

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Thursday 25 July 2013 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, Simon Clement-Jones, Shelia Constance, Richard Crowther, Denise Fox, Rob Frost, Qurban Hussain, Sioned-Mair Richards, Roy Munn, Robert Murphy and Philip Wood

Substitute Members

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

PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE MEETING

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

A copy of the agenda and reports is available on the Council's website at www.sheffield.gov.uk. You can also see the reports to be discussed at the meeting if you call at the First Point Reception, Town Hall, Pinstone Street entrance. The Reception is open between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm, Monday to Thursday and between 9.00 am and 4.45 pm. on Friday, 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 Matthew Borland, Policy and Improvement Officer on 0114 2735065 or email matthew.borland@sheffield.gov.uk

FACILITIES

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

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

**SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY AND POLICY
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE AGENDA
25 JULY 2013**

Order of Business

- 1. Welcome and Housekeeping Arrangements**
- 2. Apologies for Absence**
- 3. Exclusion of Public and Press**
To identify items where resolutions may be moved to exclude the press and public
- 4. Declarations of Interest**
Members to declare any interests they have in the business to be considered at the meeting
- 5. Minutes of Previous Meeting**
To approve the minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 28 March 2013 and 15 May 2013
- 6. Public Questions and Petitions**
To receive any questions or petitions from members of the public
- 7. Arbourthorne Fields Redevelopment Scheme**
Report of the Executive Director, Place and the Executive Director, Communities
- 8. The Impact of Welfare Reform on Sheffield's Residents**
Report of the Director of Policy, Performance and Communications
- 9. Challenge for Change: Grass Cutting Scrutiny Report**
Report of the Challenge for Change Tenant Scrutiny Group
- 10. Work Planning 2013/14**
Report of the Policy and Improvement Officer
- 11. Date of Next Meeting**
The next meeting of the Committee will be held on Thursday 26 September at 2.00pm in the Town Hall

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ADVICE TO MEMBERS ON DECLARING INTERESTS AT MEETINGS

New standards arrangements were introduced by the Localism Act 2011. The new regime made changes to the way that members' interests are registered and declared.

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

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

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

You **must**:

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

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

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

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

- Any contract which is made between you, or your spouse or your civil partner (or a body in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest) and your council or authority -
 - under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and
 - which has not been fully discharged.
- Any beneficial interest in land which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, have and which is within the area of your council or authority.
- Any licence (alone or jointly with others) which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, holds to occupy land in the area of your council or authority for a month or longer.
- Any tenancy where (to your knowledge) -
 - the landlord is your council or authority; and
 - the tenant is a body in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest.
- Any beneficial interest which you, or your spouse or your civil partner has in securities of a body where -
 - (a) that body (to your knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of your council or authority; and
 - (b) either
 - the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or
 - if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.

Under the Council's Code of Conduct, members must act in accordance with the Seven Principles of Public Life (selflessness; integrity; objectivity; accountability; openness; honesty; and leadership), including the principle of honesty, which says that 'holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest'.

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

You have a personal interest where –

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 28 March 2013

PRESENT: Councillors Chris Weldon (Chair), Penny Baker (Deputy Chair), Nikki Bond, Shelia Constance, Richard Crowther, Denise Fox, Martin Lawton, Peter Rippon, Chris Rosling-Josephs, Clive Skelton (Substitute Member) and Diana Stimely (Substitute Member)

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received and substitutes attended the meeting as follows:-

Apology

Substitute

Councillor David Barker
Councillor Simon Clement-Jones
Councillor Jayne Dunn

Councillor Clive Skelton
Councillor Diana Stimely
No substitute nominated

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10th January 2013, were approved as a correct record.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 There were no petitions submitted or questions raised by members of the public.

6. BED AND BREAKFAST ACCOMMODATION FOR HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS

6.1 The Executive Director, Communities Portfolio, submitted a report on bed and breakfast accommodation used for homeless households in Sheffield, including details of plans to introduce a Supported Accommodation Pathway for homeless households in the City. The report attached, as appendices, a schedule of requirements, requested by the City Council's Housing Solutions, of providers of bed and breakfast accommodation, together with the various forms regarding the terms and conditions of bookings.

6.2 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- Whilst the requirement in terms of the accommodation was to provide bed and breakfast only, the Council used one bed and breakfast establishment, particularly for families, which had a kitchen, providing the users with the opportunity of cooking their own food.
- The average length of stay for a homeless person or family in bed and breakfast accommodation was reasonably short. The Government has set a maximum length of stay for families in bed and breakfast at six weeks. The average length of stay in Sheffield was 6.94 days for singles and 6.42 days for families.
- The Housing Solutions Service received very few complaints in connection with the provision of bed and breakfast accommodation and if a complaint was received by a provider, they would be expected to inform Housing Solutions and provide details of the complaint.
- Whilst it was not possible to provide precise figures at this stage, it was envisaged that, out of the 245 units of temporary accommodation used by Housing Solutions, only a relatively small number of units would be out of use at any one time. Details of the figures would be provided to Members. On average, there were 28 units vacant, either because they were unready to let or have recently become ready to let and were awaiting for a household to move in.
- In the unlikely circumstance of all the units being full and where the Council needed to refer a homeless person or family, steps would be taken to free a place up at one of the units. Alternatively, if the Council had prior notice, arrangements would be made to reserve a place in advance.
- The Mortgage Reserve Scheme was a homeless prevention tool for homeowners who were at risk of losing their home through repossession. It enables households to remain in their homes by transferring ownership to a housing association. The Housing Aid Team assisted many more households to remain in their properties by negotiating with the lender, referring the households for money and debt advice and exploring affordable repayment options. The Team had just completed its 100th mortgage rescue.

6.3 RESOLVED: That this Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the additional information now reported and the responses to questions now raised;
- (b) thanks Belinda Gallup, Service Manager, Housing Solutions, for attending the meeting to speak to the report, the contents of which have allayed some of the concerns expressed by the Committee with regard to the suitability of the bed and breakfast accommodation used by the Council to house homeless households; and

(c) requests:-

- (i) the Executive Director, Communities Portfolio, to submit a report to a future meeting of the Committee on the draft Schedule of Requirements to enable Members to comment on its contents; and
- (ii) Members of the Committee to contact the Policy Officer (Scrutiny) in connection with proposed visits to a sample of the bed and breakfast accommodation presently being used by the City Council to house homeless households.

7. COMMUNITY SAFETY UPDATE 2013

7.1 Inspector Phil Shaw, Local Authority Liaison Officer, South Yorkshire Police, and Sarah Banks, Head of Safer and Sustainable Communities, gave a presentation on the Community Safety Update 2013. The presentation provided information on the Police and Crime Commissioner, Police and Crime Panels, the Safer and Sustainable Communities Partnership's priorities and the Joint Strategic Intelligence Assessment.

7.2 In terms of performance, it was reported that levels of anti-social behaviour were down, showing a 13% reduction as compared to 2011/12, levels of the reporting of hate crime had increased, with specific increases relating to disability hate crime and although burglary had shown an increase of 2%, a number of targeted actions were being taken to address this increase. There had also been a steady decrease in levels of victim-based crime in the City from 2008 to July 2012.

7.3 Reference was also made to the achievements made, specifically the Partnership Resource Allocation Meeting (PRAM), Community Justice Panels and the facility for reporting hate crime at the First Point Reception at Howden House, as well as details of the budget, future challenges and future targets.

7.4 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- In connection with the reduction in overall levels of domestic violence, whilst there were no statistics relating specifically to rape available at the meeting, the Police were in the process of establishing a dedicated unit to deal with rape.
- In connection with the disability aspect of hate crime, consideration had been given to assisting those victims who were not able to access the reporting centre at the First Point Reception at Howden House. A number of talks had been made at events and meetings attended by disability groups, with more planned, where help and advice had been provided to people with disabilities who had either been victims of hate crime, or could potentially be victims. Work had also been undertaken to encourage people with disabilities and their relatives, friends and carers, to report any incidents of hate crime. Arrangements were being made to attend a future meeting of the Learning and Disability Board to highlight the issues.

- Whilst the Police would continue to direct resources into reducing levels of shoplifting, which included the Retail Crime Unit working closely with retailers on this issue, the Government had requested that more resources be directed to targeting victim-based crime.
- A new operation had been introduced in terms of burglaries, whereby following a burglary, officers would undertake intensive house to house questioning, with the aim of raising people's attention, as well as seeking evidence to solve the crime. It was hoped that this approach would force people living within the vicinity to consider improving the security of their homes. The Police were also undertaking high visibility and covert patrols in areas with high burglary rates.

7.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the information reported as part of the presentation now made, together with the responses to the questions raised; and
- (b) thanks Inspector Phil Shaw and Sarah Banks for the presentation now made.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

8.1 It was reported that the arrangements in terms of the future of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committees would be decided at the Annual Council Meeting on 15th May 2013.

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 15 May 2013

PRESENT: Councillors Chris Weldon (Chair), Penny Baker (Deputy Chair), David Barker, Simon Clement-Jones, Shelia Constance, Richard Crowther, Denise Fox, Rob Frost, Qurban Hussain, Sioned-Mair Richards, Peter Rippon and Philip Wood

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received

2. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND DEPUTY CHAIR

RESOLVED: Councillors Chris Weldon and Penny Baker be appointed Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee, respectively.

3. DAY AND TIME OF MEETING

RESOLVED: That meetings of the Committee be held as and when required on dates and times to be determined by the Chair.

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Report to Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee

Report of: Simon Green and Richard Webb

Subject: Arbourthorne Fields Redevelopment Scheme

Author of Report: Amanda James, Assistant Regeneration Manager
Tel: 203 9677

Summary:

Phase 1 of the Arbourthorne Redevelopment Scheme was funded through the 2008-11 Housing Market Renewal (HMR) programme. When the HMR programme was terminated in March 2011 and no replacement funding stream was put in place, the Arbourthorne Fields Redevelopment Scheme was put on hold pending alternative resources being identified.

On 8th May 2013, a further report was agreed by Cabinet to use allocations from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), the Capital Programme and the Local Growth Fund (LGF), to complete rehousing and demolition on the Arbourthorne Fields Redevelopment Scheme.

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

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

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

Note the information

Background Papers:

- Arbourthorne Fields Redevelopment Scheme Cabinet Report – 8 May 2013
- Arbourthorne Fields Redevelopment Scheme Cabinet Report – 22 October 2008
- Wybourn, Arbourthorne and Manor Park Masterplan Cabinet Report – 24 October 2007
- Wybourn, Arbourthorne and Manor Park Masterplan – May 2005

Category of Report: OPEN (please specify)

1. Introduction/Context

- 1.1 Following the Report presented to Cabinet on 8th May 2013, the Scrutiny Committee requested further information on the funding package for Arbourthorne Rehousing and Acquisition.
- 1.2 On 22 October 2008 Cabinet approved the phased acquisition and demolition of 422 non-traditional T-Type and '5M Finnegan' properties on the Arbourthorne estate. This was known as the Arbourthorne Fields Redevelopment Scheme. This was completed in 2010.
- 1.3 The 2008 Cabinet decision was made on the basis that Phase 1 of the scheme would be funded by the Government's Housing Market Renewal (HMR) Programme and a bid would be made to the HCA for funding on subsequent phases.
- 1.4 However, the HMR programme was ended in March 2011 and as no further external funding could be secured, the remaining two phases of the scheme were put on hold, pending the identification of alternative funding sources.
- 1.5 Local Members and the Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods indicated that the continuation of the Arbourthorne scheme, in line with the October 2008 Cabinet decision, would be the first priority should funds be available.
- 1.6 Despite there being Cabinet authority and Member support to deliver the scheme, the funding environment has changed significantly since the scheme last went to Cabinet in October 2008. Therefore, since March 2011, the Housing and Neighbourhood Regeneration Team in conjunction with Sheffield Homes, Communities Finance and the Strategic Capital Investment Team, looked at a range of funding streams or alternative options for the remaining 5m homes.

2. Funding

- 2.1 Table 1 shows the cost of the scheme from 2013/14 – 2017/18, broken down by expenditure to the 193 Council and the 53 privately owned properties which make up phases 2 and 3 of the overall scheme.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Total
	£M	£M	£M	£M	£M	£M
Council	1.332	1.753	0.816	0.193	0.043	4.137
Private	1.211	2.767	2.329	0.315	0.158	6.780
Total	2.543	4.520	3.145	0.508	0.201	10.917

2.2 Table 2 shows the sources of funding available to ensure completion of the scheme.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Total
	£M	£M	£M	£M	£M	£M
Council						
HRA	1.332	1.753	0.816	0.193	0.043	4.137
Sub Total	1.332	1.753	0.816	0.193	0.043	4.137
Private						
Capital Receipts	0	0.898	2.329	0.315	0.158	3.700
Program me Savings	0.578	0.869	0	0	0	1.447
Local Growth Fund	0.633	1.000	0	0	0	1.633
Sub Total	1.211	2.767	2.329	0.315	0.158	6.780
Total	2.543	4.520	3.145	0.508	0.201	10.917

A further breakdown of how the funding will be allocated is given below. These costs are based on current rates provided by our Contractors.

Description	£
Council properties	
Decommissioning	55,005
Asbestos	46,460
Disconnection of Services	366,818
Demolition	1,432,060
Tenant Homeloss	907,100
Tenant Disturbance	193,000
Security	965,000
Professional Fees and Price uplift	172,272
Total Council Properties	4,137,715

The acquisition costs outlined in the table on page 5 are based on the acquisition costs paid during Phase 1, plus current values obtained from the Land Registry. Acquisition costs also include the payment of Surveyors fees, legal fees and other fees.

The figure of £1,663,500 has been secured from the Local Growth Fund for use as Relocation Assistance Loans for homeowners interested in buying a property on the open Market. The maximum available per RAL is set at £60,000. 27 RAL's would be available if all interested owners accessed the maximum allowed.

Description	£
Private properties	
Decommissioning	15,015
Asbestos	11,660
Drainage	3,710
Disconnection of Services	97,043
Demolition	393,260
Homeowner Disturbance	79,500
Acquisitions	4,230,000
Relocation Appreciation Loans	1,663,500
Security	255,000
Professional Fees and Price uplift	31,508
Total private properties	6,780,196

3 What does this mean for the people of Sheffield?

- It delivers on the WAMP Masterplan objectives and delivers the recommendations given in the 2008 Cabinet Report.
- It contributes to the Council's corporate outcome, 'A Great Place to Live', by demolishing properties which were originally built with a finite lifespan and which would require significant investment to bring them up to Decent Homes standards.
- It offers a comprehensive solution for both Council and privately owned homes
- It enables the creation of a better designed neighbourhood, with a wider range of properties, safer layout and improved linkages to open space.
- It increases the size of the existing land package, thus making it more attractive to potential developers
- It supports Sanctuary's £5million of investment into new older persons' housing development, which is due to be built on Phase 1A of the scheme. A further scheme to build over 40 new 1, 2, 3 and 4 bedroom homes has now been submitted for Planning approval. The Council will have 100% nomination rights to all of these new homes and will help facilitate the rehousing of existing residents who wish to remain in the local area.
- Any capital receipts from the sale of the land will go back into the HRA, which would reduce the overall support required for the scheme from the HRA.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 The Committee is asked to note to contents of the report and provide views and comments to the Neighbourhood Housing and Regeneration Team.

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Report to Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 25 July 2013

Report of: Director of Policy, Performance and Communications

Subject: The Impact of Welfare Reform on Sheffield's Residents

Author of Report: Nicola Rees, Policy and Improvement Officer
0114 27 34529
nicola.rees@sheffield.gov.uk

Summary:

Sheffield City Council has expressed concern about the Government's introduction of the 'bedroom tax'. This report:

- i. examines the impact of both the 'bedroom tax' and of other changes to the welfare system on the people of Sheffield; and
 - ii. explains what the Council is doing to support Sheffield residents, in response to the welfare reform agenda.
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Type of item:

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

The Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee:

- i. is asked to note the contents of the report and the progress made on both understanding the impact of welfare reform on Sheffield's residents and supporting residents in response to the welfare reform agenda;
 - ii. is asked to provide views or comments on the Council's approach on responding to the welfare reform agenda; and
 - iii. is asked to consider whether the committee would wish to receive further update reports on this issue.
-

Background Papers:

Sheffield Hallam University, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Hitting the poorest places hardest: The local and regional impact of welfare reform

Category of Report: OPEN

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Sheffield City Council has expressed concern about the Government's introduction of the 'bedroom tax', which is negatively affecting a significant number of both Council tenants and tenants of other Registered Housing Providers in the city.
- 1.2 At the meeting of Full Council on 5 June 2013, Members of the Council agreed to closely monitor the impact of the 'bedroom tax' and they asked the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee to examine the impact of the 'bedroom tax' on Sheffield people, as well as the impact of all other welfare changes.
- 1.3 In addition to examining the impact of changes to the welfare system on the people of Sheffield, this report explains what the Council is doing to support Sheffield residents, in response to the welfare reform agenda.
- 1.4 Because of the complexity of the welfare reform changes and the varied and shifting timescales for the implementation of the changes, it is not straightforward to estimate or assess the full impact of the changes. However, this report sets out the Council's current understanding, based on the information that is becoming available from the changes that have already been implemented, and our understanding of the likely impacts of future changes.
- 1.5 The Council has set up a Welfare Reform Implementation Group to oversee our response to the welfare reform agenda and to co-ordinate the activity which is happening across the organisation, which has over the past year included:
 - the launch of the Local Assistance Scheme (to replace the Social Fund);
 - the implementation of the Council Tax Support Scheme and Council Tax Hardship Scheme;
 - communications activity to raise awareness of benefit changes amongst residents and frontline staff - this has included the development of a single, recognisable brand which has been used in information booklets, website, billboards, media work, local events and targeted letters;
 - support for residents affected by benefit changes; and
 - work to understand the impacts of benefit changes on residents and on council services.

Over the next year the work of the Welfare Reform Implementation Group will also include working with Government to support residents through the introduction of Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payments.

2.0 Background

2.1 At the present time the UK is seeing the biggest change to the benefits system in 60 years. The Government has identified three key problems with the current system:

- Work incentives are poor
- The system is too complex
- Welfare costs too much

2.2 Government's stated view is that reform of the system is required to help people to move into and progress in work, while supporting the most vulnerable and reducing overall spend on the system.

2.3 Older people have been largely insulated from the welfare reforms, as this has been an explicit policy decision of the present Government. Therefore people of working age and their families are being disproportionately impacted by benefit cuts.

2.4 The changes to benefits are considerable in terms of complexity, impact and volume. The key changes and their timescales for implementation are listed below. More detailed information on each of these changes is available in Sections 3.0 and 4.0 below.

Welfare Reform	Brief Summary of Change	Timescale for Implementation
<i>Housing Benefit – Local Housing Allowance</i>	Changes to the rules governing assistance with the cost of housing for low-income households in the private rented sector.	Implemented in 2011
<i>Housing Benefit – Under-occupation ('Bedroom Tax')</i>	New rules governing the size of properties for which payments are made to working age claimants in the social rented sector (widely known as the 'bedroom tax').	Implemented on 1 st April 2013
<i>Non-dependant Deductions</i>	Increases in the deductions from Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and other income-based benefits to reflect the contribution that non-dependant household members are expected to make towards the household's housing costs.	The first change was implemented in April 2012, and a further change was implemented in April 2013.
<i>Household Benefit Cap</i>	New ceiling on total payments per household, applying to the sum of a wide range of benefits for working age claimants.	Due to be implemented from August 2013
<i>Council Tax Benefit</i>	Reductions in entitlement of working age claimants arising from reduction in total payments to local authorities.	Implemented on 1 st April 2013

<i>Disability Living Allowance (DLA)</i>	Replacement of DLA by Personal Independence Payments (PIP), including more stringent and frequent medical tests, as the basis for financial support to help offset the additional costs faced by individuals with disabilities.	All new claims from June 2013 are to be for PIP, not DLA. Migration of existing DLA claimants to PIP from October 2013; all DLA claimants to have migrated to PIP by the end of 2018.
<i>Incapacity Benefits</i>	Replacement of Incapacity Benefit and related benefits by Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), with more stringent medical tests, greater conditionality and time-limiting of non-means tested entitlement for all but the most severely ill or disabled.	Migration of existing claimants of Incapacity Benefit began in 2011 and migration is due to be completed by April 2014.
<i>Child Benefit</i>	Three-year freeze, and withdrawal of benefit from households including a higher earner.	Benefit frozen for three years from April 2011. Withdrawal of benefit from high earners implemented January 2013.
<i>Tax Credits</i>	Reductions in payment rates and eligibility for Child Tax Credit and Working Families Tax Credit, paid to lower and middle income households.	Implementation from April 2013.
<i>1 Per Cent Up-rating</i>	Reduction in annual up-rating of value of most working-age benefits.	Implementation from April 2013.
<i>Universal Credit</i>	<p>This change will affect all people of working age who are currently receiving any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income Support • Income-based JSA • income-related ESA • Housing benefit • Tax Credits <p>These benefits will be replaced by one single monthly payment which will be paid in arrears, to a single person in each household.</p>	Migration to Universal Credit is due to take place over four years between October 2013 and March 2017.

3.0 Impact of Under-occupancy ('bedroom tax') on Sheffield residents

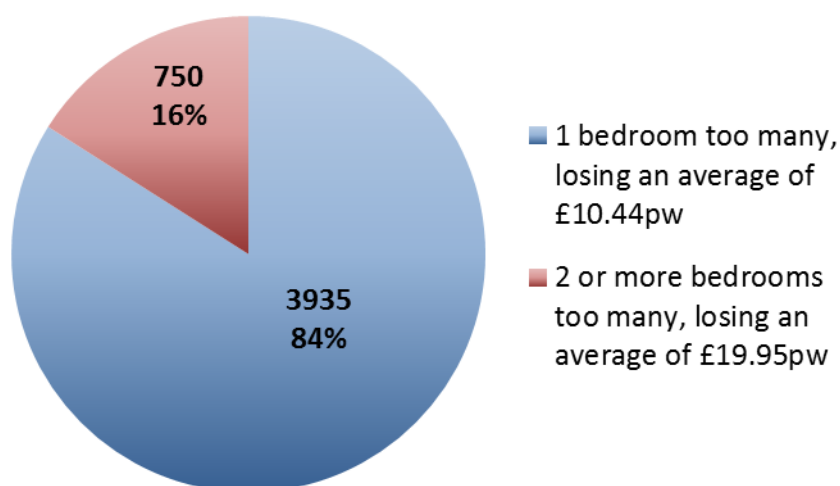
3.1 In April 2013 the Government reduced the amount of Housing Benefit (HB) for working age Council or Housing Association tenants living in homes that are classed as too big for them. Tenants with one bedroom too many have lost 14% or more of their HB. Tenants with two or more bedrooms too many have lost 25% or more of their HB.

3.2 The number of people affected by Under-occupancy is continually fluctuating, due to tenants' ongoing changing circumstances. Therefore, while the information provided below offers some insight into the impact of Under-occupancy on Sheffield residents, it should be noted that this is a moving picture.

3.3 At the end of June 2013 there were 4,685 council tenants affected by Under-occupancy¹. Of those:

- approximately 84% were assessed as having 1 bedroom too many, losing an average of £10.44pw; and
- approximately 16% were assessed as having 2 or more bedrooms too many, losing an average of £19.95pw.

Impact of Under-occupancy on Council tenants



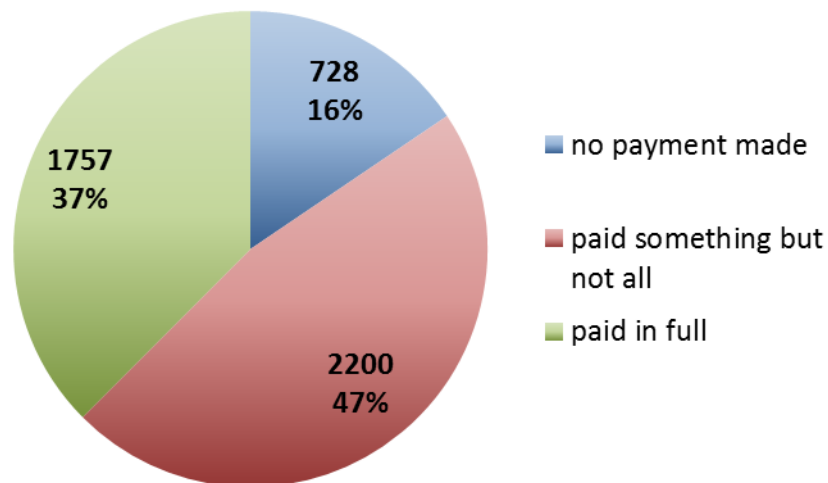
3.4 For the 4,685 tenants affected by Under-occupancy, at the end of June:

- 728 (16%) had not made any payment towards the Under-occupancy cut in their benefit;
- 1,757 (37%) had paid in full; and
- 2,200 (47%) had paid something but not all.

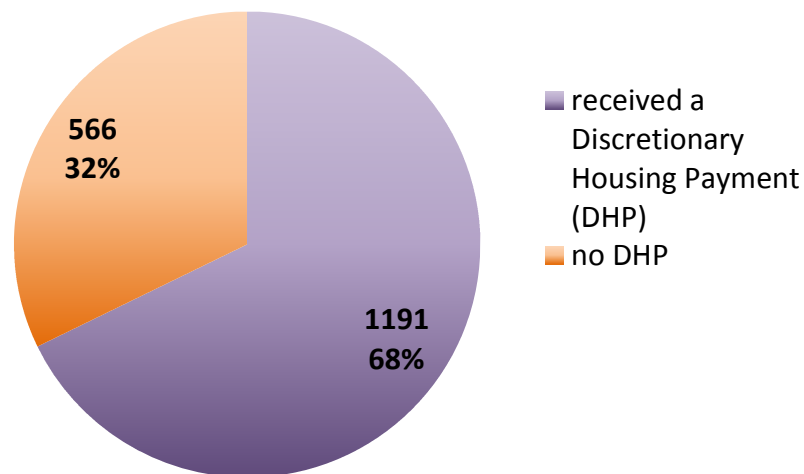
¹ **Note:** See paragraph 5.5 below regarding the discrepancy in figures shown in the *Impacts on Households* table below.

3.5 These figures are an improvement on the figures for April and May, but they still reflect significant issues with tenants' ability or willingness to pay. Further work on individual cases is ongoing. It is important to note that of those 1,757 tenants who have paid the full amount of the Under-occupancy cut in their benefit, the vast majority - 1,191- have received a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP). DHPs are administered by the Council and are payments which are used to support customers with housing costs. See Section 6.0 below for more information on DHPs.

Payment towards Under-occupancy cut in benefit by Council tenants



Receipt of DHP by Council tenants paying the full amount of the Under-occupancy cut in their benefit



- 3.6 Gross arrears for all council tenants increased by £265k in June 2013 (current arrears increased by £140k in June). This is an improvement on the position at the end of May; these figures are now in line with the increase in arrears at the same time last year. However, it is important to note that, as illustrated in para 3.4 above, at the moment many tenants are using DHPs to help them meet the costs of their housing. Clearly this position is unsustainable and there is therefore a high risk that arrears will increase in future months.
- 3.7 Since April 2013, 199 tenants have been awarded a rehousing priority to move to a smaller property. Of these:
- 178 tenants have stated this is due to the impact of welfare reforms;
 - 49 tenants have had agreement to move, despite them having rent arrears that would normally have stopped them from being rehoused;
 - 7 tenants have been re-housed already.
- 3.8 For tenants who have expressed a desire to move, where appropriate the Council will support tenants during the interim period by:
- i. Applying for a discretionary housing payment (DHP) to cover the Under-occupancy element.
 - ii. Awarding hardship payments. The Council has a small hardship fund of £50k to support tenants affected by welfare reforms and will make payments from this to help them to cover any arrears due to reforms whilst the Council works with them to remedy the situation, which may include moving house or helping people find employment.
 - iii. Being more flexible and allowing a tenant who is affected by Under-occupancy to move with existing arrears that may have been accrued prior to 1 April 2013 and the onset of the changes.
- 3.9 It is important to note that there are approximately 2,000 further households affected by Under-occupancy living in Housing Association properties. To-date the Council has not collated data regarding the impact that Under-occupancy is having on those households.

4.0 Impact of other welfare reform changes on Sheffield residents

- 4.1 There are many other changes to the benefits system which are contributing to a net decrease in household income for those claiming support. The most significant of these are detailed below.

4.2 Council Tax Benefit

From April 2013 the Government replaced Council Tax Benefit with a local scheme of Council Tax Support (CTS) run by individual local authorities. The fund available to local authorities to provide the new scheme included a significant cut, when compared to the money available to provide Council Tax Benefit. As pensioners have been protected from the changes to Council Tax Benefit, working age taxpayers have been forced to share the burden of the reduction in funds

available. The changes to Council Tax Benefit also mean that the Second Adult Rebate for working age claimants has now ended.

4.2.1 The Council has about 33,000 working age taxpayers who receive Council Tax Support. All of these customers now have to pay at least 23% of their Council Tax. This number includes about 24,000 who previously paid nothing towards their Council Tax and now have to pay 23%.

4.3 **Household Benefit Cap**

From August 2013 a cap will begin to be introduced on the total amount of benefit a single person or family can receive. This benefit change affects the working age population only. The cap is £500 a week for a family, and £350 a week for a single person. The Benefit Cap does not apply where the claimant, their partner or any children receive some specific benefits, including disability benefits.

4.3.1 The number of residents in Sheffield who will be affected by the Benefit Cap will be small, particularly when compared with those affected by other major benefit changes. However those households who will be affected will experience a substantial impact on their lives.

4.3.2 The Benefit Cap is expected to affect around 120 Council tenants with the reduction ranging between £1.24 and £412 per week. The overall number of households who will be affected by the Benefit Cap in Sheffield is estimated to be 320.

4.4 **Disability Living Allowance (DLA)**

From June 2013 all new claims from 16-64 year olds, which would previously have been for DLA, will be for a new benefit called Personal Independence Payment (PIP). From October 2013 onwards, people aged between 16 and 64 who currently receive DLA will start to be reassessed for PIP. By the end of 2018 all DLA claimants will have migrated to PIP.

4.4.1 The replacement of DLA by PIP includes more stringent and frequent medical tests. The budget nationally has been cut by £1,075m per year (a 20% budget cut) and the focus of PIP payments is to be on the most disabled, e.g. it will be harder to qualify for PIP than it would have been to qualify for DLA.

4.4.2 It is estimated that 4,700 households in Sheffield will be affected by these changes.

4.5 **Universal Credit**

This change will affect all people of working age who are currently receiving any of the following: Income Support, Income-based JSA, Income-related ESA, Housing Benefit and Tax Credits. These benefits will be replaced by one single monthly payment which will be paid in arrears, to a single person in each household.

4.5.1 Moving to Universal Credit is not designed to reduce the overall amount of benefit paid (and is therefore not represented in the *Impact on*

Households table below) but it is likely to cause difficulties for some residents who will need to make arrangements to pay their housing costs where it had previously been paid directly.

4.5.2 In addition, there will be a move towards online claiming which will have significant implications for many households who do not have access to the internet. Migration to Universal Credit is due to take place over four years between October 2013 and March 2017.

4.6 There are further changes to the welfare system, which although less-significant than those listed above, will still have an impact on many people in Sheffield. These changes are summarised in the table below.

Non-Dependant Deductions	This reduces the deductions from several income-based benefits to reflect the contribution that non-dependant household members are expected to make towards the household's housing costs. These changes affect tenants with non-dependent adults (e.g. parents, grown up children) living in the house. The first change was implemented in April 2012, and a further change was implemented in April 2013.
Housing Benefit: Local Housing Allowance (LHA)	There have been changes to the rules governing assistance with the cost of housing for low-income households in the private rented sector. The new rules apply to rent levels, 'excess' payments, property size, age limits for sole occupancy, and indexation for inflation. From April 2011 the rules changed to introduce absolute caps for LHA. From October 2011 LHA rates were set at the 30th percentile of rents in each Broad Rental Market Area rather than the median.
Incapacity Benefit	Incapacity Benefit and related benefits are being replaced by Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), with more stringent medical tests, greater conditionality and time-limiting of non-means tested entitlement for all but the most severely ill or disabled. Migration of existing claimants of Incapacity Benefit began in 2011 and migration is due to be completed by April 2014. The budget is being cut by up to £2,500m per year (30%) by 2014.
Child Benefit (CB)	Child Benefit has been frozen for three years from April 2011. There has also been an affluence test for CB which involves tapered withdrawal of CB (via income tax) from households where there is an earner over £50,000; CB stops completely where income reaches £60,000.
Tax Credits	There have been reductions in payment rates and eligibility for Child Tax Credits and Working Families Tax Credit, paid to lower and middle income families.
1% Up-rating	There has been a reduction in annual up-rating of value of most working-age benefits, which means a real-terms reduction in the amount that they are worth over time.

5.0 Net effect of welfare reform changes in Sheffield

- 5.1 The table below provides a breakdown of the financial loss to households resulting from changes to the welfare system. It is important to note that the figures show the estimated total impact when the present welfare reforms have **come into full effect**.
- 5.2 The data shown here has been produced by Sheffield Hallam University's Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research. This illustrates that when the present welfare reforms have come into full effect, there will be **£173m less** per year in the local Sheffield economy.
- 5.3 This equates to a financial loss of **£471 per year** for every working age adult in the city. However it is important to note that clearly the burden of welfare reform changes will not be shared by every working age adult in the city – as many will not be affected at all – and therefore many of those people who are affected are likely to suffer a financial loss of more than £471 per year.
- 5.4 It is important to note that of those suffering a financial loss there are a substantial number of people who are in work and claiming income related benefits, and a greater number who claim tax credits. Therefore the true picture is that the changes to benefits are not only affecting people who are out of work, but also those who are already in employment, challenging the all too common perception that the welfare reform agenda is targeting those who are idle.

Impact on Households Table

	No. of households affected	Estimated loss £m per year	Estimated average loss per household £ per year	Estimated average loss per household £ per month
Housing Benefit: Under-occupancy	11,200	7.6	679	57
Council Tax Benefit	34,200	7	205	17
Household benefit cap	320	1.5	4,688	391
Disability Living Allowance	4,700	14	2,979	248
Non-dependant deductions	3,000	3	1,000	83
Housing Benefit: Local Housing Allowance	8,500	8	941	78
Incapacity benefits	12,000	42	3,500	292
Child Benefit	63,300	22	348	29
Tax Credits	43,700	35	801	67
1 per cent uprating		32		
Total Impact		173		

- 5.5 **Note:** As this table is directly reproduced from a piece of research undertaken by Sheffield Hallam University (SHU), not all of the data tallies accurately with the local data that we have. For example, the

number of households affected by Under-occupancy in Sheffield was estimated by SHU to be 11,200 however we now know that the number of households in fact affected by this is approximately 6,500 - 7,000. This discrepancy is partly due to the fact that the picture is ever changing, as people move in and out of tenancies, but is more likely to be attributable to the fact that until benefits changes come into effect it is not always possible to know precisely how many people will be affected by the changes and therefore more accurate data is usually available after changes have been implemented.

- 5.6 Although the information above provides a useful starting point, it does not show us the *cumulative impact* of welfare reform on individual households within the city. For example we know that many households will be affected by not only the Under-occupancy rules but will also be affected by the requirement to contribute to Council Tax for the first time. In the future these households may be affected by other changes, for example Universal Credit and/or the introduction of PIP, if there are people with disabilities in the household.
- 5.7 A piece of work is currently being carried out by the Performance and Research Team to enable the Council to try to better understand the cumulative impact of welfare reform impacts on households within Sheffield.

6.0 Council support for Sheffield residents who are impacted by welfare reform: Hardship schemes

- 6.1 The Council administers or runs three principal schemes to help people who are suffering from financial hardship. These are the Council Tax Hardship Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments and the Local Assistance Scheme.

6.2 Council Tax Hardship Scheme

The Council has set up a £500K hardship fund for those who are struggling to pay their Council Tax.

- 6.2.1 As at 5 July 2013, 2,144 Council Tax Hardship Scheme awards had been made, totalling around £130,679.

6.3 Discretionary Housing Payments

The Council is responsible for administering Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP), which are used to support customers with housing costs. Many of these customers are those affected by a reduction in Housing Benefit as a result of the Under-occupancy rules.

- 6.3.1 As at 5 July 2013, 1,731 awards for DHP had been made, totalling around £384,481.

- 6.3.2 The main reasons for DHP awards are 'to help with short-term rental costs until the claimant is able to secure and move to alternative accommodation' (12% of awards) and 'to help with short term rental costs for any other reason' (81% of awards). The latter category will mainly include those customers whose housing benefit has decreased

because they have a spare room and who are unable to pay but do not have an imminent option of moving to different accommodation.

6.4 Local Assistance Scheme

Some discretionary elements of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Social Fund were abolished from April 2013, with the DWP providing funding for the Council to establish local assistance for financially disadvantaged people.

6.4.1 The Council has received funding for 2013/14 and 2014/15 as follows:

	Fund	Administration	Total
2013/14	£2,071,098	£437,638	£2,508,736
2014/15	£2,071,098	£401,143	£2,472,241

6.4.2 The discretionary elements of the Social Fund which were abolished were used by the DWP to provide two types of award - Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans.

6.4.3 In view of the challenging timeline to deliver the changes, Sheffield City Council's Local Assistance Scheme implementation has 2 phases. The first phase of the scheme, which started in April 2013, resembles the DWP scheme which it replaces. This is an interim solution which reflects the commitment across the Council and from stakeholders to continue to offer individual financial assistance to customers experiencing poverty. In the second phase, the Council will develop a longer term approach and delivery model which align further to Council strategy for Tackling Poverty and Increasing Social Justice.

6.4.4 Applicants to the Local Assistance Scheme have to meet certain eligibility criteria, including being resident in Sheffield and in receipt of particular benefits.

6.4.5 Community Care Grants exist to help vulnerable people to remain or set up home in the community, to ease exceptional pressure on families, or to prevent someone going in to care. These grants are usually in the form of an award to purchase white goods and furniture.

6.4.6 Crisis loans are awarded to customers who are experiencing extreme financial difficulty due to an emergency. The scheme offers loans to meet short term expenditure needs. These short term loans are to be repaid through the benefits, and are administered by the Sheffield Credit Union.

6.4.7 Between 1 April 2013 and 30 June 2013, the Council received:

- 1,468 applications for assistance, and 3,307 phone calls to its dedicated team
- 762 applications for loans, of which 402 (52%) were awarded (the average loan award was £81)
- 577 applications for grants, of which 422 (73%) were awarded (the average grant award was £519)

7.0 Council support for Sheffield residents who are impacted by welfare reform: Other activity

7.1 A great deal of activity is taking place across the Council to try to support Sheffield residents who are experiencing difficulties as a result of the changes to welfare benefits. This work is summarised below.

7.2 Support for Council Tenants

In response to the welfare reform changes, the Council Housing Service has undertaken the following activity:

- Carrying out 8,008 attempted visits to tenants affected by Under-occupancy or the Benefits Cap, and successfully gaining contact with 2,611 tenants.
- Helping tenants to make applications for Discretionary Housing Payments.
- Identifying a small number of homes where it is appropriate to re-designate the size of the property, due to adaptations that have been carried out.
- Participating in a trial which has supported five tenants (two of which were on the brink of eviction action) to open Sheffield Credit Union budgeting accounts.

7.2.1 The budgeting accounts referred to above - known as 'jam-jar accounts' - help customers to budget effectively and pay their creditors on time. The Council Housing Service is using this trial to assess whether it would be possible to support more tenants to open these accounts in the future.

7.2.2 Future Council Housing Service work will include:

- Working with the Access to Housing Team to progress cases where tenants have requested a move to downsize to ensure they are able to move and not build up rent arrears.
- Preparing tenants for the transition to Universal Credit.
- From July, wherever possible holding surgeries in council housing area offices where tenants can attend for a prearranged appointment or just drop in to obtain advice and support on benefits changes. This will ensure that the Council works more effectively and sees more tenants, however Housing Officers will still carry out home visits to vulnerable tenants and those who are unable to attend surgeries.

7.3 Support for Children, Young People & Families

It is anticipated that the welfare reform agenda will have an impact on many families who come into contact with children & young people's social care services. Social work teams have been kept up to speed with changes to the benefits system, have been given information about budget planning and have been given guidance on the Local Assistance Scheme so that they can refer families in need onto appropriate help and support.

7.4 Support for people at risk of homelessness

It is also anticipated that welfare reform will have an impact on homelessness in Sheffield. In response the Council is finalising a Prevention Action Plan, including improving triaging of customers and home visits to support customers as early as possible. The Council is also developing a new Homelessness Strategy to focus on activity to prevent homelessness occurring, and where homelessness does arise, to assist customers to achieve settled and sustainable housing in a timely way.

7.5 Support for older people

Most of the benefits changes which have come into effect to date will not affect people of pensionable age, and are therefore unlikely to have a significant impact on older people at the present time. However, future changes to disability benefits will affect people approaching pensionable age so this may have an impact in the future. The Council is reflecting on the possible impacts of welfare reform on this group of people and is assessing how to support these customers.

7.6 Support for people with learning disabilities and mental health problems

Residents with learning disabilities and mental health issues are likely to be affected both by wider welfare reform changes and the anticipated future reduction of specific disability benefits. The Council is starting to monitor the impact of welfare reform on this particular group and is assessing how to support these residents.

7.7 Supporting the transition to Universal Credit

Work is currently underway on the Council's response to the forthcoming implementation of Universal Credit, recognising that:

- Universal Credit will require all customers to apply for their benefits online, many of whom are likely to have limited access to the internet;
- Some residents will require intensive support when Universal Credit is implemented and this support will need to be provided through face-to-face contact.

7.8 Work with partner organisations

The Council is working closely with advice centres in Sheffield to ensure that work to support those experiencing difficulty as a result of welfare reform benefit from a joined-up approach. The Council will continue with this approach. Further work will also be required in the future to better understand how other partner organisations in the city will be impacted

by the welfare reform agenda and how the Council can best work with these partners to help mitigate the impacts for Sheffield residents.

8.0 Conclusions

8.1 As this report has demonstrated, some significant steps have been taken to date both to understand the impact that welfare reform is having on Sheffield residents and to put measures in place to help Sheffield residents to deal with these changes. However more work is clearly needed and the Council is committed to continued work to inform its understanding of the issues and to support Sheffield residents to cope with the impact of welfare reform.

9.0 Recommendation

9.1 The Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee is:

- i. is asked to note the contents of the report and the progress made on both understanding the impact of welfare reform on Sheffield's residents and supporting residents in response to the welfare reform agenda;
- ii. is asked to provide views or comments on the Council's approach on responding to the welfare reform agenda; and
- iii. is asked to consider whether the committee would wish to receive further update reports on this issue.



Report to Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee

Report of: Challenge for Change Tenant Scrutiny Group

Subject: Challenge for Change : Grass Cutting Scrutiny Report

Author of Report: Challenge for Change Tenant Scrutiny Group

Summary:

The customer scrutiny panel known as Challenge for Change (C4C) was set up in 2011 to perform an independent review of services delivered by the Council Housing Service (formerly Sheffield Homes). This report covers the group's second project. The purpose of the project was to examine the grass cutting service delivered by Sheffield Homes and the City Council's Parks and Public Realm in relation to the level of customer satisfaction and to review whether this meets their expectations.

The group identified several key challenges:

- What are the standards
- Customer expectations
- Management of the service
- Communication
- Value for money
- Involvement of tenants

The group carried out a wide ranging document review of policy, procedure and performance and satisfaction information. This was followed by a series of reality checks with staff and tenants which included forums and surveys as well as a series of interviews with key managers. The group conducted a judgement, evidence and impact analysis of their findings and makes the following recommendations to the Board

That the Scrutiny Committee considers this report and note its recommendations

Type of item:

Reviewing of existing policy	√
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	

Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	
Other	

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to: consider this report and note its recommendations

Background Papers:

Challenge for Change: Scrutiny Report: Grass Cutting

Challenge for Change: Outcomes and Recommendations

Category of Report: OPEN

Challenge for Change

Scrutiny Report Grass Cutting

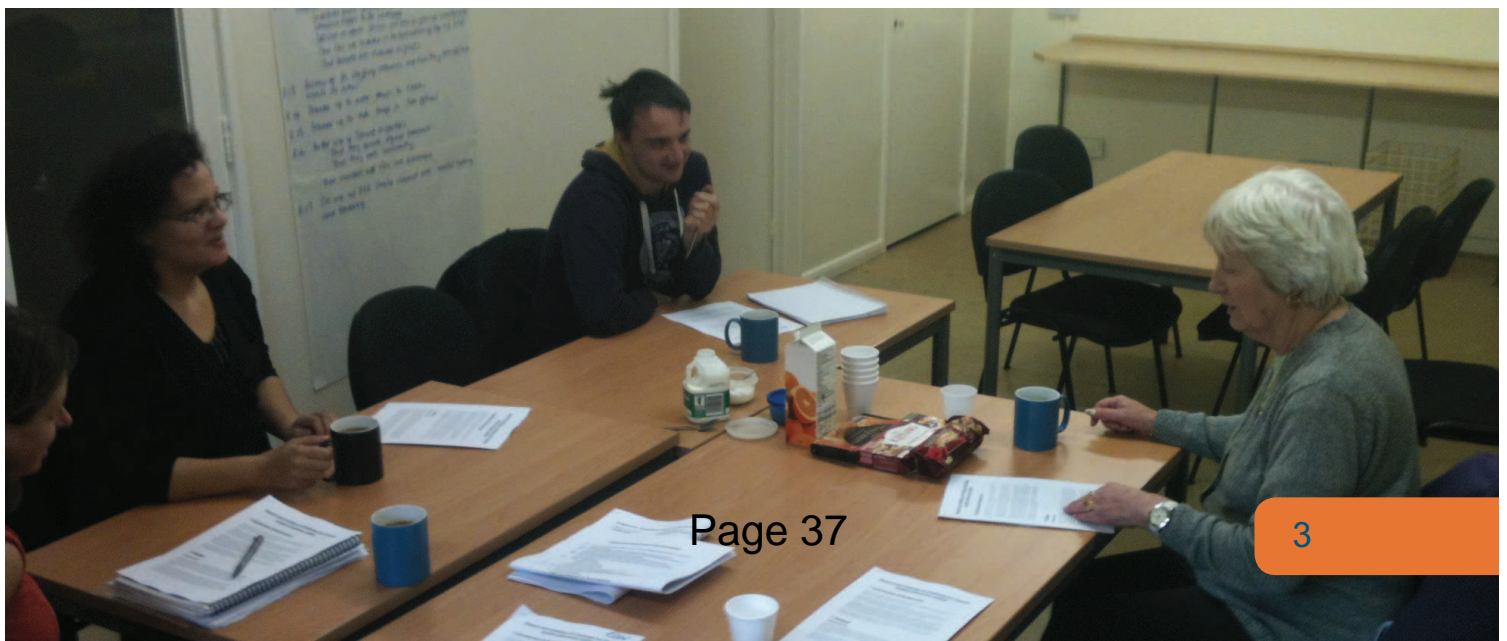


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1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Following approval from the Board of Sheffield Homes, a customer scrutiny panel was established in July 2011. 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), successfully recruited a team of scrutineers. It was decided to call the group Challenge for Change. Throughout this report, the scrutiny group will be called C4C. This is the group's second project.
- 1.2 This project was completed by four main scrutineers - Richard Bailey, Michelle Cook, Mick Daniels and Linda Moxon. Three other scrutineers have been involved with the project in the early stages - Elspeth Lusby, Ken Rickwood and Kingsley Robinson
- 1.3 The group elected to focus on grass cutting following feedback from tenants that the service was not at the required level. Many of the group have also witnessed first hand the substandard level of service that is being provided.
- 1.4 The group has also previously looked at Complaints and noticed that a lot of emphasis was being made by tenants into the substandard service of grass cutting. Overall customer satisfaction into grass cutting is extremely low, which is why the Challenge for Change team elected to scrutinise the subject to see what improvements can be made.
- 1.5 In this report, we have detailed the findings following our investigations. We have spoken to many different managers from Sheffield Homes and Parks and Public Realm. We have also spoken to Tenants and Residents on numerous estates to gather views from them. We analysed many different documents including the Service Level Agreement to ensure that the service is working well and providing good value for money for the residents. We have made several recommendations based on our findings, which are at the end of this document.
- 1.6 The overall purpose of the project was to examine the grass cutting service and ensure that Parks and Public Realm are giving a good enough service, delivering on its promises and providing Sheffield Homes with value for money.



2. Objectives

2.1 From our initial research into the grass cutting service, we identified the following objectives for the project.

- Establish what the grass cutting standards are and to understand what monitoring arrangements are in place by who and when.
- Understand why tenants feel the way that they do about the grass cutting service and evidence this. Link this to “estate pride” and health and safety issues and the fact that Sheffield is such a green city.
- Understand the “reasonableness” of customer expectations and if not being met, why is this the case.
- Understand which land is being maintained and which is not. What is the difference between areas where customer satisfaction varies.
- Understand who manages what land and how easy it is for tenants and residents to access this information.
- To understand the systems of communication, find out if there are any issues and if so what is being done about them. Also why is Parks and Public Realm named so, does this mean anything to customers.
- Are tenants and residents getting what they are paying for? Find out if it would be more cost effective to replace some grassed areas with other surfaces.
- Understand what Tenant Inspectors do and are their findings being acted upon. Are there sufficient numbers and do walkabouts have any impact.



3. Findings

3.1 Tenant Surveys

3.1.1 As part of our investigations, we devised a questionnaire which we used to gather responses from Tenants and Residents. Most of the people we have spoken to are not happy with the service, some have been unclear as to which pieces of land are covered by the contract. This can often lead to confusion, as if tenants are unclear as to which sites are maintained by who, then complaints can be made to the wrong department where the service falls short of expectations.

3.1.2 We also contacted the Tenant and Resident Associations (TARA's) and most of the replies that we have received report that the service falls far short of the expected standards. Tenants in all areas of Sheffield have reported that often the grass is not litter picked prior to grass cutting taking place, which leads to the grass being cut anyway and sending small shards of litter all over the place, This makes tenants unhappy as the grass then looks unsightly and makes areas look very unkempt.

3.2 Service Level Agreement

3.2.1 We scrutinised the Service Level Agreement (SLA) to see what the required standards are. How we interpret certain areas of this agreement has often differed to how managers we have spoken to have interpreted it, leading us to form the view that the wording of the SLA is wholly confusing.

3.2.2 The most notable part is the section around length of grass and frequency of cuts. Some departments have told us that the service focuses on height of grass not exceeding 100mm and others have told us that the service is measured on frequency of cuts, which according to the SLA is 9 cuts per annum. None of the residents/tenants we have spoken to can recall 9 cuts ever taking place and in certain areas the height of the grass has been left for the winter far exceeding 100mm.

3.3 Monitoring

3.3.1 We have also discovered that monitoring does not take place as a matter of course and the only real monitoring that takes place is by the contractor, who then reports back to Sheffield Homes that the service is of an acceptable standard and is being maintained as per the SLA. We have seen evidence of this and have discovered that the target as per the SLA is 85%, and most of the monitoring reports are at this level.

3.3.2 We have seen reports from TARAs that paint a very different picture and shows that the service is very much below standard and in the eyes of most tenants needs vast improvements. One TARA survey that we have seen shows that 67% of people that we spoke to see the service as been substandard, with only 7% of people been happy with the service.

3.3.3 We have seen some monitoring evidence, however the information is not clear and is extremely sketchy. The reports are not easy to understand and do not show which area was cut or when, just an area and a pass or a fail.

3.4 Tenant Inspectors

3.4.1 We also met with Tenant Inspectors who told us that the maps that they are issued with are usually out of date, so do not accurately reflect the full area that they have to inspect. The inspectors have criteria on which they inspect against and do report back with any issues that they have identified as part of their inspection.

3.4.2 We have discovered however that the inspector does not get any feedback to tell them once improvements have been made following an inspection. So on a repeat inspection, they would not know whether a fault they might spot again is a repeat offender or merely the same problem as when they last inspected.

3.4.3 The general feeling amongst the Tenant Inspectors was that the grass cutting service is appalling and vast improvements need to be made. When we interviewed the Tenant Inspectors, sadly not all areas were represented, so we were unable to get a holistic view of the service, but from the inspectors that were present we were able to glean that there are problems with the service and that it needs to drastically improve.

3.5 Sheffield Homes Estate Services Development Group

3.5.1 We also attended a Sheffield Homes Estate Services Development Group where we asked several questions with regard to monitoring and checks. We established that no real checks are completed other than if a supervisor or manager were to telephone the contractor to gather the information.



- 3.5.2 We also asked them about performance monitoring figures. They told us that these are not routinely provided and have not been for quite some time and was not a regular thing. Most people at this meeting felt that the relationship between Sheffield Homes and the contractor was good and were satisfied that the service is self monitored. However Sheffield Homes have to be reliant on the information being forthcoming from the contractor and that it is accurate when it arrives.
- 3.5.3 We went on to ask them about quality checks, and again we discovered that apart from self monitoring by the contractor, there is no formalised checking carried out. Feedback from TARA's is heavily relied upon to highlight areas of poor service and as previously mentioned, the role of the tenant inspector.
- 3.5.4 We then asked them about the working relationship between the contractor and Sheffield Homes, we have discovered that there is no real relationship between the two and as the contractor does not have any real estate knowledge then this has caused problems at estate level and has caused conflicts as to what is a priority and what is not.
- 3.5.5 Some at this meeting felt that the contractor was still proving its worth and needed time to really show their capabilities. We asked if taking the service back in house would be beneficial and this was met with a resounding no as it was generally felt that this could lead to a worsening of standards.

3.6 Parks and Public Realm Officers Focus Group

- 3.6.1 We also met with the officers from Parks and Public Realm who told us that their work is allocated via the "Confirm" system. All grassed areas are measured up and workers work their way through a list from April to September. The final cut of the year is in March. Alongside this, some of the work they do is to satisfy the requirements of the specification laid out in the Service Level Agreement. Work is very often reactive with teams going back to sweep up grass or anything else that has not been done for whatever reason.
- 3.6.2 They told us that when they first set out, there was some problems with unfamiliarity, as many of the teams did not know the areas they were working in. This has now being resolved and they went on to say that no matter which area they are working on, they do not feel that they have enough time to carry out their duties effectively.
- 3.6.3 They also echoed the point that litter picking is not the responsibility of Parks and Public Realm, as far as the officers knew. Sheffield Homes are informed when cuts are going to happen, it is then up to Sheffield Homes to arrange litter picking to take place. They went on to say that where large machines had been deployed and the litter pick had not happened, it would be uneconomical not to go ahead with the cut, so therefore it was often the case that litter was then spread over the area in little pieces. Areas around Takeaways are usually hotspots for excess litter and in the view of the officers, more action needs to be taken to address the problem of litter and fly tipping.

3.6.4 We then asked them about the problem of grass being left all over footpaths. They told us that a thin scattering of grass will not warrant a blowing and that the grass is only blown or swept off the footpaths where it is deemed to be a health and safety matter. Special care is taken around Disabled or Senior Citizens areas.

3.6.5 They informed us that every area is cut on average 9 times per year.

3.6.6 They went on to say that technicians do random checks, building up a record which is fed into the “Confirm” system. As far as they are aware, Sheffield Homes also do their own monitoring, and staff will go on estate walkabouts where requested.

3.6.7 They told us that it is not always possible to carry all the specialist equipment that they need to carry out their duties, so on some occasions they might have to return to an area to finish the job if they need more than one piece of equipment. They also said that in extremely wet conditions areas such as slopes can be potentially dangerous or hazardous, which makes cutting difficult.

3.6.8 They went on to say that all staff are fully trained and are not allowed out until this has taken place.

3.7 Sheffield Homes Estate Officers

3.7.1 We also met with the officers that provide the estate services, they told us that they don't always get informed about when the grass cutting is about to happen, so they can't go and litter pick. There have also been occasions when they have been informed of an intention to cut the grass, but when they have attended to litter pick, the grass was cut the previous day, which would rather negate the point of the exercise if the information is not accurate. We have also discovered that litter picking is also not done on certain days, so if grass cutters wanted to work on these days, then no litter picking would have been carried out.

3.7.2 They also tell us that they generally don't have enough staff, They do have volunteers, but due to health and safety constraints they can only be utilised for litter picking and sweeping, so they don't have a massive impact on staffing numbers. Some areas have a regular workforce, whereas in other areas the staff are moved around. East area however, has no fixed staffing levels.



3.7.3 They tell us that if they had somewhere to store the large machinery, then they could undertake grass cutting services themselves. The general consensus was that services have definitely dropped this year and the service had the potential to become even worse if the budget is cut any further in future years.

3.7.4 From this meeting we have also gleaned that the South East pilot seems to operate in a totally different way to the rest of the city with budgets being broken down into specific costs and well above the number of cuts the rest of the city has seen during the last year. They also have a detailed log of where the grass cutting has taken place, and the staff at this meeting that represented the South East were clearly delighted with the service, a view not echoed by the rest of the city where standards are vastly different.

3.8 North East Pilot Manager and Area Manager for Parks and Public Realm

3.8.1 We then interviewed the project manager for the North East Pilot and the area manager for Parks and Public Realm. We asked them about the North East Pilot - they told us that the pilot is not going to cost anymore money and that the emphasis is on getting the job done better and everyone working together to provide a better service. The existing tools are going to be used and no extra ones brought in.

3.8.2 They told us that in their view the SLA reads that the height of the grass and general appearance is the most important factor, and not the actual number of cuts.

3.8.3 We then asked them about the mapping system. They agreed with us that the mapping system is out of date and needs to be updated. They also told us that an audit is being put together to look at ways of saving money, for example litter trap shrub beds could be removed

3.9 Parks and Public Realm Manager

3.9.1 The Parks and Public Realm Manager came to meet with us. We asked him about the grass cutting service, he told us that they do random monitoring against the specification and that the monitoring is done by staff themselves, their line managers and area officers. We then asked him whether he felt that staff were being put under undue pressure and whether this was causing them to lose pride in their work, he effectively denied this and said that some pressure can be good and it was more about trying to achieve than staff losing pride in their work.

3.9.2 We put it to him that the maps are also out of date, he replied that this was inevitable as the city is changing. He went on to say that prior to the contract being signed that work was undertaken to validate the sites.

3.9.3 We then challenged him on the issue of litter picking, he replied that this is a matter for Sheffield Homes as it is not in the specification. He told us that a written schedule

is sent out so that Sheffield Homes know when the grass is going to be cut. However adverse weather can affect the schedule.

3.9.4 We then moved on to ask him whether Sheffield Homes got a refund if the work was not carried out, he did not actually answer this question clearly. He said that they always tried to get the job done, he also went on to say that monitoring is not cost effective, it is better to get the job done than to spend money on monitoring.

3.9.5 We then raised the question of some areas being invoiced the same rate for a push mower as for a ride on mower. This comes from the Streetforce days and to work out new rates would come at a cost.

3.9.6 We also raised the question of collecting up the grass and composting it, he told us that this would cost a lot of money and the money that would be collected in return would not even cover a proportion of the initial outlay. We raised the point that some other local authorities do this, he replied that to his knowledge, this was not done on a large scale and for a city as big as Sheffield to do this, the costs would be astronomical as new machines would have to be purchased.

3.10 Assistant Finance Manager

3.10.1 We have also interviewed the Assistant Finance Manager, who tells us that they do not check if the work has been undertaken, they simply process the costs as per the journal entry, there is no actual invoicing, it's all done as part of a journal.

3.10.2 He also noted that there is no mechanism in place for checking that the costs are reasonable and that there are no penalties in place for the contract not being fulfilled. He also explained why the costs of period 9 were higher, this is due to the shrub and hedge maintenance costs for the whole year are billed for during this month. He did feel that there is room for improvement within the SLA to provide a better service.

3.11 Estate Services Manager

3.11.1 We then invited the Estate Services Manager to come along, she also brought her Assistant with her. We started by asking them what monitoring was taking place, they replied that they rely on the performance information from the contractor and that they meet with them bi-monthly. A 20% sample is monitored, 85% of areas need to be within the specification of the SLA.

3.11.2 They went on to say that they don't want to move to a system where everything is monitored as this pulls staff away from their usual tasks, but they did say that a more reactive system needs to be devised to improve monitoring of the service. However they did admit that the monitoring has dropped off compared to what it used to be like and that maybe a review needs to take place.

3.11.3 We then went on to ask them regarding invoicing and pricing, They replied that they don't actually see a monthly costing breakdown, only an annual forecast at the start of the financial year as to what the costs are going to be. They also told us that they have no idea which invoice or journal represents which specific area of work as this is not monitored.

3.11.4 They also told us that under the terms of the Service Level Agreement, an annual review into whether the contractor is providing value for money is supposed to take place, but so far this year, this has not happened.

3.11.5 We went on to ask them about the North East Pilot. They echoed the comments made by the North East Pilot Manager, saying there is no additional funding for this, and the emphasis is more about doing a better job and working together with the contractor to use resources more cost effectively. They also told us the same as the Parks and Public Realm Manager that the costings that are being used are from the Streetforce days and were probably out of date, however nothing has been done to rectify this.

3.11.6 We then went on to ask them if they felt that tenant participation at the start of the year would be useful when drawing up new Service Level Agreements, they replied that they couldn't see a reason why this could not be done as this may prove useful.

3.11.7 We put it to them that perhaps the 85% satisfaction rate was not challenging enough to which they replied that it may be due a review and maybe tenant input on this matter may be useful as the current target might not be seen as acceptable to tenants.



4. Budget Review for the Project

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

- Training
- C4C member travel expenses
- Refreshments

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 During our investigations, we have consistently found that tenants and residents are far from happy with the service that is being provided, most of the challengers have seen this first hand. This view is also based on the surveys that we carried out and surveys that were sent to tenant and resident associations.
- 5.2 We have discovered that the Service Level Agreement is not clearly worded and is therefore open to multiple interpretations, this can lead to uncertainty. For example in the SLA it states that surrounding paths will be kept substantially free from grass cuttings. Parks and Public Realm interpret this as where there is a health and safety risk, customers interpret this as meaning that this will be done every time the grass is cut.
- 5.3 Monitoring is not done as a matter of course, even though the Service Level Agreement states that it will be done, we have found that it is not happening correctly, Monitoring by the contractor alone is not sufficient to ensure service standards
- 5.4 Communication between Sheffield Homes and the contractor is not sufficient and also we have discovered that the contractor is not attending meetings.
- 5.5 Maps are completely out of date, this has led to some invoicing for areas that simply do not exist anymore. Tenant and Residents Associations do not have up to date maps either.
- 5.6 Tenant Inspectors are not receiving adequate feedback when they report problems, this can lead to confusion as on further visits, they do not know whether they are looking at a repeat of the same problem, or whether no corrective action has ever been taken.
- 5.7 Pricing mechanisms are totally out of date, this has led to some areas being charged at the same rate for a push along machine as a ride on one.
- 5.8 No enforcement action is being taken where the contractor has failed to deliver or where the service is not up to standard.

6. Recommendations

R1. Find out how other Social Landlords perform and compare best practice/achieve their standards

R2. Parks and Public Realm workers to gain familiarity with the Sheffield Homes sites that they work on

R3. Grounds maintenance should be based on Housing boundaries as opposed to Community Assembly boundaries.

R4. Weed Spraying should be done more often than just once a year.

R5. Review and rewrite the SLA with customer input to ensure that it is clear and unambiguous and to make clear the distinction between a contract and an agreement.

R6. Better communication:

- Between SH teams
- Between PPR teams
- Between SH & PPR
- Between area staff & their Estate teams
- Between Area Staff & TARAS
- Ensures all delegates attend meetings.

R7. Develop and implement a new and more efficient monitoring system, ensuring it is:

- Independent
- Avoids duplication.
- Consistent application
- A clear monitoring form for Tenant Inspectors
- The use of Area Staff
- The use of TARAS

R8. Update the mapping system so all areas can be confident that sites actually exist and that charges are not being made for non-existent areas.

R9. An urgent review of pricing mechanisms for different tasks/types of work

R10. Payments are made on a per cut basis and not by the height of the grass.

R11. Enforce the SLA or invoke a penalty clause for work either not done or not done to standard. Allow SH to concentrate on its own work and recharge PPR where it does work that they should have done.

R12. That the service takes account of the various pilot schemes and make a decision to ensure:



- Indefinite pilots should be avoided and a city wide standard needs to be developed.
- Decision on which section leads grounds maintenance.
- That C4C are involved in the evaluation of the pilots and any final decision
- That Tenants are involved in the pilots

R13. Review of SH staffing resources and how they are applied across SH areas

R14. Provide up to date maps to TARAS

R15. Provide up to date maps in Area Offices

R16. Better use of Tenant Inspectors ensuring:

- That they receive regular feedback
- That they work consistently
- That their role and numbers are enhanced

R17. Sheffield Homes and not Parks and Public Realm should conduct market testing and tendering.

7. Acknowledgements

The team would like to thank Gary Westwood, Tina Gilbert and Avril Grant from Planning and Performance for their invaluable assistance with this project. Without their support, this project would not have got off the ground. They were also instrumental in arranging the manager interviews and other meetings we have been to as part of our investigations. Tom Strong from Community Engagement provided very helpful assistance with the recruitment of new challengers.

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

Estate Services Manager
 Assistant Estate Service Manager
 Housing Co-ordinator East Area
 Housing Co-ordinator Estate Services
 North East Pilot Manager
 Assistant Finance Manager
 Assistant Director
 Area Manager Parks
 Parks and Public Realm Manager
 Sheffield Homes Estate Officers
 Parks and Public Realm Managers
 Tenant Inspectors
 Tenant and Residents Associations.



Challenge for Change

Outcomes and 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?
1	Poor service in the eyes of customers, staff and most managers (SH) but PPR took a different view	Surveys Neighbourhood TARA Customer Interviews Customer satisfaction Feedback to TARAs Complaints Focus Groups	<p>Note – these impacts are both specific to issues to the left but many are cross cutting so they are grouped.</p> <p>Lack of tenant satisfaction with the service</p> <p>Environment looks neglected</p> <p>Poor image of SH land and estates</p> <p>Tenants not getting what they pay for</p> <p>More complaints than you would expect</p>	<p>R1. Find out how other RSLs perform and compare best practice / achieve their standards</p> <p>R2. PPR work to gain familiarity with all SH sites that they work on</p> <p>R3 Grounds maintenance should be based on Housing Area boundaries as opposed to Community Assembly boundaries</p> <p>R4 Weed spraying should be done twice as opposed to once a year</p>
2	Standards not adhered to and they are not high enough. There is a lack of tenant input to these standards	Surveys Neighbourhood TARA Customer Interviews Customer satisfaction Feedback to TARAs Complaints Focus Groups	<p>Knock on effects –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents lack pride in their areas and start to neglect their own gardens • Additional fly tipping • More littering etc • General deterioration open space <p>Not best use of money and resources</p>	<p>R5 Review and rewrite the SLA with customer input to ensure it is clear and unambiguous and to make clear the distinction between a contract and an agreement</p>
3	There is a lack of adequate communication	Interviews with staff and managers at both SH and PPR Lack of mutual understanding	<p>Duplication – and sometimes triplication – of resource use and unneeded effort required</p> <p>Lack of trust between tenants and their landlord</p>	<p>R6 Better communication</p> <p>Between SH teams</p> <p>Between PPR teams</p> <p>Between SH and PPR</p> <p>Between Area staff and their Estate Teams</p> <p>Between Area teams and TARAs</p> <p>Ensures all required delegates attend meetings</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?
4	The service is not monitored correctly / effectively / consistently	Lack of standard monitoring forms Lack of standard monitoring Interviews with managers	Confusion and envy with customers not in pilot areas SLA not being delivered so leads to different expectations and interpretations SH estate staff deflected from other tasks and workload with no compensation to SH	R7 Develop and implement a new monitoring system that ensures It is independent Avoids duplication Consistent application A clear monitoring form for Tenant Inspectors The use of area staff The use of TARAs
5	Incorrect /outdated information being used e.g. the mapping system	Interviews with staff and operatives using the Confirm system Tenant Inspectors	Confused Tenant Inspectors – and a lack of effectiveness with a lack of consistency across all areas A lack of clarity on whether value is actually being achieved	R8 Update the Confirm mapping system so all areas can be confident that sites actually exist and that charges are not being made for non existent ones
6	The Service Level Agreement (SLA) is not clear	This is our interpretation	More active Councillor involvement	R5 Review and rewrite the SLA with customer input to ensure it is clear and unambiguous and to make clear the distinction between a contract and an agreement
7	The service is poor Value for Money	Interview with Finance Manager Lack of audit trail Not businesslike Not enough financial rigour Staffing levels vary across areas		R9 An urgent review of pricing mechanisms for different tasks / types of work R10 Payments should be made on a “per cut “ basis and not by “grass height” R11 Enforce the SLA or invoke a penalty clause for work either not done to standard or work not done at all. Allow SH to concentrate on it’s own work and recharge PPR where it does work they should have done

	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?
8	It is unclear what the pilot schemes achieve	<p>Staff and manager interviews</p> <p>Lack of information</p> <p>Lack of tenant awareness that things are changing</p> <p>Mixed communication to TARAs</p> <p>Extra cost of SE pilot</p> <p>Continuation seems political not practical</p>		<p>R12 That the service take account of the various pilot schemes and make a prompt decision to ensure</p> <p>Indefinite pilots should be avoided and a city-wide standard needs to be developed</p> <p>Decision on which section will lead on grounds maintenance</p> <p>That C4C are involved in the evaluation of the NE pilot</p> <p>That tenants are involved in pilots</p>
9	SH Estate Teams are responsive but why do they need to do some of their work anyway ? They are accessible to tenants and TARAs, but unrepresented areas suffer	<p>Personal observations</p> <p>Staff interviews</p> <p>Focus groups</p>		<p>R11 Enforce the SLA or invoke a penalty clause for work either not done to standard or work not done at all. Allow SH to concentrate on it's own work and recharge PPR where it does work they should have done</p> <p>R13 Review of SH staffing resources and how they are applied across SH areas</p>
10	Tenants are unclear about what open space is actually managed by SH	<p>Tenant feedback</p> <p>Surveys – as above</p>		<p>R14 Provide up to date maps to TARAs</p> <p>R15 Provide up to date maps in Area offices</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?
11	Tenant Inspectors could be used more effectively / efficiently / consistently across areas	Meeting with Tenant Inspectors Personal information Surveys Meeting with Housing Coordinator at East Area. Lack of audit trail and report back mechanism to Tenant Inspectors		R16 Better use of Tenant Inspectors ensuring That they receive regular feedback That they work consistently Their numbers and role are enhanced
12	Costings / finance pricing structures are dated	Interviews Desktop analysis of financial information Managers accepting things have gone stale		R9 An urgent review of pricing mechanisms for different tasks / types of work
13	Relying on PPR to monitor their own performance seems wrong	SLA analysis / critique Manager interviews		R7 Develop and implement a new monitoring system that ensures It is independent Avoids duplication Consistent application A clear monitoring form for Tenant Inspectors The use of area staff The use of TARAs
14	Allowing PPR to tender and market test the service seems wrong	Discussion with Finance Manager SLA analysis / critique		R17 SH and not PPR should conduct any "market testing" and tendering

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Challenge for Change

Scrutiny Presentation 2013

Grass Cutting

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Introduction

Who are the
Challenge for
Change
Team?

Purpose of
the Scrutiny
Project

Methods for
gathering
evidence

Key areas for investigation

What is grass cutting?

Customer expectations

Management

Communication



Objectives

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To make recommendations to ensure grass cutting is managed in a more efficient and cost effective way

To understand why tenants feel the way they do about grass cutting

To understand what the grass cutting service is

To recommend improvements in communication

To publish our activities in newsletters, on the website and at CWF

Findings

Staff Forums

- We met with the Managers of Sheffield Homes and Sheffield City Council
- All were given the opportunity to discuss their experience of the grass cutting service and asked questions about the other information gathered by Challengers

Service Level Agreement

- We scrutinised the Service Level Agreement (SLA)

Monitoring

- We also discovered that the only real monitoring that takes place is by the contractor, who then reports back to Sheffield Homes that the service is of an acceptable standard and is being maintained as per the SLA

Tenant Inspectors

- Tenant Inspectors told us that the maps they are issued with are usually out of date

Customer Survey

- We devised a questionnaire which we used to gather responses from Tenants and Residents
- Most of the people we have spoken to are not happy with the service
- We also contacted the TARAs and most of the replies that we have received report that the service falls far short of the expected standards







Budget

Budget Allocation

Challenge for Change was allocated £12,000 for this year

How it was spent?

- Training
- Attendance at regional scrutiny conference
- C4C member travel expenses
- Refreshments

Budget Review

The group ensured all budget decisions were based on value for money

The group's financial spend has come in under budget

Conclusions

- The Service Level Agreement is not clearly worded and is therefore open to interpretations
- Monitoring is not done as a matter of course, even though the SLA states that it will be done
- Communication between Sheffield Homes and the contractor is not sufficient
- Maps are completely out of date, this has led to some invoicing for areas that simply do not exist anymore. TARAs do not have up to date maps either
- Tenant Inspectors are not receiving adequate feedback when they report problems
- Pricing mechanisms are totally out of date, this has led to some areas being charged at the same rate for a push along machine as a ride on one
- No enforcement action is being taken where the contractor has failed to deliver or where the service is not up to standard

Recommendations

- We have made 17 recommendations
- Many relate to increasing value for money of the service:
 - Payment to be made on a per cut basis and not by the height of the grass
 - An urgent review of pricing mechanisms for different tasks/types of work
- Other key recommendations are:
 - Grounds maintenance should be based on housing boundaries rather than community assembly boundaries
 - Weed spraying should be done more than once a year
 - Review and rewrite the SLA with customer input
 - Better communication
 - Develop and implement a new and more efficient monitoring system
 - Update the mapping system

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- Estate Services Manager
- Assistant Estate Service Manager
- Housing Co-ordinator East Area
- Housing Co-ordinator Estate Services
- North East Pilot Manager
- Assistant Finance Manager
- Assistant Director
- Area Manager Parks
- Parks and Public Realm Manager
- Sheffield Homes Estate Officers
- Parks and Public Realm Managers
- Tenant Inspectors
- Tenant and Residents Associations



Any Questions?



Report to Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 25th July 2013

Report of: Matthew Borland, Policy and Improvement Officer
Tel: 2735065, Email: matthew.borland@sheffield.gov.uk

Subject: Work Planning 2013/14

Summary:

This report outlines an approach to Work Planning for 2013/14 has been focused on a single question – how can the Scrutiny Committee achieve a greater impact than it did last year?

The report makes proposals on some practical next steps.

Recommendations:

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

1. Agree the approach to Scrutiny and work planning for 2013/14 as outlined in the report.
-

Background Papers: None

Category of Report: OPEN

Work Planning 2013/14

1. Style of Scrutiny Work

- 1.1. The approach to Work Planning for 2013/14 has been focused on a single question – how can the Scrutiny Committee achieve a greater impact than it did last year?
- 1.2. It is proposed that the focus shifts towards a more in depth approach on a smaller number of issues. This approach will enable the Committee to spend more time on those issues it deems are more important.
- 1.3. Looking at issues in greater depth will require Committees to look at fewer issues overall. It is proposed this is done by moving away from a large number of one-off monitoring reports.

2. Next Steps

- 2.1. It is proposed that the Committee aim to have a maximum of two main items at each of its meetings.
- 2.2. In order to have fewer items on the agenda it is proposed that some items would be circulated to Members of the Committee for information, rather than allocated time on a meeting agenda. If a Member felt an item in this category required a discussion of the whole Committee then they could make this request to the Chair.
- 2.3. That is not to suggest urgent issues should not be considered by the Committee. For clarity, this paper is not proposing any changes to how the Scrutiny Committee approaches the Call-In procedure to review a decision. The Call-In process would continue as it currently does.
- 2.4. It is proposed the Committee use a Task and Finish Group approach to work on an 'as and when' required basis. At this stage it is not proposed to set up a Task and Finish Group.

3. Future meetings

- 3.1. Future meeting dates of the Committee are:
 - 26th September 2013
 - 28th November 2013
 - 30th January 2014
 - 27th March 2014
- 3.2. Items from the 2012/13 work programme to include in the 2013/14 work programme are:
 - Homelessness Update
 - Refresh Schedule Requirement for B&B Accommodation for housing homeless
 - Implementation of Allocations Policy
 - Community Safety Partnership Annual Update

- Relationships between external contractors and housing (including tenant influence; specification; and monitoring)
 - Management of HRA Land
 - Review of HRA Business Plan
 - Progress on PRAM
 - Housing Company
 - Kier Contract
- 3.3. It is proposed the Chair, supported by the Scrutiny Policy Officer works up the detailed programme of which items should be taken at which meeting.
- 3.4. For the following items where follow up information or action has been requested by the Committee it is proposed these items would be 'for information', in other words they would not initially be allocated time on the agenda for a discussion:
- Right to Buy update
 - Fire Safety in communal areas (including mobility scooter policy)

4. Support for Scrutiny

- 4.1. The support arrangements for Scrutiny have changed. Scrutiny will be supported by two Policy and Improvement Officers in the Elections, Equalities and Involvement Team in the Policy, Performance and Communications Service. The capacity of the new support arrangements will enable each of the Council's four subject specific Scrutiny Committees to have one Task and Finish Group operating at a time.
- 4.2. Brief guidance will be available for people attending scrutiny on what the purpose is and what they can expect. This will include keeping introductions to reports or presentations brief and to the point (maximum of 10 minutes) to enable more time to be spent on the discussion.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1. The Scrutiny Committee is asked to:
- 1) Agree the approach to Scrutiny and work planning for 2013/14 as outlined in the report.

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