with this.

- Some felt that a proactive housing options approach is needed at the beginning of the process in order to manage both the housing register and people's expectations.
- 70% stated they strongly agreed or agreed with checks being carried out for mortgage and rent arrears as well as references.
- 89% answered yes to applicants having to produce documents to confirm their identity and living arrangements when registering. 7% stated no and 4% did not know. (489 answered)
- Some felt that we should become stricter about ASB, whether by excluding people from the register or managing their tenancies better. A range of groups would like to see the introduction of more behaviour related checks relating to previous tenancies. The questionnaire asked, 'Are there any groups of people we should stop from joining our Housing Register altogether?' ASB perpetrators was the most popular answer.

### Relevant Research

- Most Councils maintain more up-to-date registers with a requirement to re-register annually. Most ask for documents and information up front.
- A lot of authorities have moved, or are moving to, a more housing options approach. It is recognised that some applicants will have little or no hope of securing anything through the register and so it is important to give the right advice at point of application and manage expectations appropriately. This also pro-actively manages housing problems before they escalate and catches issues at the earliest opportunity.
- A lot of authorities carry out home visits and verify the information given to them by applicants and prior to offer stage. Applications are not processed without complete information and not registered unless complete and confirmed eligible. Suspended applicants do not accrue waiting time like they do in Sheffield.
- Many authorities are framing their policies to encourage customers into work or education, or to aspire to good tenancy management and others are recognising community contributions.
- Sheffield's register and rate of registration is by far the largest in the country and we can learn from how other authorities have reduced the register by a combination of policies in relation to eligibility and management. Other core cities have a range of between 5-11% of households on the register. The equivalent of 43% of Sheffield's households are registered. The proportion of people not bidding is disproportionate at 80%. No other authorities encourage registration from applicants who are not currently looking for social housing – their waiting lists are largely comprised of people who have recently registered/re-registered **and/or** are actively bidding for properties.

### Options

1. Keep the system as it currently is.
2. More proactive management to maintain up-to-date register e.g., annual registration requirement, identification checks and references – more time is needed to work up details.
3. Run two registers – one for active bidders and one for those only expressing interest.

## Option 1

### Advantages

- Will be popular with non-active applicants
- Will not require more resources or staff time to manage
- Will not require any revision of procedures or staff training
- We can continue to house customers some of whom have complex needs and we owe re-housing duties to who may fail to be housed if there was more requirement to provide references or meet certain conditions

### Disadvantages

- Doesn't get it right first time for the customer by pro-actively manage expectations realistically and giving good housing options advice.
- Reputational risk associated with having the largest register in the country.
- Out of step with best practice of other authorities who have managed to reduce registers effectively
- Difficult to target information to such a large group or market effectively.
- Limited knowledge of incoming prospective tenants and their needs unless they have previously been a SCC tenant or are in a priority category (for example homeless)
- Delays with offers due to lack of information at offer stage.
- Unable to carry out early homeless intervention work due to lack of information.
- No future proofing for increase in demand for Social Housing.
- Encourages priority chasing as fuels impression can only get re-housed with priority and very long waiting times.

## Option 2 Run two registers

### Key Features

- Run 2 registers one for active bidders and one for those only expressing an interest
- Applicants would need to proactively move to active list and comply with all requirements to register, up-date etc
- Introduce better housing options advice before activating registration including tenant obligations, cost of housing, likelihood of meeting aspirations or needs, other alternatives
- A decision would need to be made about what "currency" the inactive list had e.g. would a cap apply or would waiting time accrue for everyone on this list

### Advantages

- May be popular with non-active applicants
- Maintain a unique Sheffield approach which is not reflected elsewhere of encouraging people to register for social housing as an "insurance policy"
- Could concentrate on keeping up to date the active bidder list
- If there is a quota for waiting time for people in general housing need then there needs to be some mechanism for assessing waiting time.

### Disadvantages

- Doesn't pro-actively manage customers' expectations realistically at application stage.
- Creates more work for staff when there are no more properties available.
- Costs associated with maintaining two registers at a time when resources are scarce as if there is no review of the inactive list this will continue to grow year on year.
- Reputational risk associated with having the largest register in the country continues
- Has many of the disadvantages of Option 1 unless decide to adopt features of option 2 with the active bidders list
- Could be confusing and cause more complaints and queries from applicants

## Recommend Option 3



More proactive management to maintain an up-to-date register e.g., annual registration requirement, identification checks and references, introduce restrictions for better management – more time is needed to work up details.

### Key Features

- Introduce better housing options advice before registration including tenant obligations, cost of housing, likelihood of meeting aspirations or needs, other alternatives
- Set out frequency for review/re-registration e.g. annual (this could apply to all options)
- Introduce evidence checks earlier in process either at point of registration or bidding. Restrict bidding to eligible properties – this could apply to all options.
- Expand rent arrears checks from former SCC tenant to all people before tenancy offered and/or tenancy references
- Consider “currency” of waiting time for inactive applicants or those who are suspended from the register for example could stop suspended applicants from accruing waiting time, could only count waiting time that has accrued whilst the applicant was eligible for the type of property they have bid for or put a cap on waiting time
- Consider introducing restrictions on immediate re-registration when been re-housed
- Consider penalties/demotions for customers who refuse offers

### Advantages

- Would expect the register to reduce as only people who are serious about re-housing will register so annual review costs will reduce in time.
- Updated message conveyed that social housing is a scarce and valuable resource which is unlikely to be available to the vast majority of people registered and we will be more careful about who can become a tenant. Shifts culture on viewing Social Housing as a realistic insurance policy for most people and increases focus on other housing options.
- Able to target resources appropriately and market more effectively.
- Better understanding of applicant’s needs and more appropriate allocations resulting. Better tenancy sustainment as a result.
- Less delays on offers and acceptances with resulting revenue loss, voids times and customers awaiting re-housing.
- Potentially better tailored housing options for customers producing more holistic and realistic outcomes. More chance of early intervention and therefore prevention of homelessness.
- Potentially fewer complaints, Member’s enquiries and higher customer satisfaction if applicants expectations are managed.
- Could differentiate between people who have been genuinely seeking housing and those who are not

### Disadvantages

- May initially be unpopular with applicants and support agencies as they have to provide more information and documents.
- More resources will be required to manage the processes up front.
- Staff training on new processes and procedures, and new procedure manuals required.
- Is a major shift in emphasis and requires educating applicants and support agencies regarding new procedures and cultures about the purpose of social housing.
- Customers currently accepted for re-housing that we owe a duty to may not be accepted – this could mean we have difficulties discharging duty or would need to invest more in supporting them in other housing.

### Business case supporting recommendation

- Policy was framed at a time when we had far more stock available and this situation has

reversed with demand now considerably outstripping supply. It is no longer realistic to encourage people to register as an insurance policy before they have considered all their options and had advice on this.

- This doesn't mean it is wrong to encourage people to wait as there is less stock than is needed at anyone time. But it isn't helpful to customers to mislead them about the possibility of social housing meeting their needs when they are planning their futures.
- Sheffield has the largest Housing Register in the country, and it is not reviewed frequently enough to keep it up to date. We know relatively little about the customers on the Housing Register and therefore do not target resources and advice. This contrasts with other Councils that actively manage their waiting lists and can target resources appropriately.
- By not expecting customers to at least re-register regularly, not having any penalties for refusals, and not giving good initial advice, a message is conveyed that social housing isn't as valuable or rare as it really is and that applicants need to make little commitment. This could contribute to the high number of refusals of offers and rate of tenancy failure.
- Tenants and prospective tenants are very concerned about ASB and the effects on a community. There is a lot of support for more checks being carried out prior to acceptance onto the Housing Register or being offered accommodation to mitigate this risk.
- This would not provide a complete resolution to issues – many customers will have complex needs particularly those the Council is obliged to give reasonable preference to.

### 5.3 Bedroom Eligibility

#### Current Policy

	Studio Flat	1 Bed Flat or House or Bung	2 Bed Flat or Mais	2 Bed House or Bung	3 Bed House or Bung	3 Bed Flat or Mais	4 Bed House	4 Bed Flat or Mais	5 Bed +
Single Person	✓	✓	✓						
Single Person with overnight access to 1 or more children	✓	✓	✓						
Single Person with overnight access to 2 or more children	✓	✓	✓			✓			
Couple or 2 Adults		✓	✓	✓					
Household with 1 child			✓	✓					
Household with 2 children same sex or 3 individual adults			✓	✓	✓	✓			
Household with 2 children opposite sex; or 3 or more children					✓	✓			
Household with 4 or more children; or household of at least 6 people in total					✓	✓	✓	✓	

Household with 5 or more children or Household of at least 8 people in total					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
--	--	--	--	--	---	---	---	---	---

The table

below sets out the current eligibility criteria for bedrooms/type of property:

If more than one applicant is eligible then the property is allocated on order of registration. If nobody meets the eligibility criteria then the property can be let to a smaller household.

### What works well in the current bedroom eligibility section of the policy?

1. The flexibility to relax the criteria if no-one meets the criteria.
2. Households can occupy a property with a spare bedroom and can potentially meet future housing need without moving/access to children is acknowledged
3. The generosity of the eligibility criteria has been effective in making sure properties that would have otherwise been vacant are occupied.

### Issues with the current policy

- The policy was originally formulated at a time when there was an over supply of Social Housing and so could be more generous with bedroom allocation. That is not the case today with 90,000 on the register and 18,500 actively bidding for only 4,000 lets. Demand for Social Housing now far exceeds supply.
- This applies for all size of properties so under current policy we are allocating family size housing to single applicants or those without children in preference to customers with larger households who need them where eligibility overlaps. For example a single person is eligible for a 2 bedroom flat as is a couple with 2 children of the same sex. If a single person has the earlier registration date they will be allocated the property.
- There is an inherent contradiction between having priorities and incentives for people to move out of properties they are under-occupying at the same time as having a policy which encourages under-occupation.
- Proposed welfare reform raises affordability issues for incoming and current tenants under-occupying. Tenants and prospective tenants face a real possibility of being unable to pay their rent due to reduced housing benefit provisions that are likely to apply from April 2013. This will increase the level of arrears, possession actions and void times.
- Welfare reforms are wide spread and will also affect those in the private rented sector and owner occupiers. This may increase the demand for Social Housing further and there may be increases in homeless approaches due to affordability issues in current properties.
- Sheffield's relatively generous criteria compared to neighbouring authorities makes it more attractive to non-Sheffield residents to register for housing.

### Consultation Results

65% of responses to the consultation questionnaire agreed that policy should be changed to allocate a property with the minimum number of bedrooms to meet an applicant's current housing need.

### Relevant Research

Many northern cities have already adopted the minimum bedroom standard as their eligibility criteria with the ability to relax the criteria. This has been in response to the supply and demand issues experienced in most authorities and puts them in a better position with the

coming Welfare Reforms proposed.

SCC adopted current policy of a generous bedroom allocation to deal with over-supply of properties and this is no longer the case.

## Options

1. Keep the system as it currently is
2. Bedroom Criteria tightened to reflect current supply shortage more in line with Welfare Reforms i.e. 'need' only
3. Bedroom Criteria tightened to reflect current supply shortage be more in line with Welfare Reforms with relaxed criteria for specified circumstances

### Option 1 Keep system as it is

#### Advantages

- Staff and applicant's are familiar with the current system.
- No changes necessary to processes, documentation, systems etc.
- People do not always have to move when needs change
- Continue to attract people to Council housing who are not benefit dependent and can afford rent if can have a larger property

#### Disadvantages

- Not recognising and responding to increased demand for Social Housing and supply outstripping demand for all property sizes. Families will continue to live in unsuitable housing whilst properties are allocated to people who do not "need" them.
- Perceptions of unfairness as properties are allocated to people who do not need them when there are supply and demand issues.
- Not managing a scarce resource efficiently.
- Not dealing with affordability issues for tenants in receipt of reducing benefits.
- People needing to down size being unable to.
- Not responding to the increasing pressure that Welfare Reform will put upon applicants of all tenures and the resulting possible further increase in demand for Social Housing.
- Rent loss, churn and associated costs that we can't afford with the new HRA funding gap for Sheffield and to sustain a robust Self Financing Model
- No coherent policy on under-occupation
- Sends message that people do not have to be able to afford their home when we rent it to them which will create difficulties when trying to address arrears

### Option 2 Bedroom Criteria tightened to reflect current supply shortage more in line with Welfare Reforms i.e. 'need' only

#### Key Features

- Revise letting criteria so that maximum bedroom entitlement more closely reflects need and demand for housing
- Remove overlaps between eligible categories

#### Advantages

- Recognition that Social Housing is a scarce resource and can no longer afford to promote under-occupation.
- Recognises supply and demand miss match for all property sizes.
- Better utilising the stock and ensuring properties are populated fully.
- Allocating people what they 'need' rather than 'want' is positive in terms of encouraging move-on to other housing options thus freeing up Social Housing for others that need it.
- In line with consultation findings.
- Creates less competition for two and three bed properties as fewer will be eligible.

- Protects tenants from gaining tenancies that are not affordable.
- Pre-empts problems associated with issuing unaffordable tenancies such as rent arrears, court action and possible eviction.
- Minimises churn in respect of loss of tenancies due to affordability issues.
- Coherent policy on under-occupation

### Disadvantages

- People may have to move on when circumstances change, creating churn.
- Reducing choices for people who can afford to pay (not on benefit) could be controversial.
- Maybe less attractive to some applicants as limits the current choice they have to have an extra bedroom.
- Tenants downsizing or in demolition schemes may find options less attractive.
- Some properties may become hard to let e.g. age designated 2 bed bungalows.
- Age designated stock becomes harder to let.
- May restrict some areas even more for younger people (if no 1 bed non age designated available).
- Creates more competition for one bed properties.

### Recommended Option 3 Allocation tightened to reflect current supply shortage in line with Welfare Reforms with relaxed criteria for specified circumstances

### Key Features

- For the majority of properties revise letting criteria so that maximum bedroom entitlement more closely reflects need and demand for housing and in line with welfare reforms
- Remove overlaps between eligible categories
- Retain flexibility to allow a more generous allocation for example for older people's housing
- Retain flexibility to let property to a smaller household than is eligible if no eligible household requires property **and** prospective tenant can pay rent

### Advantages

- Recognition that Social Housing is a scarce resource.
- Recognises supply and demand miss match.
- Better utilising the stock and ensuring properties are populated fully.
- Protects tenants from gaining tenancies that are not affordable.
- Pre-empt problems associated with issuing unaffordable tenancies such as rent arrears, court action and possible eviction.
- Minimises churn in respect of loss of tenancies due to affordability issues.
- Creates less competition for two and three bed properties.
- More attractive option for tenants downsizing or in demolition schemes
- Allocating people what they 'need' rather than 'want' is positive in terms of encouraging move-on to other housing options thus freeing up Social Housing for others that need it.
- More coherent policy on under-occupation.
- More flexible than option 2 and therefore less likely to have voids in certain housing e.g. older peoples

### Disadvantages

- People may have to move on when circumstances change, creating churn.
- Reducing choices for people who can afford to pay (not on benefit) - could be controversial
- Maybe less attractive to some applicants as limits the current choice they have to have an extra bedroom.
- Could be difficult to define why some could still continue to under-occupy if there is a clear business case not to allow this – consistency and fairness.
- Some properties become hard to let (could be mitigated by relaxing criteria in some circumstances)
- May restrict some areas even more for younger people (if no one bed non age designated available).

- Creates more competition for one bed properties.

### **Business case supporting recommendation**

There is a huge mismatch between supply and demand. Many northern cities have already adopted the bedroom standard as their eligibility criteria with the ability to relax the criteria. Sheffield no longer needs or can afford to be more generous than neighbouring authorities.

65% of responses to the consultation questionnaire agreed that policy should be changed to allocate a property with the minimum number of bedrooms to meet an applicant's current housing need. This would also address customer's perceptions of fairness as often they can't understand how a single person can be given a larger property than they need when we have such a high demand.

Welfare reform is going to affect more people in Social Housing and private rented housing who need to down size. It is important to minimise rent losses as much as possible and not increase our losses of approximately £2.1 million per year. A self financing model will not be robust if we encourage under-occupation and the accrual of rent loss.

## **5.4 Age Designation**

### **Current Policy**

All bungalows and each block of flats will be designated for one of three groups:

- No minimum age limit;
- 40+ or with mobility needs and with no children under 16;
- 60+ or with mobility needs.

For properties with a minimum age limit we make every attempt to offer the property to someone above the minimum age. If there are no suitable applicants we let it as First Come First Served without considering other applicants who have bid but do not meet the minimum age limit. If there is still no demand from people who meet the minimum age limit we will consider re-designating the bungalow or block of flats.

### **What works well in the current age designation section of the policy?**

1. Age designation is popular with some older people.
2. Age designation addresses some of the issues around clash of life styles and anti-social behaviour/perceptions of safety.

### **Issues with the current policy**

- Age designated properties can be hard to let because no one of that age wants them.
- 96% of the properties that drop into the First Come First Served band are age designated
- FCFS properties are not advertised on the internet and a person can get larger accommodation than they are eligible for just because they see it and bid for it first. Or can be housed ahead of people who have been waiting longer

- Although policy says we can consider de-designating properties, in reality this is a lengthy complicated process.
- More than a quarter of all our flats and bungalows are aged designated but the majority of bids come from people under 40 years of age – so a disproportionate amount of stock is age designated. This could be seen as discriminatory against younger people who are not been given fair access to available housing.
- Lack of properties in some areas has the affect of concentrating under 40s customers into areas of the city where there are more properties without designations. These areas can sometimes be far from support networks and in unfamiliar areas of the city and this does not support the sustainability of tenancies for younger people.
- Age designation is not compatible with mutual exchange rules as not meeting an age requirement is not a grounds for refusing an exchange. It cannot be enforced when customer have exercised RTB which may become more of an issue in future.
- Location, distribution and type of age designated stock means properties are not always appropriate for the 60+ group, such as located on a hill or far from transport links, shops etc or on the top floor.

### Consultation Results

- This is a very emotive subject requiring careful and sensitive thought.
- There is a lot of support for removing the over 40's designation as it appears arbitrary and this assumes an awful lot about people, not least that a person over 40 won't have children.
- Support for other ways of managing the housing register, allocations and estates could bring more confidence that the associated difficulties of de-designation could be overcome.
- 47% respondents answered that we should have age banded properties and 44% answered that we shouldn't. 9% answered that they did not know.
- From the questionnaire, 63% of respondents felt that we should remove age restrictions from properties that are proving harder to let
- There is a lot of concern about restricted access to housing for those who are under 40 – both with priority and waiting time.
- Many share concerns about the re-designation process, transitional period and who is housed there. Various suggestions have been made about how the system could be changed. These include expanding the use of sensitive lets, local lettings policies, managing tenancies differently and checks on incoming tenants.
- During consultation Social Services (adult services) commented that they report higher levels of support required from their services in some areas where older people are concentrated. Older people supporting older people doesn't always work very well and older people in a mixed community can receive more support from a mixed community environment.

### Relevant Research

Other authorities are seeking to remove age designations and manage estates differently. Stockport have a 10 year strategy to remove all age designations from stock, Manchester are moving to Local Lettings Policies and have been recognised for their excellent work in reducing ASB. Leeds are reviewing specific locations where they have age designated stock and are bringing in Local Lettings Policies as an alternative estate management tool.

Most other local authorities carry out an annual review of their housing register and have many more requirements to produce documents, references, etc. They also carry out more checks and ask for more information than we do. This in turn means that they have a better understanding of who is on their housing register, what their support needs are likely to be and give more tailored housing advice and options up front.

There are sometimes housing management issues with incoming new tenants. Other authorities manage these differently such as by issuing introductory tenancies or the introduction of Local Lettings Policies that might specify lets to working people or people with older children or no children. There is mixed evidence on the effectiveness of introductory tenancies and this would need to be fully investigated.

## Options

1. Keep the system as it currently is and pursue reviews more rigorously.
2. Remove all age designations.
3. Remove all 40+ age designations and reduce 60+ age designations to only specified properties, identified through comprehensive review.

## Option 1

### Advantages

- Older applicants will be happier
- Do not have to manage big change in policy
- Helps to manage problems such as ASB, clash of lifestyles

### Disadvantages

- Continued rent loss and voids.
- Empty properties at a time when demand for housing is high.
- Continued miss match of supply and demand.
- Inefficient management of a scarce resource.
- Properties continually dropping through to First Come First Served.
- Not all priorities getting the opportunity to bid on First Come First Served properties so increased costs associated with longer stays in temporary or supported accommodation.
- Complaints from individuals and organisations wishing to access those age designated hard to let properties for themselves and their clients.
- Continued perceptions of unfairness in the process.
- Continuing to concentrate young people elsewhere in the city often far from their support networks. Resulting issues of ASB, tenancy failure, rent arrears, damage, abandonment, churn, costs associated
- Out of step with the demand and disadvantages younger people.
- Costs resulting from inappropriate lets such as officer time spent on ASB complaints, rent arrears, churn etc.
- Possible challenges regarding equalities issues in relation to discrimination against people under 40 years of age.
- Failure to create mixed and sustainable communities in areas of the city.
- Continued conflict with mutual exchange rules.
- Not recognising the need to be more business minded in the light of the change to the way Council Housing is funded.



## Option 2 Remove all age designations

### Key Features

- Remove all age designation
- Produce strategy for ending of all age designation
- Introduce alternative approaches for managing lifestyle clashes and minimising risk of lets to customers who will cause issues for others e.g. pre-tenancy checks/references, concierge schemes, tenancy support

### Advantages

- Good management of stock and of a scarce resource.
- Less empty properties.
- Less properties being hard to let.
- Less rent loss.
- More opportunities for housing for younger people.
- More mixed and sustainable communities.
- More housing for younger people in areas where they already have support networks.
- Less churn, therefore less costs associated with churn.
- Less tenancy failure and therefore less costs associated with repairs and relet processes.
- Less ASB and related costs.
- Less complaints from under 40s and related agencies.
- Risk of challenges regarding discrimination removed.

### Disadvantages

- Unpopular with 60+ groups, their families and support agencies.
- More complaints from older customers
- Less take up of release high demand if cannot elect to go to age designated properties in future
- Doesn't allow choice to live in quieter areas or that forcing people together e.g. in flats that may not have good sound insulation could be counter-productive for all.

## Option 3 Remove all 40+ age designations and reduce 60+ age designations to only specified properties, identified through comprehensive review.

### Key Features

- Remove all 40+ age designations
- reduce 60+ age designations to only specified properties, identified through comprehensive review
- Introduce alternative approaches for managing lifestyle clashes and minimising risk of lets to customers who will cause issues for others e.g. pre-tenancy checks/references, concierge schemes, tenancy support

### Advantages

- Closer to current policy than more radical change and will still be able to provide more targeted accommodation for older customers
- Frees up more accommodation for the under 60s.
- Good management of stock and of a scarce resource.
- Fewer empty properties and being hard to let.
- Less rent loss.
- More opportunities for housing for younger people.
- More mixed and sustainable communities.

- More housing for younger people in areas where they already have support networks.
- Less churn, therefore less costs associated with churn.
- Less complaints from under 40s and related agencies.
- Risk of challenges regarding discrimination removed.

#### **Disadvantages**

- Could be unpopular with 40+ groups, their families and support agencies

#### **Recommendation**

More work is required – system of age designation does need to be revised as is not effective in managing stock or concerns about anti-social behaviour but has to be considered in context of developing more effective housing management options to deal with issues, meet different customer needs and coupled with steps such as better vetting of incoming tenants.

#### **Business case supporting recommendation**

Most of the properties appearing on First Come First Served are age designated properties that we can't let to people of those ages. This shows the lack of demand for those properties by people of those ages. 26% of all flats and bungalows are aged designated. This breaks down as 14% to 40+ and 12% to 60+.

Age designation was introduced in response to older people's concerns over clashes of life styles and ASB. This has some success but is not wholly effective. Other Councils show that there are now new and better tools to deal with such issues and concerns also. Knowing more about our incoming tenants will also help us to deal with any issues and support vulnerable tenants more appropriately.

Younger people are finding it difficult to access accommodation in some areas of the city and are being forced to occupy other areas of the city. Currently 25-30% of new tenants quit their tenancy within the first two years, which creates significant direct costs through rent loss, vacant repairs and the managing the letting process.

The Self Financing Business Plan highlights the problems and issues and endorses the need to reduce the proportion of housing stock that is age banded.

### **5.5 Choice Based Letting**

#### **Current Policy**

The current policy is for the majority of properties to be let by Choice Based Lettings - i.e. by customers bidding for properties and being matched by the criteria set out in the policy.

The majority of properties are advertised and customers have a week in which to bid for properties. Customers are then matched – according to length of priority/waiting time. Successful customers are informed of the outcome and offered a property. At this point checks are made on identity and eligibility.

Any property that has not been allocated via this system is let via First Come First Served.

A number of properties are allocated as management lets i.e. are allocated to customers with a requirement for that property e.g. to discharge a duty or deal with an urgent/unusual circumstance.

## What works well with CBL?

- Enables available properties for let to be advertised. This makes lets more open, transparent and accessible to all. Letting information can be published in respect of each let
- Following the introduction of CBL there are fewer low demand properties. In the past shortlists for particular areas excluded applicants that hadn't identified that area as of interest to them.
- CBL customer led and not officer led. Customers like being able to see and choose.
- Reduces costs in terms of voids, hard to let properties, officer time in managing shortlists
- On satisfaction surveys undertaken, customers have given an average rating of 8.3 (out of 10) for 'how easy is it to understand the bidding process' and 9.0 for 'ease of bidding via the website'.

## Issues with the current policy

- CBL can be confused with the policy itself and be blamed for lots of things that it doesn't influence such as the availability of stock/increased demand.
- The word 'choice' can be felt to be misleading as there is little choice of properties.
- Some vulnerable customers may find it hard to access the system or be pro-active in engaging in their search for housing.
- There is some tension with the concept of Choice and urgent priority cases/assisted bids.
- SCC was an earlier adopter of CBL and is benefiting from reviewing how other Councils have developed their approaches
- The current ICT system was the best available at the time CBL was introduced but is now out of date and needs to be improved to manage the system efficiently, and provide better information.

## Consultation Results

- 83% of people said it was easy or very easy to register.
- 78% said it was easy or very easy to bid.
- 75% liked the current system of being able to see all the available properties and register bids.
- Customers do not want to be allocated properties they have not expressed an interest in.
- 40% said they had ideas about how the CBL system could be improved. Most of these suggestions for improvement could potentially be addressed in the new ICT system currently being purchased.

## Relevant Research

The large majority of local authorities use CBL to advertise and let their properties and are pleased with the way CBL operates. Many authorities have found that they no longer have a problem with low demand but this is also due to decreased stock being available. Most report voids times have been improved by enabling shortlists of customers that actually do want to live in a particular property. Majority of Councils maintain an up-to-date register that is regularly reviewed so they are confident bidders are eligible for housing and for the property they are bidding for.

Some authorities have moved away from CBL such as Barnet, Portsmouth, and Stoke. Barnet and Portsmouth have changed their policies to be far more restrictive and Barnet have reduced their housing register from around 21,000 households to approximately 750 through this process. However, it should be noted that Councils who have done this are in the minority and have far fewer properties available than Sheffield overall and as a percentage of the housing stock in their area.

## Recommended Option 1 Keep CBL as the advertising and matching mechanism using

## the new ICT to manage more effectively

### Advantages

- An open transparent system
- Empowers customers to manage their own housing solutions
- Less staff needed to administer this system and very little officer discretion
- Fewer complaints and Members' enquiries, better customer satisfaction
- Fewer hard to let properties, less rent loss and fewer voids periods
- New ICT system will produce cost savings and efficiencies as processes will be speeded up, the ability to tailor adverts to the specific customer etc, easier to keep register up to date
- Minimal change risks as we already have CBL established in Sheffield

### Disadvantages

- Customers have unrealistic expectations of choice raised
- System of allocation is confused with other aspects of policy

## Option 2 – Officer Allocations of Each Property

### Key Features

- Revert to system where people register interest for areas
- Officers allocate properties as they fall vacant to customers according to agreed criteria e.g. points based on waiting time/priority etc
- Properties are not advertised but a register is maintained and people matched “in turn” for each vacancy

### Advantages

- Do not have to maintain process and mechanism for advertising properties
- Do not raise expectations of choice and it is clear why a property has been allocated to next applicant that fits criteria
- Easy for customers to understand reaching top of a list but would need to have policies in relations to refusals as could not have inactive people on register

### Disadvantages

- Disempowering to customers - dissatisfaction at returning to officer allocation
- More staff required to deliver the service
- More MP and Member enquiries, complaints and queries when it is felt property doesn't meet need
- Less transparent and open and more officer discretion
- More hard to let properties as people will be offered they are not interested in - would need to consider penalties for refusals
- Increase in voids and re-let times, some properties will be empty for a lot longer

## Business case for recommendation

- Self Financing Business Plan identifies that the new CBL system will lead to efficiencies that include the ability to restrict bidding and other IT functionality the current system doesn't have.
- CBL is popular with customers and this is born out by the consultation results attached and by customer satisfaction surveys undertaken by Sheffield Homes.

## Age Designation – Information Report

(All information taken from OHMS and Gentia system including ASB age profile information)

Flats and bungalows which Sheffield Homes manage fall into one of 3 categories:

- Available to only people aged 40 years or above
- Available to only people aged 60 years or above
- Available to all - general need.

This report looks at these properties along with information which may effect the letting and management of these properties.

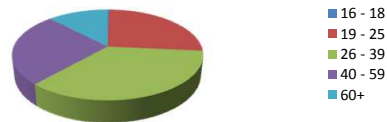
### Contents:

- A. Age profile of those bidding for properties 2009/10, 5 age bands
- B. Age profile of those bidding for properties 2009/10
- C. Age profile of current Sheffield Homes' tenants, 5 age bands
- D. Age profile of current Sheffield Homes' tenants, 3 age bands
- E. Stock make-up
- F. Stock make-up by dwelling type - Flats and Bungalows only
- G. Number of dwellings in each category by area
- H. Number and percentage of unique bidders by age band, 2009/10
- I. Number and percentage of lettings by age band
- J. Number of lettings by dwelling type
- K. Number of lettings by dwelling and management area
- L. First Come First Served Lets by Age Band, 2009/10
- M. First Come First Served Lets by Dwelling Type, 2009/2010
- N. Anti-social behaviour reporters (ASB) age banded, 2009/10

#### A. Age profile of those bidding for properties 2009/10, 5 age bands

Age Band	No. bidding	%
16 - 18	61	0.3%
19 - 25	4900	26.2%
26 - 39	6580	35.1%
40 - 59	4882	26.1%
60+	2301	12.3%

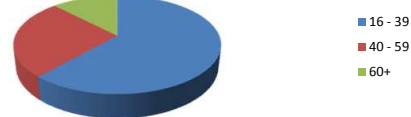
Chart to show proposition of those bidding in 2009/10 by 5 age bands



#### B. Age profile of those bidding for properties 2009/10

Age	No. bidding	%
16 - 39	11541	61.6%
40 - 59	4882	26.1%
60+	2301	12.3%

Chart to show proposition of those bidding in 2009/10 by 3 age bands



#### C. Age profile of current Sheffield Homes' tenants, 5 age bands

Age Band	No. of tenants	%
16 - 18	47	0.1%
19 - 25	2871	6.0%
26 - 39	9102	18.9%
40 - 59	15582	32.4%
60+	20468	42.6%

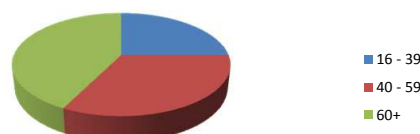
Sheffield Homes' current tenants by 5 age band



#### D. Age profile of current Sheffield Homes' tenants, 3 age bands

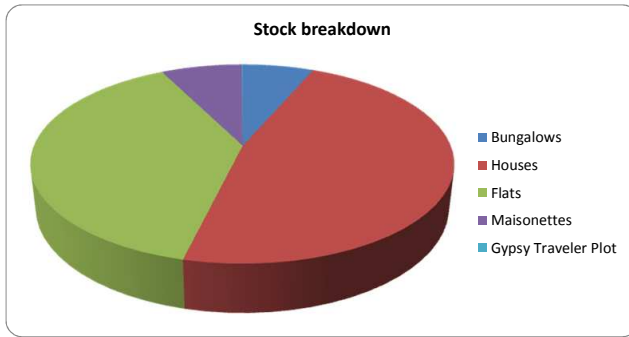
Age Band	No. of tenants	%
16 - 39	12020	25.0%
40 - 59	15582	32.4%
60+	20468	42.6%

Sheffield Homes' current tenants by 3 age bands



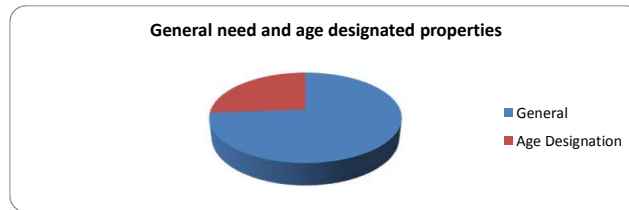
**E. Stock make-up**

Dwelling Type	Number of properties
Bungalow 60+	1,970
Bungalow Adapted	98
Bungalow 40+	623
House	19,574
House Adapted	138
Flats (sub total)	16,159
Flat Lower	2,746
Flat Lower 40+	2,448
Flat Lower 60+	1,353
Flat Upper	3,967
Flat Upper 40+	2,713
Flat Upper 60+	1,565
Flat Multi	1,129
Flat Multi 40+	191
Flat Multi 60+	47
Maisonettes (sub total)	3,065
Maisonette Lower	1,380
Maisonette Upper	1,685
Gypsy Traveller Plot	31
All Properties	41,658



**F. Stock make-up by dwelling type - Flats and Bungalows only**

Dwelling Type	No. of dwellings	%
General	30,712	74%
Age Designation	10,906	26%
Upper 40	2,904	7%
Upper 60	1,612	4%
Lower 40	2,448	6%
Lower 60	1,349	3%
Bungalow 40	623	1%
Bungalow 60	1,970	5%



G. Number of dwellings in each category by area - Flats and Bungalows only

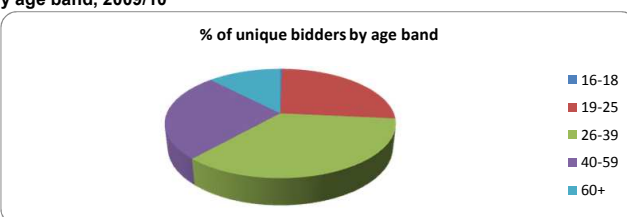
	All Areas	North West	Central	South East	South West	Sheltered	North	East
<b>Total</b>	41,627	5,563	5,723	7,355	6,851	1,224	9,535	5,357
<b>General Need</b>	30,717	3,474	4,840	5,341	5,462	10	7,705	3,866
<b>Bungalow 60+</b>	1,970	325	386	320	111	92	270	466
<b>Flat Lower 60+</b>	1,353	346	80	120	174	464	69	100
<b>Flat Upper 60+</b>	1,612	355	67	155	205	657	47	126
<b>Bungalow 40+</b>	623	111	26	108	0	0	178	200
<b>Flat Lower 40+</b>	2,448	417	168	654	363	0	545	301
<b>Flat Upper 40+</b>	2,904	535	156	657	536	1	721	298

Percentage of dwellings in each category by area - Flats and Bungalows only

	All Areas	North West	Central	South East	South West	Sheltered	North	East
<b>General Need</b>	74%	62%	85%	73%	80%	1%	81%	72%
<b>Bungalow 60+</b>	5%	6%	7%	4%	2%	8%	3%	9%
<b>Flat Lower 60+</b>	3%	6%	1%	2%	3%	38%	1%	2%
<b>Flat Upper 60+</b>	4%	6%	1%	2%	3%	54%	0%	2%
<b>Bungalow 40+</b>	1%	2%	0%	1%	0%	0%	2%	4%
<b>Flat Lower 40+</b>	6%	7%	3%	9%	5%	0%	6%	6%
<b>Flat Upper 40+</b>	7%	10%	3%	9%	8%	0%	8%	6%

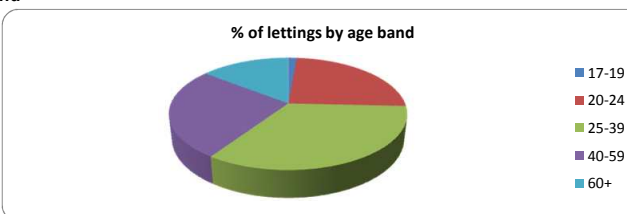
H. Number and percentage of unique bidders by age band, 2009/10

Age Band	No. of bidders	%
16-18	58	0%
19-25	4899	26%
26-39	6576	35%
40-59	4870	26%
60+	2299	12%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>18702</b>	<b>100%</b>



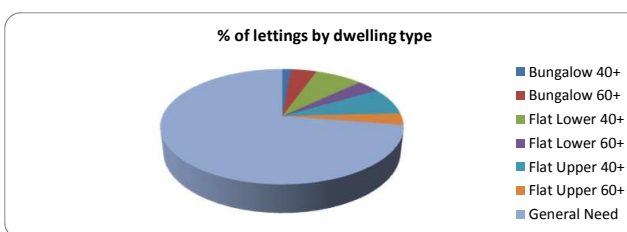
I. Number and percentage of lettings by age band

Age Band	No. of lettings	%
17-19	52	1%
20-24	900	24%
25-39	1247	34%
40-59	966	26%
60+	535	14%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3700</b>	



J. Number of lettings by dwelling type - Flats and Bungalows only

Dwelling Type	No. of lettings	%
Bungalow 40+	53	1%
Bungalow 60+	150	4%
Flat Lower 40+	282	8%
Flat Lower 60+	133	4%
Flat Upper 40+	278	8%
Flat Upper 60+	121	3%
General Need	2683	73%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3700</b>	<b>100%</b>

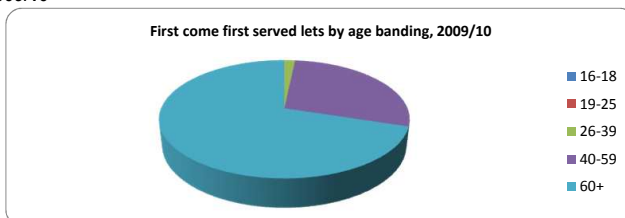


**K. Number of lettings by dwelling and management area - Flats and Bungalows only**

	North West	Central	South East	South West	Sheltered	North	East	Grand Total
Bungalow 40+	11		13			12	17	53
Bungalow 60+	27	22	29	12	3	24	33	150
Flat Lower 40+	45	19	74	39		66	39	282
Flat Lower 60+	22	6	14	22	52	6	11	133
Flat Upper 40+	46	16	63	60		56	37	278
Flat Upper 60+	23	5	16	16	54	4	3	121
General Need	257	392	394	707	1	560	371	2683
Grand Total	431	460	603	856	110	728	511	3699

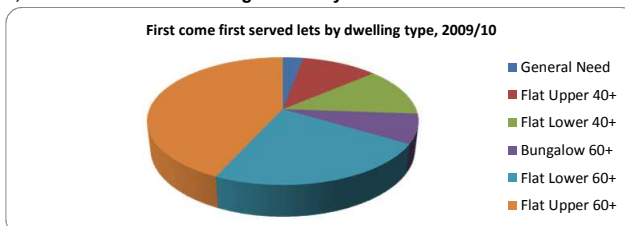
**L. First Come First Served Lets by Age Band, 2009/10**

Age Band	No. of FCFS Lets	%
16-18	0	0%
19-25	0	0%
26-39	4	2%
40-59	68	28%
60+	169	70%
Grand Total	241	



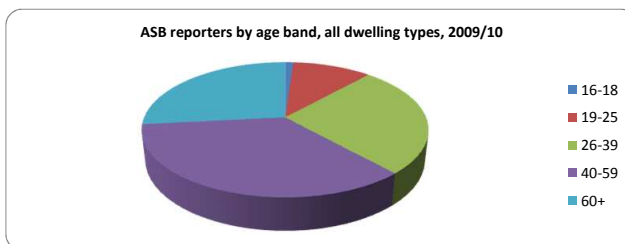
**M. First Come First Served Lets by Dwelling Type, 2009/2010 - Flats and Bungalows only**

Dwelling Type	No. of lets	%
General Need	7	3%
Flat Upper 40+	26	11%
Flat Lower 40+	30	12%
Bungalow 60+	18	7%
Flat Lower 60+	56	23%
Flat Upper 60+	104	43%
Grand Total	241	100%



**N. Anti-social behaviour reporters (ASB) age banded, 2009/10**

Age Band	Reported ASB	%
16-18	45	1%
19-25	431	11%
26-39	1079	27%
40-59	1424	35%
60+	1082	27%
Grand Total	4061	100%





## Age Designated Stock By Area

	All Areas	% of all stock	North	% of area stock	North West	% of area stock	East	% of area stock	Central	% of area stock	South east	% of area stock	South West	% of area stock	Sheltered	% of area stock
<b>Total Stock based on Year 2011/12</b>	41,281	100%	9,458	100%	5,547	100%	5,339	100%	5,687	100%	7,221	100%	6,823	100%	1,206	100%
<b>Age designated</b>	8,919	23%	1,559	17%	1,761	32%	1,022	19%	494	9%	1,701	24%	1,275	19%	1,206	100%
<b>Adapted</b>	225	<0.01%	38	<0.01%	19	<0.01%	30	<0.01%	20	<0.01%	84	1%	33	<0.01%		
<b>General Need</b>	32,137	77%	7,861	83%	3,767	68%	4,287	81%	5,173	91%	5,436	75%	5,515	81%		
Breakdown of GN properties:	32,137															
<b>Unavailable General Needs properties for young, singles</b>	20,958	51%	6901	73%	1879	34%	2527	47%	3157	56%	3674	51%	2545	37%	-	
<b>Total stock suitable for young singles households</b>	11,179	27%	960	10%	1888	34%	1760	33%	2016	35%	1762	24%	2970	44%	-	

This page is intentionally left blank

# Challenge for Change Presentation March 20<sup>th</sup> 2012

Page 39



Agenda Item 8



# Introduction

Page 40

## Who are the Challenge for Change Team?

- Project was completed with 6 scrutineers

## Purpose of the scrutiny project

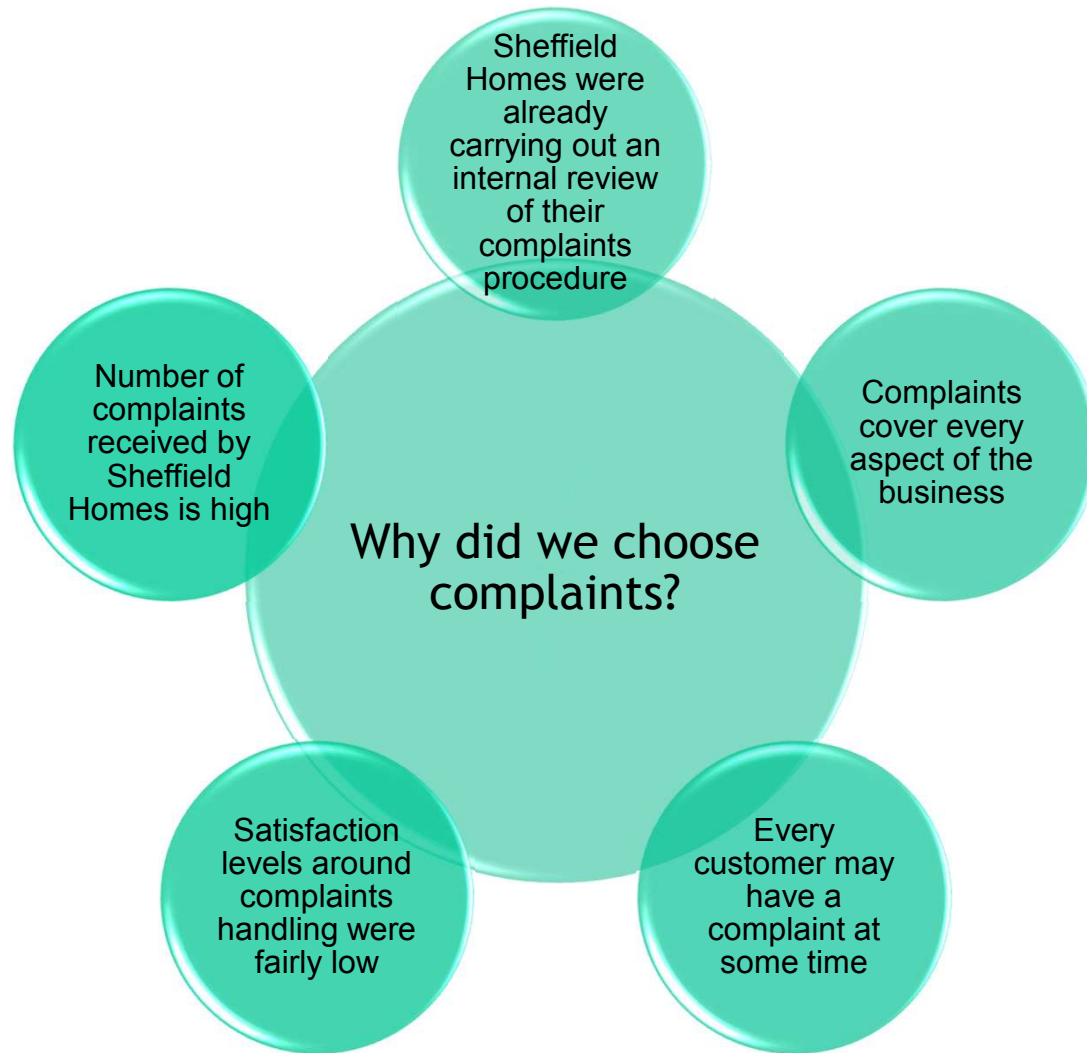
- To examine the customer service satisfaction levels of complaints handling

## Methods for gathering evidence

- Desktop document analysis
- Reality checks with staff and customers



# Project Start-Up



## Key areas for investigation

Page 42

What is a complaint?

Customer Expectations

Management of complaints

Communication

Learning from complaints



# Project Objectives



To make recommendations to ensure complaints are handled in a more efficient way

To understand the difference between 'a complaint and a grumble'

To reduce the number of cases considered by the Ombudsman

To recommend improvements on communicating with customers on making a complaint

To publish our activities in newsletters and the website





## Findings - Internal

### Review of customer correspondence letters

- Challengers examined a sample of individual response letters
- Letter quality varied from good to unacceptable
- Responses showed inconsistencies of information and a lack of attention to detail

### Staff Forum

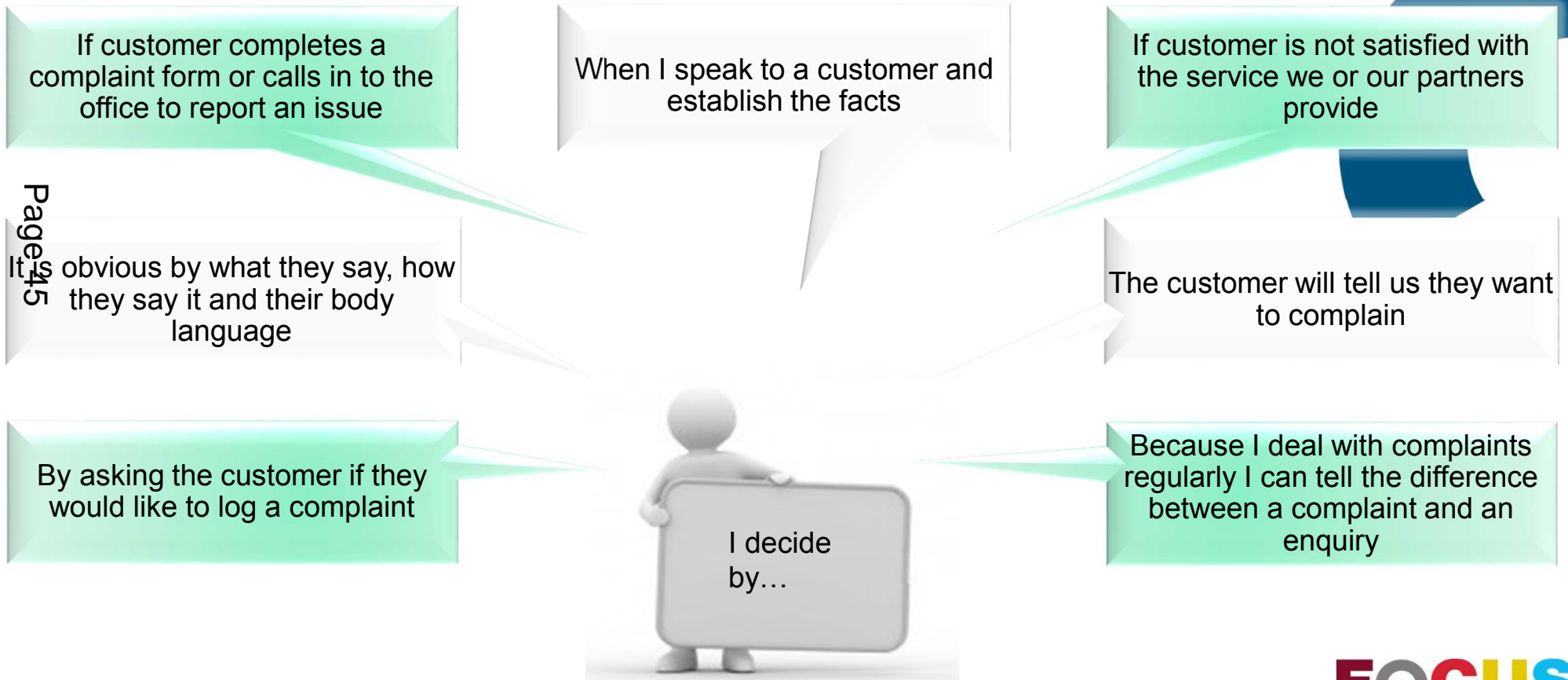
- Couple of challengers held a forum with contact centre and housing office staff
- It offered the opportunity for staff to discuss their experience of complaint handling and for the challengers to discuss information gathered from the reality checks and desktop analysis

### Staff Survey

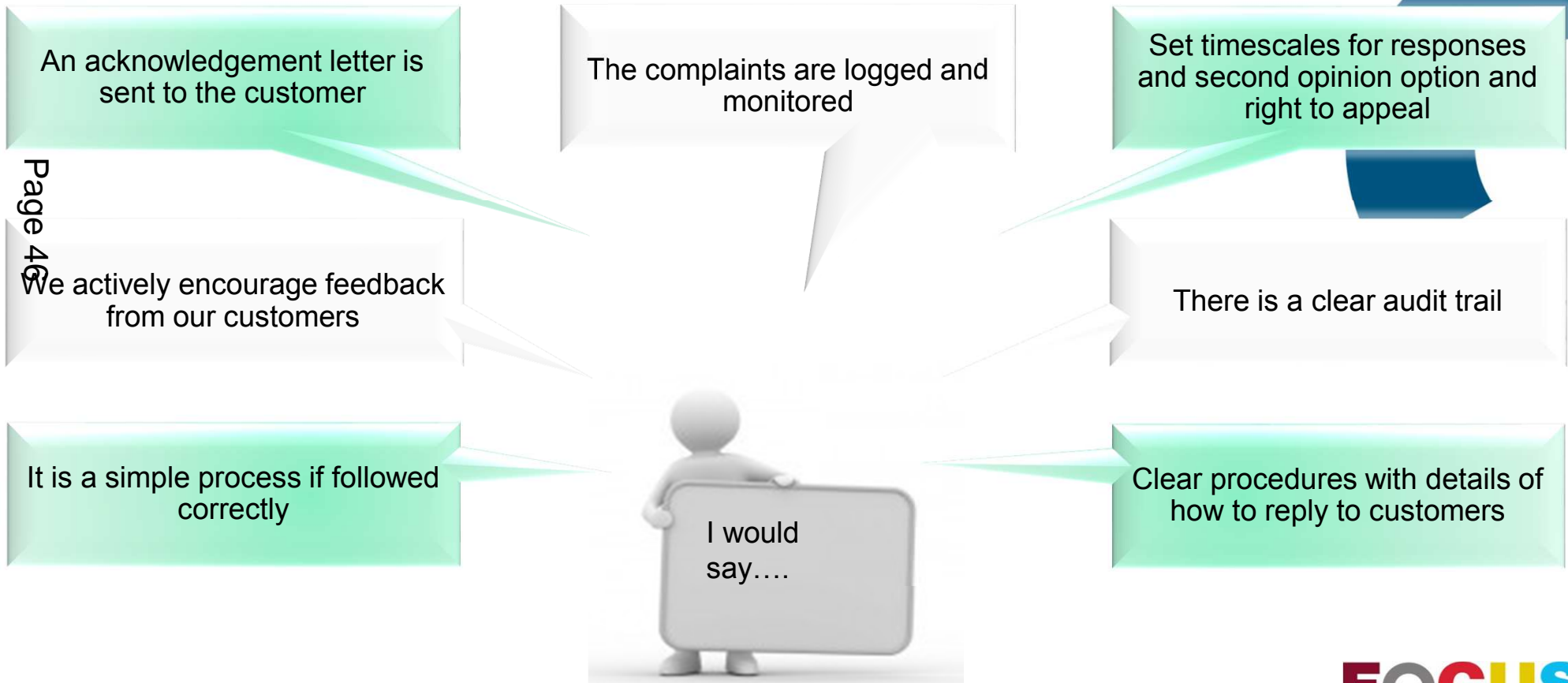
- Survey distributed electronically to all Sheffield Homes staff
- 128 responses were returned across all grades of staff
- Results indicated a high level of confidence in the complaints system but many also felt under pressure when dealing with complaints.



## How do you decide if a customer is making a complaint?



## What are the strengths of the complaints process?



## What are the weaknesses of the complaints process?

Finding the right department to forward the complaint onto

Pressure to respond within the timescales and do the 'day job'

Encouraged to apologise for things that a customer doesn't like but have little power to change things

Page 47

We have two IT systems running alongside each other.

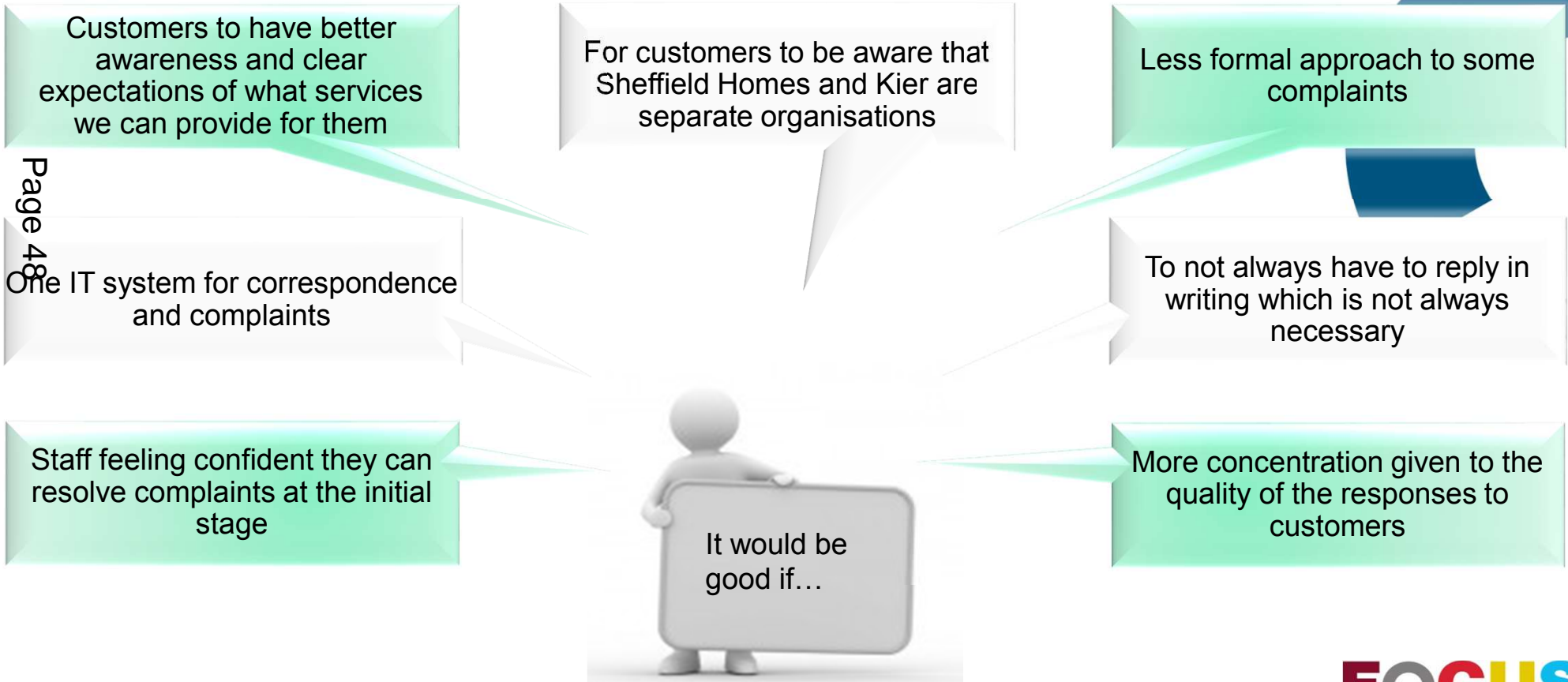
Staff logging on the IT system as complaint without fully understanding the actual issues

I have seen staff receive a complaint but not log it on to OHMS because this would create extra work for them

There are a few...

We take complaints for our partner organisations over which we have no control

## What improvements would you like to see to improving the complaints process?



# Findings - Customers

## Visit to Viewpoint

- Challengers visited Viewpoint to listen to a sample of recordings of complaints surveys made to customers who made complaints which are now closed.
- Offered an opportunity to gauge the customer experience from lodging a complaint and charting their journey through the complaints process
- Findings from the visit indicated that the customer satisfaction is of a low level

Page 49

## Tenants Forum

- Challengers attended a complaints workshop for tenants hosted by Sheffield Homes
- Feedback from the forum suggested that Sheffield Homes needs to improve the way it communicates with customers regarding complaints handling

## Tenants Survey

- Five hundred surveys were sent to customers who had made a complaint in the last 12 months. 91 completed questionnaires were returned
- Results established that just under half of the customers who make a complaint do so by phone, followed by visiting a housing office and putting it in writing
- Just over 10% correspond by email or use the template on the website

## Comments from tenants survey

I expected my question to be given a direct answer. Instead I was fobbed off

You can never speak to anybody to get a proper answer

I got what I expected – excuses as to why the work wasn't being done

Page 50

I understand that there is not only myself but being passed from one person to another is not a good service

To have a dedicated complaints team with a named contact

I did not feel an investigation was made even though I received a letter of explanation

My view is...

A tenants appeals panel to consider complaints appeals cases



## Budget

### Budget allocation

- Challenge for Change was allocated a budget of £5,000 for this scrutiny project

### How was it spent?

- Workshop venues
- Challenger members travel expenses
- Support from TPAS mentor
- Refreshments

### Budget Review

- The group ensured all spend decisions throughout the project were based on value for money
- The group financial spend came in under budget

# Recommendations

From all the evidence gathered from the reality checks, desktop document analysis and our own experiences as customers, the group were able to come up with the recommendations listed in Appendix 9 in your board papers.

Please see below a few of the key recommendations which should be considered for implementation

Page 52

2

- R2. To focus on resolving informal grumbles & low level complaints quickly

3

- R3. To implement a 3 stage complaints process

4

- R7. To improve communications between customers, Sheffield Homes and Kier

5

- R9. To produce a lessons learned report from complaints and share with customers and staff
- R13. To have dedicated staff to deal with stage 2 complaints or have a dedicated complaints team





# Acknowledgements

1

- Tom Strong and Louise Thompson of the Community Engagement Team

2

- Peter Brown and Gary Westwood of the Planning and Performance Team

3

- Alison Wood and her staff from the customer care team

4

- Kate Newbolt of TPAS

5

- Tenants, residents and customers who made up the initial steering group and carried out the recruitment

# Any Questions?



# Challenge for Change

## Scrutiny Report Customer Complaints



## Contents

1.0	Introduction and Background	3
2.0	Project Start-Up	4
3.0	Project Objectives	5
4.0	Findings	6
5.0	Budget review for the project	8
6.0	Learning and Development	9
7.0	Conclusions	9
8.0	Recommendations	10
9.0	Acknowledgements	10
10.0	Bibliography	11
	Appendices	

## 1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Following approval from the Board of Sheffield Homes, a customer scrutiny panel was established. Recruitment was open to tenants, leaseholders and customers of Sheffield Homes. The Community Engagement team, with independent support and advice from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), along with a steering group of tenants, and other customers, successfully recruited 15 scrutineers. The steering group decided that the scrutiny panel should be called 'Challenge for Change'. Throughout this report the scrutiny group will be called C4C.
- 1.2 The project has been completed with 6 scrutineers including Ian Alexander, Jenny Croft, Elspeth Lusby, Mick Daniels, Linda Moxon and Michelle Cook.
- 1.3 In this report, we have outlined our methods of investigation, detailed our findings from reality checks, document analysis and made recommendations for the board to consider as possible improvements to complaints handling and customer service delivery.
- 1.4 Kate Newbolt of TPAS presented at the inaugural meeting, an overview of scrutiny projects to C4C and to Chief Executive Peter Morton and Councillor Harry Harpham. The presentation outlined the basis for tenant led scrutiny and the tasks that would be required for a successful project. Kate also offered indicators in her presentation of what service areas of social housing landlords made for good and bad first scrutiny projects.
- 1.5 The purpose of the project was to examine the customer service delivery of Sheffield Homes in relation to the level of customer satisfaction of complaints handling and to review whether this meets their expectations.



## 2. Project Start-Up

2.1 Much thought and discussion was held before the group decided which area of the business should be scrutinised. Consideration was given to several operational areas of Sheffield Homes before deciding to select complaints as the first scrutiny exercise. C4C selected the topic for a number of reasons:

- Sheffield Homes were already carrying out an internal review of their complaints procedure
- complaints cover every aspect of the business
- every customer may have a complaint at some time
- satisfaction levels around complaints handling were fairly low
- the number of complaints received by Sheffield Homes is high compared to other similar social housing landlords

2.2 At the start of the project, C4C held an initial workshop day facilitated by Tom Strong and Louise Thompson from the Community Engagement team. The workshop helped identify the team's strengths and weaknesses and what each person could bring to the project. We also identified areas where training would be beneficial to help with the group's understanding of scrutiny projects

2.3 At this workshop, C4C made a decision to appoint a project manager to co-ordinate and monitor the progress of the tasks by use of a project plan (*Appendix 1*). The group identified desktop review information and reality check-ing tasks they would like to analyse and investigate with staff and customers.

2.4 C4C set about getting an understanding of the current complaints process by requesting survey documents produced by Alison Wood as part of the internal complaints review. The group then conducted its own desktop review.

2.5 The documents provided helped C4C to identify which areas of Sheffield Homes service received the most complaints. The repairs service delivered by Kier was identified as the main area of dissatisfaction amongst customers.

2.6 Information from the review informed discussions at the regular C4C fortnightly meetings about the way forward for the project and objectives for the project.



2.7 C4C reviewed these documents and identified key areas for further investigation during the project. The key themes were as follows:

### **What is a complaint?**

- What is the difference between a complaint and a grumble?
- Are service requests by customers confused with complaints?
- Who decides when it is a complaint?
- Are there different ways of recording/managing complaints?

### **Customer Expectations**

- Do customers have different expectations of the service delivery to what Sheffield Homes can deliver?
- Do Sheffield Homes need an 'Expectations Charter'?
- Do customers have the confidence to make and follow through complaints?

### **Management of complaints**

- Should there be a single team to manage complaints on service delivery issues?
- Who signs off letters and takes responsibility for quality assurance before these are sent to customers?
- Are too many people/teams involved in the complaints handling process?
- How timely is the response?
- Are complaint responses handled, using too formal a route?
- Who decides when a complaint is 'closed'?

### **Communication**

- Is there good sign posting for customers to know where and how to make complaints and the procedure for complaints handling?
- Do Sheffield Homes respond using the correct communications channels?
- What is the level of consistency of response letters to customers and quality of responses?

## Learning from complaints

- Are complaints used for lessons learned to identify key themes and improve customer service delivery?
- What internal learning is given as training support for staff?
- What lessons learned is published for customers?

## 3. Project Objectives

3.1 From our desktop research and analysis, we identified the following objectives for the project.

- To make recommendations which ensure that Sheffield Homes handle complaints in a more efficient way to improve customer satisfaction levels
- To understand the difference between ‘a complaint and a grumble’
- To recommend a system to reduce the number of cases which are considered by the Housing Ombudsman
- To improve the consistency of grammar and clarity of detail in the response letters/emails sent to customers
- To recommend an improvement on how Sheffield Homes communicates with customers on how and when to make a complaint
- To publish activities in newsletters and the website to keep customers up to date on the work of Challenge for Change

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Reality Checks

In order for the group to obtain the information needed to scrutinise and investigate the complaints service, various reality checks with staff and tenants groups were undertaken. C4C identified many areas of strengths and weaknesses of the complaints handling service. From the feedback at a staff forum and feedback results from a C4C staff and tenant survey, the group were able to identify areas which could be improved by implementing some changes to the complaints system and learning from the feedback from tenants and customers on their dissatisfaction.

### 4.2 Staff Survey

C4C designed a survey (*Appendix 2*) that was distributed electronically, to all Sheffield



Homes staff. C4C were pleased with the response returns number of 128. Responses were across all grades of staff, and the results show a high level of confidence in the complaints system. However, the majority of respondents indicated that they felt under pressure when dealing with complaints. A sizeable majority feel they get lots of support with complaints handling, and an even larger proportion are confident they can resolve complaints.

The survey asked how well they understand what customers think. The responses were much more widely spread, with just over 1/3 indicating they had an understanding or a good understanding.

There was also a wide range of opinions about identification of a complaint as differing from a request for service, or a general comment. Some staff commented that they take time to clarify the issue, even phoning or emailing a customer. Others commented that if a customer wants to complain they treat it as a complaint regardless.

*(Appendix 3) - Staff complaints survey - comments.*

### **4.3 Staff Forum**

C4C members attended a staff forum to meet with those staff who handle complaints in the contact centre, housing offices and within New Bank House. The meeting enabled the group members to get an insight into the complaints process from a staff view point by talking to staff directly involved with dealing and responding to complaints.

The meeting gave an opportunity for the members to discuss with staff information gathered from the reality checks and desktop analysis.

### **4.4 Tenants Survey**

Five hundred questionnaires (*Appendix 4*) were sent to customers who had made a complaint in the last 12 months. 91 completed questionnaires were received, giving a response rate of 18%. From the responses we received we established that just under half of customers who complain do so by phone, with around one in five visiting a housing office, and roughly the same number putting complaint in writing. Just over 10% use email or the website.

Less than half of respondents (41%) said they wanted to make a formal complaint even though they had been recorded as complainants. From the responses it is noticeable that most of the complaints received were about repairs issues. It is also evident that many of those who took the time to respond were frustrated by the experience, with a sizeable number commenting on poor communication.

#### 4.5 Visit to Viewpoint

C4C visited Viewpoint to listen to a sample of recordings of complaints surveys made to customers who have made complaints which are now closed. The meeting gave the C4C members an opportunity to gauge the customer experience of firstly lodging a complaint with Sheffield Homes and then charting their journey through the complaints process.

From the recordings observed by C4C members, the surveys indicated that the customer experience is of a low satisfaction level. Comments from the customers also indicated that areas for improvement should be better communication and being kept informed on latest updates of their complaint.

The visit was in addition to the information we received from 46 surveys carried out in June 2011 by Viewpoint. 18 responses from tenants in that sample indicated dissatisfaction specifically with communication.

*(Appendix 5) for comments and satisfaction scores.*

#### 4.6 Tenants Forum

C4C members attended a complaints workshop for tenants hosted by Sheffield Homes at Bard Street Community Centre. The workshop gave C4C the first opportunity to test the information gathered about complaints with tenants who had made complaints against Sheffield Homes and its partner organisations.



The feedback from the workshop suggested that Sheffield Homes needs to improve the way it communicates with its customers with regards to handling complaints. The tenants put forward a suggestion that a dedicated complaints team with a named contact would be a good idea to finding a solution to improving complaints handling. The tenants also suggested that a tenant's appeals panel which would consist of tenants and customers and Sheffield Homes managers should be in place to consider complaints appeals cases. They felt that this may help towards reducing the number of cases which go before the Housing Ombudsman.

*(Appendix 6) for feedback comments*

#### **4.7 Correspondence response letters to customers**

A sample of 10 individual letters (appendix 7) plus a standard acknowledgment letter were examined by the group. The quality of individual letters varied from good to unacceptable. Some had spelling errors, and others were not written in the recommended font. We would like to highlight one letter sent to a bereaved family member which demonstrated honesty and sensitivity. The standard acknowledgement which C4C also saw was considered to be of the right standard. However the standard of correspondence by individual staff members was inconsistent and showed a lack of attention to detail.

In some cases the response letter informed customers that the case was now closed. C4C considered that the customer should always be given the opportunity to contest the decision if they are not satisfied with it.

#### **4.8 Benchmarking Review**

4.9 C4C undertook benchmarking analysis and comparison markings with other social housing landlords. C4C used benchmarking information from Housemark to compare Sheffield Homes' results for complaints handling against similar organisations. The summary helped develop recommendations of areas to be reviewed in order to improve complaints satisfaction levels which should ultimately drive down complaints.

From the summary we saw that out of 12 organisations who responded, Sheffield had the 5th highest number of new complaints (15.2) per 1000 stock. Others ranged from 1.9 to 34.66 per 1000. To achieve the upper median the number would have to reduce to 10 in 1000.

Sheffield placed 6th out of 7 for speed of full stage 1 response, at 10.7 days, with the quickest being 6 days and the slowest 12.28. 59.5% of Sheffield customers expressed satisfaction with complaint handling, which put them 3rd out of 5 organisations.

*C4C used statistical analysis information from the complaints benchmarking summary 2010/2011. See bibliography*



## 5. Budget review for the project

C4C were allocated a budget of £5,000 for the duration of the scrutiny project. The money was used to cover the costs of:

- Workshop venues
- C4C member travel expenses
- Refreshments
- Costs for support from the TPAS mentor

C4C had a standing budget review agenda item at each meeting to discuss current spend and reviewed the cost implications for attending training events and conferences. The group aimed where possible to find ways of making value for money decisions when considering the need to spend money throughout the life of the project.

*(Appendix 8 for final budget spend)*

## 6. Learning and Development

For this first scrutiny project, C4C members have undertaken differing forms of learning and development. These include:

- Workshops – these enabled the group to learn to work together, review documents and findings gathered from reality checks, and, provided a forum for sharing of ideas for the way forward.
- Presentations from Sheffield Homes staff including:
  - » How Sheffield Homes and the Council is structured
  - » How the current Complaints Management System works and current complaints trends
  - » Performance Reporting Information
- Training visits to other organisations including:
  - » A Scrutiny Event held at Trafford Hall
  - » A Housemark Benchmarking event in Leeds
  - » Presentations from Kate Newbolt at TPAS about scrutiny

## 7. Conclusions

- 7.1 Sheffield Homes customers and partners do not agree about what a complaint should be.
- 7.2 Customers are not always clear who will deal with their complaint and how their complaint will be dealt with.
- 7.3 Sheffield Homes are missing opportunities to deal with low level ‘grumbles’ before they get bigger this incurs more time and resources in addition to lower customer satisfaction.
- 7.4 The complaints process becomes too formal, too quickly.
- 7.5 There are too many levels in the complaints process.
- 7.6 It does not always communicate effectively in-house.
- 7.7 It does not always communicate clearly with the customer.
- 7.8 Communication internally and externally is poor – particularly with and from Kier.

- 7.9 There is inconsistency in communications between 1) Sheffield Homes staff and customers, 2) Sheffield Homes staff and Kier and 3) Kier and customers.
- 7.10 Complaints are sometimes closed without involving the customer.
- 7.11 Sheffield Homes do not routinely produce a 'learning report' showing what they have learned from complaints.
- 7.12 Learning from complaints is not fed back to customers.
- 7.13 Sheffield Homes do not benefit from listening to the call back surveys made by Viewpoint.
- 7.14 Repairs are the biggest area of complaints for Sheffield Homes.
- 7.15 The letters sent to customers are inconsistent in their quality, tone, grammar and spelling.
- 7.16 With improvements to complaints handling and customer care, this should see a rise in morale as staff gain a better understanding of how complaints are handled and benefit from a streamlined process for dealing with them and checking on a single IT system.
- 7.17 All staff will need to have a 'can help attitude' to assist customers to resolve complaints at first chance, but if unable to then it should go to a second stage or a dedicated customer complaints officer.
- 7.18 All staff should be made aware of the new complaints handling system. The complaints new team handlers would need to be given adequate training in:

- Dealing with complaints – varying kinds
- Writing response letters to Councillors & MP's
- Producing in-house style templates for response letters to customers
- Understanding of housing policy

## **8.0 Recommendations**

In line with the conclusions made in section 7.0 of this report, Appendix 9 sets out clearly the recommendations that C4C have agreed. This format has been agreed to ensure that there is alignment to our judgements, to show the evidence-base for each judgement made and the relevance and impact for Sheffield Homes' customers.

## 9.0 Acknowledgements

C4C have been pleased to have the opportunity to understand and develop their skills whilst carrying out this, their first project. We would like to thank the following people/ teams who have been instrumental in selection, training, supporting, and gathering information for the project.

Firstly, the Community Engagement team for enabling the project; setting up the steering group to do the recruitment; training the group; for their support and enthusiasm as we got the project off the ground.

Tenants, residents and customers who made up the initial steering group and carried out the recruitment. Peter Brown and Gary Westwood of the Planning and Performance team for their helpfulness in producing requested information; their role in organising meetings and activities for the group and their support and encouragement. We wish to also thank our mentor, Kate Newbolt of TPAS

## 10.0 Bibliography

List of documents used by C4C as part of the desktop review to enable the group to undertake investigative analysis of the complaints process within Sheffield Homes and benchmarked against other social housing landlords.

- Complaint case analysis
- Complaints benchmarking summary 2010/11
- What is important to a customer when making a complaint
- Complaints review questionnaire
- Most important factors when dealing with a complaint
- Complaints profile and performance analysis report
- Sheffield Homes customer feedback policy
- Customer feedback procedure
- Complaints results - June 11
- Complaints survey questions - March 11





# Challenge for Change

## Recommendations



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?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SH customers and partners do not agree about what a complaint should be</li> <li>Customers are not always clear who will deal with their complaint and how their complaint will be dealt with</li> </ul>	<p>Staff survey Reality checking Customer Survey Customer focus group Mystery shopping</p> <p>Viewpoint call backs Customer Survey</p>	<p>Customers are not clear about how their problem will be dealt with.</p> <p>Lack of clarity about 'complaints' means that customers receive an inconsistent service.</p> <p>This creates poor satisfaction for customers. Creates more work for staff</p> <p>Lack of trust from customers. Potential for repeat work. Lack of reassurance for customers</p>	<p>R1. Sheffield Homes should draft a 'Complaints Expectations Charter' to give customers more information about how their complaint will be handled</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SH are missing opportunities to deal with low level 'grumbles' before they get bigger</li> </ul>	<p>Customer Satisfaction scores Viewpoint call backs Customer surveys Staff survey Staff focus group</p>	<p>Customers have to wait longer for complaints to be resolved. It creates more work for staff. SH is missing out on learning from grumbles and opportunity to fix them</p>	<p>R2. Sheffield Homes should focus on resolving informal grumbles and complaints quickly when they are reported. This will be better for customers and prevent complaints escalating into more formal stages.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The complaint process becomes too formal, too quickly</li> <li>There are too many levels in the complaints process</li> </ul>	<p>Reality checks Customer Survey Customer Focus Group Staff survey</p> <p>Benchmarking Reality checks Customer Focus Group</p>	<p>Confused tenants</p> <p>Increased workload for staff</p> <p>Poor customer satisfaction</p> <p>Takes longer to resolve complaints</p> <p>Confused tenants</p> <p>Increased workload for staff</p>	<p>R3. Sheffield Homes should introduce a 3 stage complaints process: Stage 1 – 'Informal' complaints and 'grumbles' reported by customers that should be dealt with by staff wherever possible at point of contact Stage 2 – Formal complaints – those which require a detailed investigation or ones that have not been resolved at Stage 1 – that should be dealt with by dedicated complaints staff Stage 3 – Complaints not resolved at Stage 2 should be referred to an independent Tenants Panel to review.</p>

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?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SH does not always communicate effectively in-house</li> </ul>	Staff survey Viewpoint call backs Customer survey Reality checks	Increases staff time spent trying to resolve complaints  Increases stress for staff  Takes staff away from day job  Reputational issues for SH and partners	R4. The IT systems used for managing complaints should be streamlined so that they work together more efficiently and make it easier for staff to deal with complaints.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SH does not always communicate clearly with the customer</li> </ul>	Customer survey Viewpoint call backs Reality checks Letters review	Poor customer satisfaction  Repeat complaints  Frustration from customers	R5. Sheffield Homes should promote access to complaints reporting via the website and e-mail. This will be more efficient for the organisation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The complaint process becomes too formal, too quickly</li> </ul>	Reality checks Customer Survey Customer Focus Group Staff survey	Confused tenants  Increased workload for staff  Poor customer satisfaction  Takes longer to resolve complaints	R6. Staff dealing with Stage 2 complaints should have the authority to work with customers to resolve their complaints.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication internally and externally is poor – particularly Kier</li> <li>There is inconsistency in communications between SH staff and customers, SH staff and Kier and Kier and customers</li> </ul>	Reality checks Customer Survey Customer Focus Group Staff survey Viewpoint call backs Letter reality checks Staff survey Customer survey	Unhappy customers  More and repeat complaints  Potential Ombudsman and legal action  Lack of trust from customers. Frustration from customers. Low satisfaction scores. Poor reputation.	R7. Communication between customers, Kier and Sheffield Homes must be improved.

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?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complaints are sometimes closed without involving the customer</li> </ul>	<p>Viewpoint Call backs</p> <p>Letter reality checks</p>	<p>Lack of trust</p> <p>Repeat complaints</p> <p>Poor value for money</p> <p>Increased workload for staff</p> <p>Poor satisfaction</p>	<p>R8. Sheffield Homes should reach a joint agreement with the customer to close a complaint (or refer to the next stage).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SH don't routinely produce a 'learning report' about what they have learnt from complaints</li> <li>Learning from complaints is not fed back to customers</li> </ul>	<p>Benchmarking</p> <p>Reality checks</p> <p>Reality checks</p>	<p>Learning from complaints is not captured</p> <p>Opportunities for improving services and reducing further complaints are missed</p> <p>Staff are not able to learn and share good practice</p> <p>Customers do not get reassurance that views count. SH miss out on opportunities to improve reputation and celebrate success</p>	<p>R9. A 'Learning from complaints' report should be produced regularly and the findings shared with staff and customers.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SH don't benefit from listening to the call backs made by Viewpoint</li> </ul>	<p>Viewpoint call backs</p>	<p>Staff are not able to learn and share good practice</p> <p>Good opportunity to understand customer expectations is missed</p>	<p>R10. Sheffield Homes' staff handling complaints should have access to recorded complaint call-backs made by Viewpoint to assist with their training and development.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repairs are the biggest area of complaints for SH</li> </ul>	<p>Performance information</p> <p>Customer Survey</p> <p>Staff Survey</p>	<p>Opportunities to improve the repairs service are missed</p> <p>This generates repeat complaints</p> <p>Poor value for money</p> <p>Potential Ombudsman challenges</p>	<p>R11. The process for sharing learning from complaints between Kier and Sheffield Homes should be improved.</p>

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?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The letters sent to customers are inconsistent in their quality, tone, grammar and spelling</li> </ul>	Reality checks Customer survey Mystery Shopping	Customers can receive a poor service from Sheffield Homes  Low satisfaction  Poor reputation	R12. The quality of written communication with customers should be improved and letters be of a consistently high standard.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The lack of dedicated staff managing a complaint through the process is a weakness</li> </ul>	Benchmarking Reality checks Customer Focus Group Customer Survey	Can result in lack of personal responsibility  Poor communication  Less speedy attention to complaint	R13. Dedicated staff should be identified whose main role is to deal with Stage 2 complaints. These staff could be brought together in one Complaints Team or they could be based in teams around the organisation where the biggest numbers of complaints are received. The staff would need sufficient authority to require co-operation from other teams in order to respond to complaints and be empowered to discuss a resolution with the customer. The staff would need to be managed as a team or 'virtual team' to realise all the advantages listed.

## We believe that the advantages of having dedicated complaints staff are:

- There would be more consistency in how complaints are dealt with as fewer staff would be involved in the process
- Specialist staff could be recruited with the right skills to deal with customers who may be frustrated and dissatisfied
- Staff would be focussed on resolving rather than formalising complaints and would be able to prevent complaints escalating by filtering out and resolving less serious complaints more quickly
- Serious complaints could be dealt with more effectively
- Staff could act as a semi-independent reviewers of complaints
- The resolution of the complaint can be jointly agreed with the customer
- There should be a reduction in complaints through improved complaint handling and the overall quality of customer care
- The response to the customer can be co-ordinated where different sections are involved
- The management of persistent complainants would be more co-ordinated
- There may be a reduction in the number of referrals to the Ombudsman as the quality of complaint handling would be improved. Where the customer did refer to the Ombudsman, the case file would be more immediately available and quality assured.
- A named contact would encourage accountability
- Staff would be focused on meeting smarter targets
- It would be easier to share good practice and implement improvements
- Training costs would be reduced as fewer staff would need to be trained
- Responses to customers would not be delayed because of staff holidays, sickness etc.
- The overall quality of complaints handling would improve

## There are also some disadvantages:

- There will be some initial costs in setting up the process
  - Recruitment and set-up
  - Training for staff
  - Budget
- Staff would need to move from their current roles into the dedicated complaints role. This may reduce the resources in some existing teams.

## Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny

### Policy Update

APR/MAY/JUNE 2012

#### **1. Helping tenants take control**

- a) Plans to make it easier for council tenants to take control of their local neighbourhood and services have been announced by Housing Minister Grants Shapps MP
- b) Mr Shapps has challenged tenants who feel their landlords have neglected their neighbourhood to exercise their rights and take matters into their own hands in the spirit of last year's riot clean-up crews
- c) The Minister has published plans to strengthen and streamline 2 key rights that can help tenants achieve this
- d) The Right to Manage gives tenants the chance to take over day-to-day management of housing services such as cleaning, repairs, refurbishment and security to deliver a more responsive, better quality and value for money service for their community. New proposals will streamline the piles of paperwork involved in transferring management responsibilities to a tenant organisation, speeding up the handover process.
- e) The Right to Transfer allows tenants to request the ownership of council homes in their neighbourhood to be transferred from the council to a local housing association. This could be because tenants believe this new landlord could provide better services like cleaning and security or bring more investment into their area such as improvement to peoples' homes and the environment. At the moment, tenants can put forward a case for transfer, but councils have no obligation to consider their proposals. The proposed changes will strengthen these rights, requiring councils to work with tenants to explore transfer requests
- f) The consultation runs until 23 May 2012 and comments are being invited from a wide range of consultees from across the local authority, housing and tenant sectors

#### **2. Invest to save and offer support to vulnerable people**

- a) Councils must invest to save and protect their most disadvantaged residents, Housing Minister Grant Shapps has said
- b) The Minister has urged town halls to follow Whitehall's example and protect Supporting People funding to help the most vulnerable in their communities
- c) In a letter to council leaders, he has reminded councils as they set their budgets they should consider evidence showing that every pound spent through this housing support services saves £3 in reduced costs to homelessness, tenancy failure, crime, health and residential care packages
- d) So the £1.6 billion invested in Supporting People can save as much as £3.41 billion in the costs of alternative help for vulnerable people in our communities

- e) The government protected £6.5 billion funding for Supporting People over the course of the Spending Review – representing a less than 1% cash reduction in funding each year
- f) The funding helps people across the country to live independently in their own homes. These can include: older and disabled people; single homeless people; people with mental health problems; and, women at risk of domestic violence

### **3. Up to £1 million to help communities shape the future of their high streets**

- a) Planning Minister Greg Clark has revealed that £1 million will be made available to support the creation of high street neighbourhood plans that will help revitalise this crucial part of the local economy
- b) The announcement is part of the government's 'Portas-plus' response to the Mary Portas High Street Review, which goes above and beyond her recommendations and includes a raft of new incentives, funding schemes and bureaucracy-busting measures, all in a bid to rejuvenate the country's rundown high streets
- c) This financial support for neighbourhood planning will help local people, businesses and councils come together to develop and agree a neighbourhood street plan that makes locally led sustainable development puts the town centre first with plans for the vitalising and growing high street economy
- d) Neighbourhood planning is part of a series of measures announced in the Localism Act shifting power away from Whitehall into the hands of people. Over 200 neighbourhood planning front-runner projects are already trialling the new powers before they are fully rolled out next week
- e) The new National Planning Policy Framework also responds to the Portas recommendation by underlining the importance of town centres and allowing councils to provide the parking facilities in town centres that will help them compete with out-of-town shopping centres and supermarkets

### **4. PM launches reinvigorated Right to Buy scheme**

- a) From April 2012 2 million social tenants could benefit from a discount of up to £75,000 with Right to Buy scheme
- b) The government has launched the reinvigorated Right to Buy, with a new discount of up to £75,000. since 1980, 2 million social homes have been bought by their occupants under the scheme, but numbers have gradually fallen to fewer than 4,000 sales last year as discounts have declined, making the scheme virtually meaningless in some parts of the country

### **5. Sound investment to help build more affordable homes**

- a) Moves to encourage more private investment in social housing have been announced by Ministers
- b) Housing Minister Grant Shapps and Economic Secretary Chloe Smith published a consultation seeking views on how to encourage more



- private investment into the social housing sector through Real Estate Investment Trusts – vehicles for those wishing to invest in property
- c) The current Finance Bill is introducing a series of measures to support entry to and investment in Real Estate Investment Trusts. This consultation will build on these measures considering potential further changes to Real Estate Investment Trusts to support the establishment of more of these in the social housing sector
  - d) The consultation follows the successful Affordable Homes Programme, which levered in private funding from providers of almost £10 billion, and which is set to exceed expectations and deliver 170,000 homes – 20,000 more than originally thought
  - e) Private investment is vital to help fund the supply of new homes, but Ministers also want to see greater innovation and diversity in the management and delivery of affordable housing
  - f) Mr Shapps has also announced that 3 companies – Orchard and Shipman, Shanley and Pinnacle Spaces – have already signed up to become commercial providers of social housing
  - g) The registration of these organisations will help bring the innovation and investment needed to deliver even more of the affordable homes the country needs

#### **6. Focus on victims to tackle antisocial behaviour**

- a) Focusing on victims and changing the attitudes of police and partners is the key to tackling antisocial behaviour, according to a Home Office report published recently
- b) The report, 'Focus on the Victim: Summary report on the ASB call handling trials', summarises the findings of 8 police forces which trialled new approaches to handling calls from the public
- c) The forces which volunteered for the trials – Avon and Somerset, Cambridgeshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Metropolitan, Sussex, West Mercia and South Wales – designed their own projects and have reported some encouraging initial results
- d) These included better working relationships with other agencies, an improved service to the victim, and the start of a shift in culture with call handlers responding to the needs of the victim rather than just ticking boxes

#### **7. George Clark appointed empty homes adviser**

- a) Architect and TV presenter George Clarke is to be an independent adviser to the Government to help bring thousands of empty homes back into use for families in need of stable, secure homes, Ministers recently announced
- b) Although the numbers of empty homes have fallen to their lowest level since 2004, there are still 720,000 homes sitting empty across the country – with 280,000 left vacant for 6 months or more
- c) Ministers have already announced £150 million to bring empty homes back into use as affordable housing – including £50 million to tackle clusters of empty homes

- d) George Clarke presented Channel 4's recent series of programmes, 'The Great British Property Scandal'. His work as independent adviser on empty homes will particularly involve:
  - Promoting bringing empty homes back into use
  - Raising public awareness of the benefits of bringing empty homes back into use and encouraging people to report empty homes in their area
  - Encouraging councils, housing associations and voluntary groups to identify innovative and good ideas and sharing this across communities
  - Challenging government and other public bodies to ensure publicly-owned homes are not left empty
  - Exploring whether current plans for demolition in councils could be scaled back
- e) Ministers have made £150 million available to communities to bring empty homes back into use. This is comprised of:
  - £70 million for councils to bring over 5,600 empty homes back into use
  - £30 million for community groups
  - £50 million to tackle clusters of empty homes

#### **8. Grant Shapps: Downing Street hosting the self-build boom**

- a) A package of new support to give as many people as possible the opportunity to build their own homes was announced recently at England's most famous address by Housing Minister Grant Shapps
- b) It comes as a new report predicts a 141% rise in the mortgages available for those building their own homes over the next 3 years
- c) The Minister said that going down the self-build route was an affordable option for aspiring homeowners and shouldn't be seen as the preserve of those with deep pockets and grand designs

#### **9. Grant Shapps: Help to get boxed-in generation up the property ladder**

- a) Minister pledges to help those growing out of their properties
- b) The boxed-in generation – people unable to upsize their home but who have also outgrown their first property – will for the first time benefit from support to help them move up the housing ladder
- c) In a speech to housebuilders, the Housing Minister has argued that a generation of first-time buyers and families with children are unable to do what their parents did and move homes as their needs grow
- d) A recent survey from Finaproerty.com found that almost a third of parents find their current home too small to accommodate their family – rising to 40% for younger families where the parents are aged between 18 and 34
- e) Mr Shapps has said that for the first time these overlooked owners will now get the help they need to move from their current abode to a new address – through the NewBuy Guarantee – while also freeing up properties suitable for aspiring first time buyers
- f) The NewBuy Guarantee is not confined to first-time buyers but is designed to help anyone looking to buy a newly-built property – and is expected to help up to 100,000 prospective and current homeowners

- g) Through this innovative new scheme, instead of a typical buyer requiring a £40,000 deposit to buy a £200,000 home, they will now only need £10,000. The scheme – which had its first sale recently – is available for homes up to £500,000
- h) The NewBuy Guarantee is already starting to open up the market, with 4 lenders offering 95% mortgages on new-build properties by up to 9 leading housebuilders
- i) They are:
  - o Natwest – who offer 95% loan-to-value mortgages at under 5% interest on properties built by Barratt, Bellway, Bovis, Linden Homes, Persimmon, Redrow and Taylor Wimpey
  - o Barclays – who offer 95% loan-to-value mortgages on properties built by Barratt, Bellway, Bovis, Persimmon, Redrow and Taylor Wimpey
  - o Nationwide – who offer 95% loan-to-value mortgages on properties built by Barratt, Bovis, Bellway, Crest Nicholson, Fairview, Linden Homes, Persimmon, Redrow and Taylor Wimpey
  - o Halifax – who offer 95% loan-to-value mortgages on properties built by Barratt, Bellway, Bovis, Crest Nicholson, Cala Homes, Linden Homes, Persimmon, Redrow Homes and Taylor Wimpey

#### **10. Grant Shapps: 'Fantastic' response to Portas Pilots offer**

- a) Hundreds of towns across the country have applied in their droves to become one of the first Portas Pilots to breathe new life into their high streets, Local Government Minister Grant Shapps said recently
- b) The Government has received bids from 371 different towns to become one of 12 pilot areas, with the chance to receive a share of £1.2 million to help turn around their high streets – but more importantly the backing from the Minister and Mary Portas herself
- c) Mr Shapps said he was excited by the enthusiastic and energetic response to the Portas Review, which has proved a catalyst for communities to come together, form Town Teams and make plans for the future of their high streets
- d) While the results of this competition will be announced in May, the Minister has also announced a further round of pilots to trial some of Mary's recommendations
- e) This programme of pilots is just one part of the Government's 'Portas Plus' response to Mary's review into the future of the high streets
- f) Grant Shapps has also announced:
  - o A £1 million Future High Street X-Fund, which will be awarded to areas with the most creative and effective schemes to rejuvenate their town centres
  - o A National Markets Day, launching a National markets fortnight, to celebrate the role markets can play and offer budding entrepreneurs the chance to test their business ideas, and
  - o A £500,000 fund for Business Improvement Districts, to help town centres access loans for their set-up costs

#### **11. Grant Shapps: surge of interest in national home swap scheme**

- a) Housing Minister Grant Shapps has hailed the national home swap scheme, 'HomeSwap Direct', as inquiries via the new scheme passed the million mark
- b) Since its launch in October 2011, over a million searches for properties have been made through HomeSwap Direct. The new scheme allows social housing tenants wanting to swap their home to see, for the first time, every available property in the country
- c) Mr Shapps said the surge of interest from tenants testified to a dramatic improvement since the failure of the centrally-prescribed MoveUK service. Started in 2004, within 2 years the number of moves had collapsed by half, and there was no clear strategy to improve the situation
- d) Now with over 5,500 searches a day, it is clear the greater choice offered through HomeSwap Direct is proving popular with tenants who want to move house, whether to be closer to a new job or their family, or to find a property that better suits their needs
- e) Until now tenants have been restricted to swapping properties with other tenants in a scheme chosen by their landlord – effectively meaning only a partial swap scheme existed, and often an uphill battle for tenants if they wanted to move anywhere other than the neighbourhood where they already lived. HomeSwap Direct is now giving tenants access to a much wider selection of properties than ever before and boosting their prospects of moving
- f) The scheme is online, so advertised swaps are much more accessible for tenants and the possibility of moving house is just a click away
- g) HomeSwap Direct brings together 4 internet-based providers of mutual exchange services (HomeSwapper, House Exchange, Abritas, and LHS)
- h) A new Tenancy Standard came into force on 1 April 2012 and places a requirement on social landlords in England to subscribe to an internet-based mutual exchange service. The provider of the service must be a signatory to an agreement such as HomeSwap Direct under which tenants can access matches across all (or the greatest practicable number of) internet based mutual exchange services

**12. Communities and Local Government Committee publishes report on new housing supply**

- a) The government must employ a basket of measures, covering all tenures of housing, if sufficient finance is ever to be available to tackle the country's housing crisis, says the CLG Select Committee in a report examining the financing of new housing supply
- b) Launching the report, Clive Betts, Chair of the CLG Select Committee has said that:
  - For decades, successive governments have failed to deliver sufficient homes to meet demand
  - The country faces a significant housing shortfall, and the financial crisis has amplified the problem – 232,000 new households are forming each year in England, and yet last year fewer than 110,000 homes were completed

- c) The Committee sets out 4 key areas for action which, taken together, could go a long way to raising the finance needed to meet the housing shortfall:
  - Large-scale investment from institutions and pension funds
  - Changes to the financing of housing associations, including a new role for the historic grant on their balance sheets
  - Greater financial freedoms for local authorities
  - New and innovative models, including a massive expansion of self-build housing
- d) Institutional investment
  - The Committee finds that large institutions and pension funds, which have only ever made a limited contribution to new housing, could provide a substantial source of investment
  - Public sector bodies and housing associations must encourage such investment
  - The Government should also look to establish a housing investment bank, to channel investment into housing – expanding the Green Investment Bank to cover housing would be one way of achieving this
- e) Housing associations
  - The Committee questions the Government's flagship Affordable Rent model e.g. how will it play out in different parts of the country? Will it prove unaffordable in parts of London? Is housing benefit now expected to take the strain of paying for new affordable housing? Is this model sustainable beyond 2015?
  - The Committee calls on Ministers to set out proposals for the future delivery of affordable homes, and to consult on how housing associations should be financed in future
- f) Local authorities
  - The Committee concludes that local authorities have an important role to play, but may struggle to fulfil their potential because of centrally-imposed constraints
  - The Government should give councils greater freedom to decide on the best housing solutions for their areas
  - Local authorities must also be allowed, within prudential limits, to safely increase their capital borrowing for new housing
- g) New models
  - The Committee urges Ministers to look to different models of delivery to help meet the housing shortfall
  - It sees interesting potential in self-build, where people manage the construction of their own homes, and points to Almere in the Netherlands as a useful model
  - Self-build schemes could be a major new source of housing in England, but it will require substantial institutional change to realise this potential. Government, local authorities and lenders must work together to remove the barriers that currently restrict self-build and commit to getting pilot schemes underway very quickly

### **13. Grant Shapps: Revamped Right to Buy to deliver thousands of new homes**

- a) Details of how thousands of new affordable homes will be built using the cash proceeds from the Government's reinvigorated Right to Buy scheme were unveiled recently by Housing Minister Grant Shapps
- b) The Minister said he was responding to appeals by local authorities for more time to take advantage of the new scheme by allowing them 3 years to reinvest the funds they gain from additional sales into new housing. He said councils now have a prime opportunity to refresh their housing stock and help meet the housing needs of hard-working families currently languishing on the waiting list
- c) The revamped Right to Buy, which will give 2.5 million social tenants the opportunity to buy their home with discounts of up to £75,000 was launched in April 2012
- d) Mr Shapps has said that his ambition is that, for the first time, every Right to Buy home sold will be replaced by a new affordable home to rent nationally. He said he had listened to views raised by councils on how they would deliver this ambition, and has agreed to extend their timeframe for spending the receipts from 2 years to 3 years
- e) Under the new, light touch agreement between Whitehall and Town Halls, councils will have the opportunity to keep receipts from additional Right to Buy sales and the freedom to spend the cash as they see fit to meet local housing demand
- f) Councils will have the freedom to:
  - o Decide on the type, size and location of the new homes they build according to local needs
  - o Work with other organisations such as housing associations to finance and deliver affordable homes for their area, or
  - o Pass the cash to Whitehall to help deliver one-for-one replacement at a national level
- g) To ensure best value for taxpayers' money, Mr Shapps said Right to Buy funds should account for no more than 30% of total investment in new homes – in place of Government funding. This is in line with the highly successful Affordable Homes Programme, which has exceeded expectations and is expected to deliver up to 170,000 new affordable homes by 2015
- h) However, the Minister has been clear that the new homes must be delivered as quickly as possible, which is why councils must spend the cash on new affordable homes for rent within 3 years of first receiving it. This has been extended from the original proposal of 2 years in response to feedback from councils
- i) If additional Right to Buy receipts remain unspent after 3 years they will be returned to Whitehall to be reinvested in house building nationally
- j) Additional Right to Buy receipts for councils that have not signed the Right to Buy agreement will immediately be passed on to the Homes and Communities Agency or the Greater London Authority for investment. Councils will then be able to bid for funding for investment in affordable housing from this pot
- k) Councils that wish to retain additional Right to Buy receipts for the first quarter of 2012/13 must sign up to the Right to Buy agreement by

Wednesday 27 June 2012. Agreements can be signed after this date but will not cover receipts for Q1

- l) If Right to Buy receipts remain unspent at the end of 3 years they must be returned to central Government for investment by the Homes and Communities Agency or Greater London Authority. Similarly, if receipts constitute more than 30% of total investment, then a sum equivalent to the overspend should be returned to central Government
- m) The remaining 70% invested in new affordable homes must come from authorities' or housing associations' own resources, which could include borrowing supported by the additional rental income. For local authorities this will only be possible if they have sufficient headroom to borrow under the recent self-financing settlement

#### **14. Putting people at the heart of tackling antisocial behaviour**

- a) People affected by antisocial behaviour will have the right to force action from the police and local agencies through new proposals published recently
- b) Home Secretary Theresa May revealed plans to introduce faster and more effective powers to stop the dangerous and yobbish behaviour of those who make victims' lives a misery
- c) The existing top down approach will be turned on its head to ensure local solutions are found to local problems with a focus on the impact of victims and neighbourhoods
- d) The antisocial behaviour White Paper, *Putting victims first: more effective responses to antisocial behaviour*, will reduce 19 complex existing powers to 6 simple and flexible new ones
- e) And for the first time, victims who feel their problems are not being taken seriously enough will have the right to force action through a newly introduced 'Community Trigger'.
- f) The trigger will be trialled in Manchester, Brighton and Hove and West Lindsey in Lincolnshire from 1 June
- g) The government will publish a draft bill for pre-legislative scrutiny to ensure parliament, victims and frontline practitioners are involved in shaping the new legislation and that we deliver effective laws that last a generation

This page is intentionally left blank



## Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee

### Draft Work Programme

2012/13

Meeting date	Papers to be circulated	Issues to consider
19 July	11 July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OSMC referrals? Draft work programme agreed?</li> <li>• Draft lettings policy?</li> <li>• Tenant scrutiny report on Sheffield Homes complaints, and how being taken forward by Sheffield Homes?</li> <li>• Policy update</li> </ul>
11 September	3 September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PCC manifesto, Community Safety Partnership document, PCP?</li> <li>• Antisocial behaviour review?</li> <li>• Lettings Policy Review</li> <li>• Policy update</li> </ul>
8 November	31 October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy update</li> </ul>
10 January	2 January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy update</li> </ul>
14 March	6 March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy update</li> </ul>

**Other issues to potentially consider?**

- Homelessness
- Police and Crime Commissioner and Panel arrangements

- Migration and asylum: the G4S contract
- Housing and Health & Wellbeing Board – joint scrutiny session possibly?

Repairs and maintenance contract 2014?  
Future of council housing (April 2013 transfer date)

Ways of giving tenants greater say in housing services? Increasing responsible private sector involvement?  
Monitoring private sector landlords

Housing benefit changes and impact  
Self-financing briefing