

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

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**Thursday 31 July 2014 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**

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

## **Substitute Members**

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

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## **PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE MEETING**

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

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

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

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

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

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## **FACILITIES**

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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.

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**SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY AND POLICY  
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE AGENDA  
31 JULY 2014**

**Order of Business**

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- 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 26 March 2014 and 4 June 2014
- 6. Public Questions and Petitions**  
To receive any questions or petitions from members of the public
- 7. The Impact of Welfare Reform on Sheffield's Residents - Update July 2014**  
Report of the Director of Policy, Performance and Communications
- 8. Council House Building**  
Report of the Executive Director, Communities and the Executive Director, Place
- 9. Work Programme 2014/15**  
Report of the Policy and Improvement Officer
- 10. Right to Buy Update July 2014**  
Briefing Note for Information
- 11. Review of the Partner Resource Allocation Meeting (PRAM)**  
Briefing Note for Information
- 12. Date of Next Meeting**  
The next meeting of the Committee will be held on Thursday 25 September 2014 at 2.00pm in the Town Hall

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## ADVICE TO MEMBERS ON DECLARING INTERESTS AT MEETINGS

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

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

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

You **must**:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You have a personal interest where –

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

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

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

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

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

Further advice can be obtained from Gillian Duckworth, Interim Director of Legal and Governance on 0114 2734018 or email [gillian.duckworth@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:gillian.duckworth@sheffield.gov.uk).

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

**Meeting held 26 March 2014**

**PRESENT:** Councillors Chris Weldon (Chair), Penny Baker (Deputy Chair), David Barker, Simon Clement-Jones, Sheila Constance, Richard Crowther, Denise Fox, Qurban Hussain, Roy Munn, Jillian Creasy (Substitute Member).

Tenants' Representatives

Gillian Ashberry, Robin Clarke and Tracey Kerrigan

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**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sioned-Mair Richards, Rob Murphy and Philip Wood. Councillor Jillian Creasy attended as a substitute for Councillor Rob Murphy.

**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 interests.

**4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2014, were approved as a correct record.

**5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS**

5.1 There were no petitions received or public questions submitted.

**6. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ALLOCATIONS POLICY**

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Assistant Director, Council Housing Service, which provided an update on the implementation of the new Allocations Policy. The report was presented by Jasper South, Assistant Director, Council Housing Service, who made particular reference to the seven key issues involved and progress made in addressing these.

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

- A full customer satisfaction survey was to be completed in the next four

weeks, but anecdotal evidence suggested that the implementation of the new policy had been well received. It was early days to judge the effect on empty properties, as it was felt that the new policy was still in the settling down process. There had been an improvement in turnaround times but a drop in demand for three-bedroomed properties had been noticed which, it was felt, was due to the implementation of the Under-Occupancy Welfare Reform provisions (Bedroom Tax).

- It appeared that no day to day problems were being caused by the IT (Information Technology) which was being used to support the new policy.
- It was accepted that the risks associated with implementation needed to be managed carefully and measures were being put in place to monitor these on a monthly basis.
- All sheltered accommodation was allocated for those aged over 60 and no changes were planned in this respect.
- The policy allowed for medical need to be assessed and attempts were made to ensure that appropriate offers of accommodation were made to those with particular requirements. It should be borne in mind though, that the Council had to work with the housing stock available, so it might not be possible to locate the elderly and disabled near to their family or support networks. Having said that, efforts were always made to find the best match possible in terms of accommodation and area. It should also be noted that there was a budget for adaptations where appropriate.

6.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Jasper South for his contribution to the meeting;
- (b) notes the contents of the report and the responses to questions;
- (c) recognises that the Implementation of the Allocations Policy is at an early stage; and
- (d) requests that:-
  - (i) an update report on the Implementation of the Allocations Policy be presented to the Committee in 6 months' time, to include examples of how the associated risks had been managed; and
  - (ii) local tenant representatives, who had been involved in the consultation process, be invited to the Committee meeting at which the above update report was to be presented.

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

7.1 The Committee received a report of the Interim Director of Council Housing which

provided Members with details of the new contract for Repairs and Maintenance Services to tenants' homes, which had been agreed between the Council and Kier Services and which would start on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014, and run for 3 years (with the option to extend by up to 2 more years). The report was presented by Janet Sharpe, Interim Director of Council Housing, who referred to the procurement process, the consultation involved and the aims of the contract.

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

- It was important to ensure value for money but not compromise on quality. A target of 5% efficiency savings had been set but this would not be achieved at the expense of the quality of the service.
- There would only be marginal savings with the 5 years plus 2 years option, so 3 years plus 2 years had been agreed as the duration of the contract.
- There were 6/700 Council officers working within the contract and the day to day workers would transfer to Kier under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE). All the submitting contractors were large national organisations who had previously worked in Sheffield, but Kier had management in place which would create stability for the workforce.
- Issues such as multiple visits for repairs, the empowering of operatives and dealing with more difficult repairs were intended to be addressed in the contract. This would be achieved by creating a multi-tasking workforce with the appropriate skills and tools, improved analysis, and the monitoring of salary and bonus arrangements using key performance indicators. It was intended to move to a salary system only over the next 3 years to support a cultural change from a system where the bonus scheme reflected the number of visits to a property. The aim was to have a more modernised workforce to the benefit of customers.
- The intention was to ensure that planned work was done whilst achieving the best value for money. The number of visits to complete a repair was proving to be a barrier, so the approval process was being looked at to see how far operatives could make their own decisions. Technology was being used to achieve this, but it was appreciated that this change would take time, as systems which had been in place for ten years would have to be changed. Operatives would need to be confident as to their decisions and their managers would need to know that budgets were not being exceeded.
- The workforce should be trained to identify situations where asbestos was an issue, so that the Council's database of such locations could be updated. Under the new contract, Kier would procure responsive skills to deal with asbestos in a more flexible manner.
- In relation to adaptations, it was felt that a more holistic approach was

required with regard to both public and private works.

7.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Janet Sharpe for her contribution to the meeting; and
- (b) notes the contents of the report and the responses to questions.

## **8. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 2014/15**

8.1 The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Communities, which provided a summary of the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan and the principles that underpinned it. The report was presented by Liam Duggan, HRA Business Plan Team Manager.

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

- Tenants had been involved in the process by means of a session at the Tenant Conference which had been held in October 2013. This provided direction as to the chosen path to be taken and how resources were to be focused.
- Right to Buy sales were presently at around 150 per annum, with approximately 100 new units per annum being built in the next six years. It was likely that more would be lost under Right to Buy and consideration needed to be given to this issue. It should be noted that the Council could only retain a small part of the proceeds of Right to Buy sales and officers were well aware of the need to reach a breakeven point.
- The reduction in the bulky waste collection service was funding increased action on flytipping in the form of increased education and enforcement activity. This had been trialled successfully in the East of the City and would next start to be rolled out to other parts of the City.
- The Decent Homes programme would finish within the next two weeks. The next programme would begin in April 2015. This would be an elemental replacement programme which would focus on properties omitted from the Decent Homes programme. There were no compensation arrangements in place for tenants who had undertaken their own improvements.
- In relation to the next investment programme, feedback from the service design workshops had revealed that tackling partial omissions was a lower tenant priority than properties which had had no Decent Homes work. There were actually 1,700 properties with no work having been done and these would now be prioritised, together with a parallel commitment that anyone moving into a home which was not up the Sheffield standard, would have any necessary works undertaken within 12 months. Partial omissions would then be next in line.

- The consultation on HRA usually started in September, with a session at the Tenant Conference in October, followed by a review in November and a January briefing on proposals, prior to these being presented to Cabinet.

8.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Liam Duggan for his contribution to the meeting;
- (b) notes the contents of the report and the responses to questions; and
- (c) requests that an update report be presented to the Committee following the Tenant Conference in October and that tenant representatives be invited to that Committee meeting.

## **9. WELFARE REFORM UPDATE**

9.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the contents of the March 2014 Welfare Reform Update report.

## **10. RIGHT TO BUY**

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

## **11. SOUTH YORKSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL**

11.1 The Policy and Improvement Officer gave a brief update on the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel meeting, which was to be held on Monday, 31 March 2014. Councillors Sheila Constance and Sioned-Mair Richards would represent the Committee at the meeting. The Panel had asked which community safety topics the Committee would be looking at in 2014/15. The Committee had already requested that the Safer Communities Partnership and the Partnership Resource Allocation Meeting (PRAM) be included in its 2014/15 Work Programme, and a steer was sought as to whether there were other topics to make the Panel aware of.

11.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee requests that Anti-Social Behaviour be included in its 2014/15 Work Programme.

## **12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

12.1 The next meeting of the Committee will be held on a date to be arranged.

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**SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL**

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

**Meeting held 4 June 2014**

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

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**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies for absence were received.

**2. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND DEPUTY CHAIR**

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

**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 Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 31 July 2014

**Report of:** Director of Policy, Performance and Communications

**Subject:** The Impact of Welfare Reform on Sheffield's Residents –  
Update July 2014

**Author of Report:** Nicola Rees, Policy and Improvement Officer  
0114 27 34529  
[nicola.rees@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:nicola.rees@sheffield.gov.uk)

### Summary:

Since July 2013 the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee has been receiving regular reports regarding the impact of welfare reform and how the Council and others are responding. This report provides the update for July 2014.

### 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	X

**The Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee is asked to:**

- i. note the contents of the report and the progress made on understanding the impact of welfare reform on Sheffield's residents;
  - ii. consider the response from officers regarding the aspects of good practice operating in Bristol and Manchester and the request from the Committee in January 2014 that consideration be given to adopting these measures in Sheffield;
  - iii. provide views or comments on the Council's approach on responding to the welfare reform agenda; and
  - iv. give consideration to whether the Committee wishes to continue to receive further update reports on this issue.
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**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](#)

[Sheffield Citizens Advice, Experience of Job Seeker's Allowance sanctions \(October 2013-March 2014\)](#)

[Independent review of the operation of Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions validated by the Jobseekers Act 2013](#)

**Category of Report:** OPEN

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 At the present time the UK is seeing the biggest change to the benefits system in 60 years. Several of the most significant changes were introduced on 1 April 2013.
- 1.2 Since July 2013 the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee has been receiving regular reports regarding the impact of welfare reform and how the Council and others are responding. This report provides the update for July 2014.
- 1.3 As a reminder, and for members who are new to the Committee, the last full update report on welfare reform which was considered by the Committee in January can be found on the [Council's website](#)<sup>1</sup>. The report provides a summary of the key changes to the benefits system and their timescales for implementation.
- 1.4 This report covers the following areas:

- Section 2 **Latest information**  
Under-Occupancy ('Bedroom Tax')  
Council Tax Support  
Household Benefit Cap  
Universal Credit  
Personal Independent Payment
- Section 3 **Understanding how people in Sheffield are being affected by welfare reform**  
The experience of the advice sector  
The impact of Job Seeker's Allowance sanctions in Sheffield  
Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned research on benefit sanctions  
Increases in food bank usage  
The cumulative impact of welfare reform in Sheffield
- Section 4 **Support for Sheffield residents who are affected by welfare reform: Update on hardship schemes**  
Council Tax Hardship Scheme  
Discretionary Housing Payments  
Local Assistance Scheme  
Council Housing Service Hardship Fund
- Section 5 **Learning from other local authorities' approaches to welfare reform**  
Bristol City Council  
Manchester City Council
- Section 6 **Conclusions**
- Section 7 **Recommendations**

## **2 Latest Information**

### **2.1.1 Under-occupancy ('Bedroom Tax')**

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 deemed to have one bedroom too many have lost 14% or more of their HB. Tenants deemed to have two or more bedrooms too many have lost 25% or more of their HB.

2.1.2 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.

2.1.3 At the end of June 2014 there were 3,958 council tenants affected by Under-occupancy.

Of those:

- approximately 85% were assessed as having 1 bedroom too many, losing an average of £10.82 pw; and
- approximately 15% were assessed as having 2 or more bedrooms too many, losing an average of £20.99 pw.

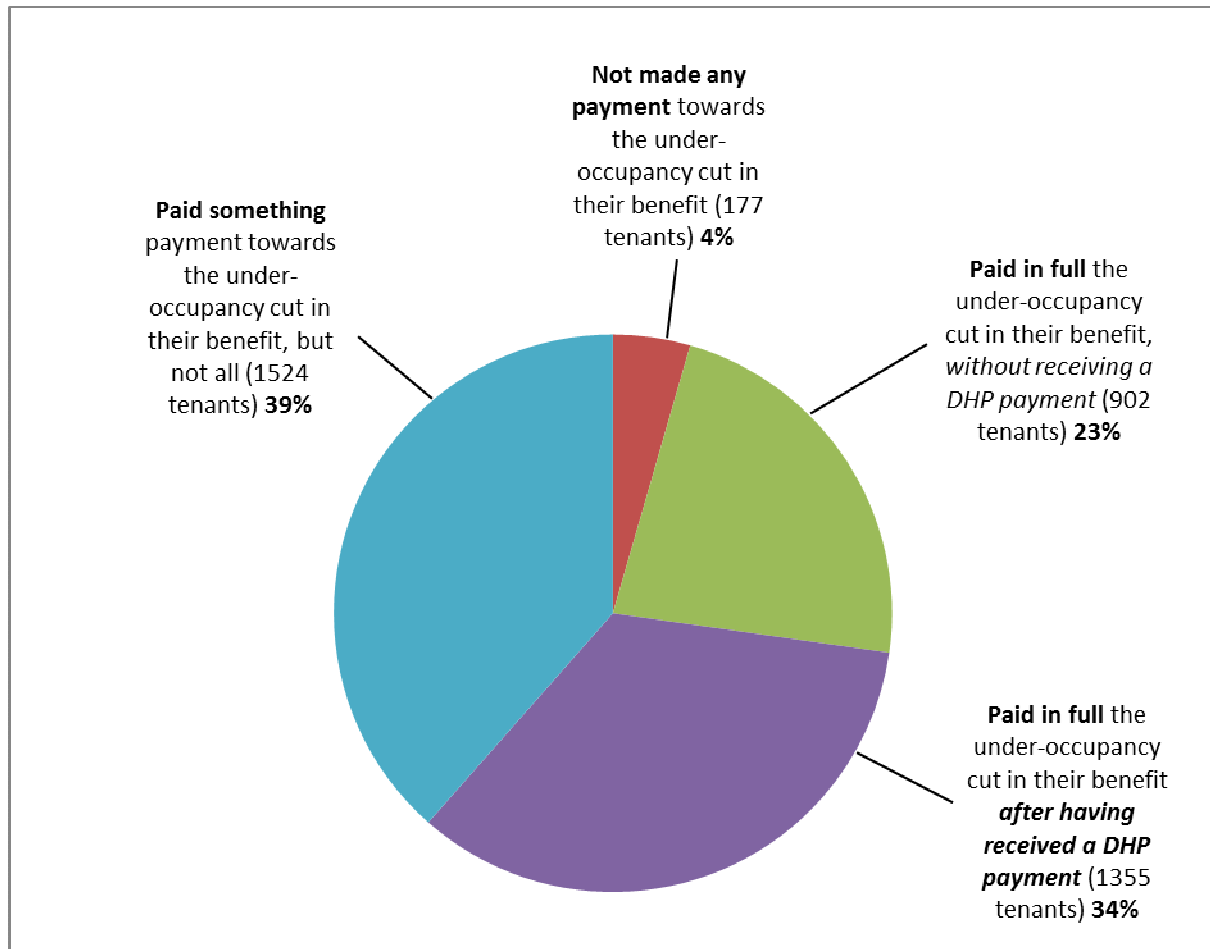
2.1.4 For the 3,958 tenants affected by Under-occupancy, at the end of June:

- 177 (4%) had not made any payment towards the Under-occupancy cut in their benefit;
- 2,257 (57%) had paid in full; and
- 1,524 (39%) had paid something but not all.

2.1.5 Of the 2,257 tenants who had paid the full amount of the Under-occupancy cut in their benefit, 1,355 had received a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP).

2.1.6 Therefore, of the 3,958 tenants affected by Under-occupancy, only 902 (23%) had paid in full towards the Under-occupancy cut in their benefit without receiving a Discretionary Housing Payment.

## Payment towards under-occupancy cut in benefit



### 2.2.1 **Rehousing**

Since April 2013, 459 council tenants have been awarded a rehousing priority to move to a smaller property. If tenants are not actively bidding the priority can be cancelled after 6 weeks but can be reinstated if the tenant then starts bidding. Of the tenants awarded a priority:

- 363 tenants have stated this is due to the impact of welfare reforms;
- 132 tenants have had agreement to move, despite them having rent arrears that would normally have stopped them from being rehoused;
- 225 tenants have been re-housed already into smaller properties since April 2013

2.2.2 Since April 2014, 35 council housing tenants have downsized already. Of these 31 have moved to another council property, and 4 have moved to other accommodation.

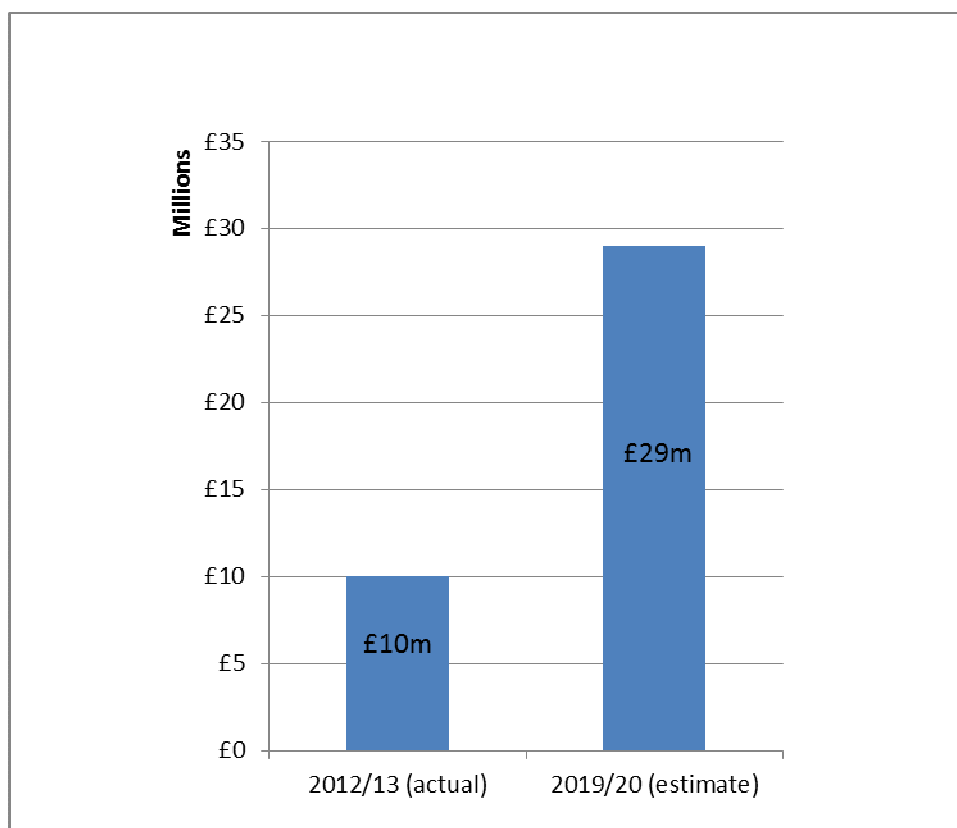
### 2.3.1 **Impact on rent arrears**

The potential impact on rent arrears caused by all the welfare reform changes is currently estimated by the Council Housing Service (CHS) to be an increase from £10 million at the end of 2012/13 to £29 million by 2019/20.

2.3.2 The impact on rent arrears from Under-occupation was far greater than initially estimated in 2013/14. However, this increase has been offset by higher than estimated funds for Discretionary Housing Payment.

2.3.3 Analysis will continue to be carried out to update the estimate on a regular basis as more information is released by the Department for Work and Pensions and as other information becomes available.

### **Impact of welfare reform on rent arrears**



2.3.4 Rent arrears of Sheffield Council tenants at the end of 2013/14 compare favorably with local benchmarking partners, ranking first amongst Northern benchmarking partners at the end of 2013/14. In addition to supporting tenants affected by Welfare Reforms, the Council Housing Service has continued to support other tenants who aren't affected, ensuring performance on the collection of current arrears for all groups of tenants exceeds targets.

2.3.5 The Council Housing Service is finding that tenants' ability to pay their rent is being affected not only by the changes to benefits but also by the current economic climate. In particular, the following issues are contributing to an increasing workload for staff dealing with rent arrears cases:

- the volume of tenants who are in work and are on zero hours contracts;
- sanctions being applied to tenants on benefits;
- the need to provide greater advice to tenants who are currently claiming housing benefits;
- the need to provide tenants with greater support on all aspects of financial capability and education, including managing money, prioritising essential outgoings, advice on low cost loans/avoiding payday lenders & illegal money lenders and issuing debt advice;
- additional financial pressure on council tenants in receipt of benefits, who now pay council tax where previously there was no charge.

#### 2.4.1 ***Tenants in other social housing***

There are approximately a further 2,000 tenants in Sheffield affected by Under-occupancy who are living in other social housing.

2.4.2 The Housing Associations (HAs) in the city have done a lot of work in terms of profiling their households to see who will need extra support. Support has included stepping up debts and benefits advice work, supporting tenants to make DHP applications, as well as various policy and practical measures put in place to facilitate transfers and moving.

2.4.3 Although HAs were initially very concerned about rent loss and rent arrears action leading to evictions, there have in fact been very few evictions that have been identified as caused by the shortfall in Housing Benefit due to Under-occupancy exclusively, although there have been some evictions of tenants with arrears caused by Under-occupancy, combined with other factors.

2.4.4 HAs still have tenants who are affected by Under-occupancy and for some the number of tenants affected is not diminishing, because as some tenants are rehoused others move to a position of needing to be rehoused. As has been experienced by the Council Housing Service, HAs are finding that many households affected by Under-occupancy have chosen to try and stay put, rather than downsize.

2.4.5 Virtually all HAs say they do not have the right sized stock, or the right sized stock in areas that people want to move to, to allow affected households to downsize. Several HAs have reported difficulty in letting 2-bedroomed and/or 3-bedroomed properties in some areas and they are attributing this directly to Under-occupancy rules.

2.4.6 The numbers of tenants not paying towards their shortfall appears to be diminishing. The impact on arrears has not apparently been as significant as some HAs were expecting and the overall position on arrears is mixed with no clear trend.

### 2.5.1 **Council Tax Support**

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.

2.5.2 The Council has about 33,000 working age taxpayers who receive CTS. From April 2013 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%. The 23% contribution equates to £4.29 per week for a Band A property (reduced to £3.28 per week for customers receiving a 'Single Person Discount').

2.5.3 The Council took the decision to maintain an unchanged CTS scheme in 2014/15.

2.5.4 Under the rules set down by Central Government, all councils must have undertaken a review of the first year of their CTS scheme by 31 January 2014. Practically, this meant that the Council had to undertake the year 1 review in the autumn of 2013, at which time the medium to long-term impacts of the introduction of CTS were not known. Now that the Council has a full year's worth of data regarding the introduction of CTS, a further review of the scheme will shortly commence. This review will analyse the impact of the scheme and will inform the decision making process which will determine the Council's CTS scheme in 2015/16.

### 2.6.1 **Council Tax arrears**

During 2013/14 the Council issued 19,836 summonses to taxpayers in receipt of Council Tax Support, with the total value of the summonsed debt amounting to £5.28m. The Council remains committed to doing everything in its power to recover this debt, and any other debts which are owed. In doing so the Council will continue to adopt a firm but fair approach to recovery, taking robust action against those who simply refuse to pay, whilst taking a more sympathetic approach to those who are genuinely struggling to pay. In practice this means that realistic repayment arrangements will be made with those who are struggling to pay and this may mean that the debt is not always cleared at the end of the financial year.

2.6.2 However, in pursuing Council Tax arrears, the Council must follow the collection and recovery rules as set by Central Government, and the Council is unable to introduce alternative processes for collection or recovery outside of those established in law.

2.6.3 Out of the 19,836 summonses issued, 18,756 Liability Orders were granted. A Liability Order legally establishes that the debt is owed; once a Liability Order is obtained, the Council can then take further recovery action if non-payment persists. The actions the Council can take include:



- Deducting money from benefits;
- Deducting money from earnings;
- Instructing an External Collection Agency (bailiff) to collect the debt;
- Placing a Charging Order on property owned by the taxpayer;
- Issuing bankruptcy proceedings; and
- Committal to prison.

2.6.4 The Council pursues all of these actions, to a greater or lesser extent, in order to recover sums owed. The action taken will depend on the individual circumstances of the debtor and actions such as committal to prison, issuing bankruptcy proceedings and obtaining charging orders are only taken where the Council feels that there is no alternative.

2.6.5 A full analysis of the impact of CTS on Council Tax collection and recovery will be undertaken for the forthcoming CTS review and included in the report to full Council.

#### 2.7.1 **Household Benefit Cap**

From August 2013 a cap began 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.

2.7.2 During the summer of 2013, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) originally identified 327 households in the City who they considered would be in the first group of households to be subject to the Benefit Cap. However after cross-referencing this data with data held by the Council's Benefits Service, when the Benefit Cap was first introduced in the City, this number reduced to 168.

2.7.3 During the period September 2013 to June 2014, a total of 275 households in the City have been, at one time or another, subject to the Benefit Cap. The number of children in these households amounted to 1378.

2.7.4 Since August 2013 the Benefit Cap has initially been applied to a customer's Housing Benefit (HB). Once this has taken place, if the income of the household is still above the level of the cap (£500 per week for a family, £350 per week for a single person) the customer will continue to receive the "excess" income until they migrate to Universal Credit, at which point the income will reduce to the level of the cap.

2.7.5 The average cut in Housing Benefit for all households affected has been £40.43 per week, with the highest reduction being £217.63 per week and the lowest £0.55 per week. The total annual amount of HB lost to these households is over £587,000.

2.7.6 Currently there are 176 households still subject to the Benefit Cap and within these households there are 827 children.

### 2.8.1 **Universal Credit**

Universal Credit (UC) is a new benefit which 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
- Child Tax Credit
- Housing Benefit

2.8.2 These benefits will be replaced by one single monthly payment which will be paid in arrears, to a single person in each household.

2.8.3 Migration to Universal Credit (UC) was originally due to take place over four years between October 2013 and March 2017. However DWP have stated that they now expect the vast majority of claimants on existing benefits to move onto Universal Credit during 2016 and 2017.

2.8.4 Moving to UC is designed to simplify the working age benefits system, and is not intended to reduce the overall amount of benefit paid (although cuts either have been or will be applied to many of the benefits that will make up UC).

2.8.5 However, UC is likely to cause difficulties for some residents, who will need to make arrangements to pay their own housing costs, where previously these payments had been paid directly to their landlord. There will also be a move towards online claiming of the benefit which will have significant implications for many households who do not currently have access to the internet.

2.8.6 The Council has particular concerns about the ability of vulnerable people, for example those with learning disabilities and mental health issues, to transition successfully to UC.

2.8.7 The Council has established a Project Group to enable the Council and its customers to prepare for the introduction of UC. The Project Group brings together representatives from services across the Council, with involvement from representatives in the Department for Work and Pensions and the advice sector.

2.8.8 The initial focus of the UC Project Group has been a joint geographical mapping exercise involving the Council, DWP and the VCF sector, to assess what support services and internet access are available throughout the city, and what gaps there are in provision. The longer-term aims of the group are to ensure that by the time UC is introduced in South Yorkshire, the Council and its partners have a coherent approach to supporting people in Sheffield, particularly the most vulnerable residents, to transition to UC.

2.8.9 In terms of supporting residents with digital inclusion, the Council Housing Service has already identified and contacted 1,205 tenants to promote and offer free internet training, in partnership with Heeley

Development Trust. We are also aware that many Housing Associations are engaging their tenants in digital inclusion measures, in preparation for the introduction of Universal Credit.

### **2.9.1 Personal Independence Payment**

A new benefit, Personal Independence Payment (PIP), was introduced in June 2013. All new claims from 16-64 year olds, which would previously have been for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) will now be for PIP.

2.9.2 Replacement of DLA by PIP includes more stringent and more frequent medical tests. The budget has been cut nationally by just over £1bn per year (a 20% budget cut) and the focus of PIP is to be on people with the most severe disabilities. It will therefore be harder to qualify for PIP than it would have been to qualify for DLA.

2.9.3 In South Yorkshire, migration of existing DLA claimants to PIP will not commence until October 2015 at the earliest. It is the Government's intention that by October 2017 all existing DLA claimants will have been reassessed for PIP.

2.9.4 It is estimated that 4,700 households in Sheffield will be affected by these changes and it is estimated that the financial loss to Sheffield resulting from these changes will be £14m per year.

2.9.5 Work is continuing within the Council to prepare for the migration of existing DLA claimants to PIP, including trying to understand the potential impacts on the Council's own budgets.

## **3 Understanding how people in Sheffield are being affected by welfare reform**

### **3.1.1 The experience of the advice sector**

The advice sector continues to be significantly affected by the welfare reform programme. Demand for services remains intense; in the quarter January to March 2014, Sheffield Citizens Advice (SCA) dealt with 16,346 issues (an increase of 21% compared to the preceding quarter) for 7082 unique clients (an increase of 24% compared to the preceding quarter).

3.1.2 43% of the issues SCA are dealing with are benefit related. 34% of issues are debt related; a growing proportion of the work. Groups who appear to be badly affected by welfare reform processes are those whose first language isn't English, refugees, people with physical and learning disabilities and those with health problems, including mental health problems.

3.1.3 Benefits sanctions and severe delays in the processing of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) applications are emerging as key issues, alongside problems with the implementation and impact of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

3.1.4 Advice sector referrals to food banks for people who are destitute are now routine. A sample survey of 1693 SCA service users in March 2014

found that 47% had struggled to afford food in the last 6 months. A similar proportion of people were struggling with fuel and rent or mortgage payments.

### 3.2.1 **SCA report on the impact of Job Seeker's Allowance sanctions**

A report has been produced by Sheffield Citizens Advice (SCA) examining evidence from 134 SCA service users who had been sanctioned from Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA). The report, [Experience of Job Seeker's Allowance Sanctions \(October 2013-March 2014\)](#), looks at the effects that sanctions are having on SCA clients and proposes a series of recommendations to mitigate against some of the unintended knock-on effects of benefit sanctions and to ensure that JSA sanctions are helping people to get back into work.

3.2.2 Conditionality and the use of sanctions - where a benefit is stopped or reduced - is not new to the UK benefits systems. However, over recent years as part of the welfare reform agenda, the number of people being sanctioned has increased.

3.2.3 Although sanctions can be applied not only to JSA claimants, but also to certain Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants, the report focuses mainly on the experience of JSA claimants. A sanction usually means that a claimant will have their benefit stopped for a fixed period of either 4 weeks, 13 weeks, 26 weeks, or 3 years, depending on what the sanction is for.

3.2.4 The report found that for most of SCA's clients, even a brief sanction could have considerable knock-on effects. Claims for housing support and Council Tax Support, already tight budgets for essential outgoings and existing debt repayments could all be disrupted and require considerable time and effort to rectify, which in itself could further disrupt job-seeking activities.

3.2.5 Many clients reported being unable to take care of their basic needs because they were unable to buy food during the sanction period. Many required repeated referrals to food banks. Although hardship funds are available (generally paid at 60% of normal JSA personal allowance rates) for some there is no access for the first two weeks of a sanction period and it was found that many clients were unaware that the hardship funds were available.

3.2.6 The report claims that there is often a disproportionate response by Jobcentre advisers to claimants' difficulties in evidencing or carrying out their job search activities. It argues that vulnerable job-seekers, such as young people, people who speak English as a second language and lone parents, are often the recipients of benefit sanctions. It is claimed that for these groups, rather than assisting them to find work, the combined effect of the sanction and the knock-on effects appears to makes it harder for them to find sustainable employment.

3.2.7 The report asserts that there are many underlying social factors that make claimants more vulnerable to receiving benefits sanctions. Many claimants who had been sanctioned were trying to cope with the issues

arising from dealing with poverty and/or adjusting to life in the UK when they received JSA benefit sanctions. Difficulties that claimants were experiencing included homelessness, problems with debt, parental responsibilities and problems speaking English.

3.2.8 Some claimants seen by SCA have reported that they had not been informed of the decision to sanction before their benefit was stopped; a common experience was that claimants realised that no money had been paid into their bank account, and then later received a letter stating that their benefits had been stopped. Many claimants found that decisions letters were unclear or confusing. The report states that often claimants who felt that they had received a sanction unfairly were reluctant to appeal or ask for a review, due to the length of time this would take and due to the fact that even if the appeal was successful, this would only result in corrective action being taken long after the client had been forced to cope without any benefit payment.

3.2.9 The report does not seek to argue against the principle of sanctions in the benefit system. However, it claims that vulnerable claimants seem to be disproportionately targeted by sanctions, resulting in some of the most vulnerable people facing further difficulties in dealing with a number of social issues, often brought about by their dependence on benefits. The report raises concerns about the impact this approach has on the likelihood of assisting people to move from benefits into sustainable employment.

3.2.10 The report proposes a series of recommendations; full details can be accessed [here](#)<sup>ii</sup>.

### 3.3.1 **Department for Work and Pensions commissioned research on benefit sanctions**

A review commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions, [\*'Independent review of the operation of Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions validated by the Jobseekers Act 2013'\*](#)<sup>iii</sup>, was published on 22 July 2014. The independent review considers benefit sanctions for claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) who have been sanctioned after being referred to a mandatory back to work scheme. The review was tasked with assessing and making recommendations around how the process of benefit sanctions functions in these circumstances, and how well claimants understand the system.

3.3.2 The report found the way in which the DWP communicated with claimants was legalistic, unclear and confusing. The report states that claimants often did not know why benefits were stopped and were frequently not informed by the DWP about hardship payments to which they were entitled. The report claims that "actual and sample letters that the review team saw were hard to understand (even for those working in the area), unclear as to why someone was being sanctioned and confusingly laid out." Additionally the review found that many people "expressed concerns that the first that claimants knew of adverse decisions was when they tried to get their benefit payment out of a cash point but could not".

- 3.3.3 The report, which makes 17 recommendations for reform, also revealed serious flaws in how sanctions were imposed. The report highlighted concerns about vulnerable claimants. The report states "Many advisers also highlighted the difficulties of communicating with particular groups of claimants. In particular, many advisers identified a 'vulnerable' group who tended to be sanctioned more than the others because they struggled to navigate the system. This concern for the vulnerable claimants was consistent throughout the visits. For these groups, particular difficulties were highlighted around the length of time it could take to ensure some claimants fully understood what was required of them and in conveying that a 'sanction' could entail the loss of benefit for a prolonged period of time."
- 3.3.4 The Government has released a [statement](#)<sup>iv</sup> saying that they welcome and accept all of the recommendations made within the report.
- 3.4.1 **Increases in food bank usage**  
Recent [reports in the local media](#)<sup>v</sup> (July 2014) have highlighted an increase in reliance on food banks in Sheffield. 'Share' food bank, which serves Parson Cross, reported that demand had doubled in the previous six months. The food bank had given out food parcels to 651 people from January to June 2014, compared with 694 food parcels in the whole of 2013.
- 3.4.2 Share food bank reported that three quarters of people needing food parcels this year did so because of delays to or sanctions on benefit payments.
- 3.4.3 Sheffield Citizens Advice has also reported an increase in service users experiencing difficulty in paying for food. See paragraph 3.1.4, above.
- 3.5.1 **The cumulative impact of welfare reform in Sheffield**  
Research produced by Sheffield Hallam University's Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research illustrates that when the present welfare reforms have come into full effect, [there will be £173m less](#)<sup>vi</sup> per year in the local Sheffield economy.
- 3.5.2 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.
- 3.5.3 It is clear that the welfare reforms that are currently underway are having a major impact on individuals, communities and on Sheffield as a whole. At the present time, a number of the reforms have been fully implemented, for example around Housing Benefit, but others are still at a comparatively early stage, for example the transition from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment. Therefore there is still a long way to go before the full impact is felt.

- 3.5.4 The Council is keen to understand more about the cumulative impact of welfare reform on households in Sheffield and has commissioned CRESR to undertake a research project in Sheffield.
- 3.5.5 CRESR has a track-record as the UK's leading centre of expertise on the local impact of the reforms. This includes the 2013 report, *Hitting the Poorest Places Hardest*, which charted the impact at local authority level across Britain (referred to in paragraph 3.5.1, above), as well as local research in Hampshire, Scotland and Northern Ireland on the impact of welfare reform.
- 3.5.6 The Sheffield research project will comprise two elements. The first element will generate local area statistics for the city. The existing statistics on the impact of welfare reform, published by the Sheffield Hallam team in 2013, cover the city as a whole. These indicate that there will be an estimated loss of £470 per adult of working age, once the reforms have reached full fruition. This element of the study will take these estimates for the city down to the level of electoral wards. Given the size of wards in Sheffield, it should be possible to generate tolerably robust estimates not only for the overall impact of the reforms but also for each of the 10 individual elements of the reform package (including Under-occupancy rules, Disability Living Allowance etc.).
- 3.5.7 The ward-level figures will cover the overall financial loss, the loss per adult of working age and the number of households/individuals affected. The city-wide and ward estimates will also be up-dated to take on board significant data, for example on the impact of Under-occupancy rules, that has been released by government since the original 2013 estimates were produced.
- 3.5.8 The second element of the research project will look at the impact on different types of households/individuals. The government's Impact Assessments only look at each reform on its own, whereas many individuals/households are adversely affected by more than one element of the package. This element of the study will therefore trace the impact of the package *as a whole* on different types of individuals/households in Sheffield. The key analytical tool to be used in the second element of the study will be the government's Family Resources Survey.
- 3.5.9 The research project is due to be completed in Autumn 2014.

#### **4 Support for Sheffield residents who are affected by welfare reform: Update on hardship schemes**

- 4.1 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. The Council Housing Service also runs a small hardship scheme.

#### 4.2.1 **Council Tax Hardship Scheme**

In 2013/14 the Council set up a £500k hardship fund for those who are struggling to pay their Council Tax, known as the Council Tax Hardship Scheme (CTHS).

4.2.2 During 2013/14, 8,315 CTHS awards were made. The value of those awards was over £413,000.

4.2.3 For 2014/15 the Council has set aside an initial £500k to fund the CTHS. Between 1 April and 30 June 2014, CTHS awards totalling over £196,000 had been made.

#### 4.3.1 **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.

4.3.2 During 2013/14, 6,982 DHP awards were made. The value of those awards was £1,224,000.

4.3.3 For 2014/15 the Council has received £1,040,000 in DHP grant from the Government.

4.3.4 Between 1 April and 30 June 2014, DHP awards totalling over £326,000 had been made, with committed expenditure taking the total of current awards made up to £590,000 (the committed expenditure is for awards made up to October but not currently paid).

#### 4.4.1 **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. Sheffield's fund is known as the Local Assistance Scheme.

4.4.2 The Council's budget allocation for the scheme for 2013/14 was £2,071,098.

4.4.3 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.

4.4.4 The first phase of the Council's scheme, which started in April 2013, resembled the DWP scheme which it replaces. This was an interim solution which reflects the commitment across the Council and from stakeholders to continue to offer individual financial assistance to customers experiencing poverty.

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



4.4.6 Local Assistance 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.

4.4.7 Local Assistance 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 benefits, and are administered by the Sheffield Credit Union.

4.5.1 **Local Assistance Scheme 2013/14**

Between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014, the Council received:

- 6,292 applications for assistance and 14,532 phone calls to its dedicated team;
- 2,470 applications for loans, of which 1,286 (52%) were awarded (the average loan award was £62.76); and
- 3,822 applications for grants, of which 1,961 (51%) were awarded (the average grant award was £597.97).

4.5.2 A high number of applications were from customers who either were not in receipt of qualifying benefits or needed assistance for an ineligible purpose – for example an advance on benefits or because benefit was sanctioned. This has been discussed with the DWP.

4.5.3 At the end of March 2014 the total spend on loans was £78,455, and the total spend on grants was £1,172,637.

4.5.4 The number of loan and grant applications received to the Local Assistance Scheme was less than the predicted number, which was based upon the preceding DWP figures for 2011/12. The demand for grants did build steadily in the first year, whereas loan applications did not significantly increase. This experience has been similar to other Councils who have set up discretionary local welfare schemes.

4.5.5 Partnership working and signposting which has benefitted customers applying to the Local Assistance Scheme has included:

- Referrals to Housing Solutions for housing advice and assistance with a range of housing issues, including preventing homelessness;
- Referrals to social care services to assist customers to live independently in their homes; and
- Signposting to debt and tenancy support services to assist customers to sustain tenancies.

4.5.6 At the end of 2013/14, 61% of total funds distributed as loans had been re-paid to the scheme via Sheffield Credit Union, demonstrating that the majority of customers have stuck to repayment agreements and that it is viable to recycle funds through the scheme.

- 4.5.7 Local Assistance loans are to help people who do not have enough money to meet their short term needs because of an emergency or disaster. Local Assistance loans are generally awarded to cover day to day living expenses (food, groceries, nappies, money for pay as you go fuel meters), which replicates the items that would have been available under the Social Fund Crisis loans. During 2013/14, 51% of customers who applied for a loan requested top-ups for pre-pay meters and 39% of customers requested assistance with buying food. At the end of 2013/14 the largest loan expenditure was for food provision, at £43,249 for the year.
- 4.5.8 Local Assistance grants are to support independent living in the community. Local Assistance grants are generally awarded to help buy household items such as white goods (for example fridges, ovens and washing machines), essential cooking equipment, seating, carpets, curtains, beds and bedding, which replicates the items that would have been available under the Social Fund Community Care Grants. 30% of customers applying for a grant requested kitchen equipment (including crockery, cutlery, saucepans etc.) and 22% of customers requested white goods (including fridge, cooker, washing machine etc.). At the end of 2013/14 the single largest expenditure was for the provision of white goods, at £497,789 for the year.
- 4.6.1 ***Local Assistance Scheme Service Review***  
The review of the Local Assistance Scheme service was completed at the end of June 2014 and identified that performance against service targets were being met. Working arrangements with Sheffield Credit Union and the Contact Centre were reviewed after 6 months, and again at 12 months to take into account the lower than expected demand, to streamline service delivery and achieve cost efficiencies. A particular feature of the local scheme has been to take a holistic view of the customer's needs and there has been valuable work undertaken with customers, their support workers and other key workers. This has enabled us to find other ways of assisting customers, as well as offering short term financial support.
- 4.6.2 The service review included comparison with other core cities and whilst there are significant differences between scheme designs and methods of delivery, all local authorities have had lower numbers of customers accessing services than were predicted using DWP data for the social fund.
- 4.7.1 ***Review of Local Assistance Scheme Policy***  
The current Local Assistance Scheme policy has been reviewed in light of the information gathered during the first 12 months of the scheme and slight amendments will be proposed to the Local Assistance Scheme Policy to ensure that it is fit for purpose and enables the service to meet the needs of vulnerable customers in crisis.

#### 4.7.2 Proposed changes to policy include:

- Further definition of terms including 'crisis', 'emergency and disaster', 'Sheffield resident', 'family' and 'family member'; and
- Making provision for requests for the review of application decisions.

#### 4.8.1 **Local Assistance Scheme 2014/15**

There has been a slight increase in applications for Local Assistance Scheme loans during the first quarter of 2014/15 as shown below.

Quarter 1 2014/15		
April 2014	May 2014	June 2014
174	134	189

4.8.2 Whilst Grant applications had been increasing month on month during 2013/14 this seems to have stabilised and the number of applications received for grants during the first quarter of 2014/15 reflect similar numbers to those received in the previous two quarters.

Quarter 1 2014/15		
April 2014	May 2014	June 2014
332	334	362

#### 4.9 **2015/16 and beyond**

It should be noted that the Government has announced that it will not be providing local authorities with a grant to provide a Local Assistance Scheme, after the financial year 2014/15. This presents a significant challenge for funding for the Local Assistance Scheme beyond March 2015. The Council will therefore be reviewing its discretionary funds, demand on those funds and the resources available, with a view to making best use of them to meet agreed priorities.

#### 4.10.1 **Council Housing Service Hardship Fund**

In 2013/14 a £50k Hardship Fund was set up from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to support tenants affected by welfare reforms and suffering hardship. In 2013/14, 134 payments were made, totaling £49,942, which will save the HRA an estimated £121,814 in costs for legal action, including eviction. There will be additional savings for other Council services due to stopping eviction for at least 37 of the tenants.

4.10.2 A further budget of £1m has been identified from the HRA to support tenants up to the end of 2019/20, with the majority of this expected to be spent in 2016/17 and 2017/18, when Council tenants will start to be affected by Universal Credit. Of this additional funding, £22,136 has been awarded to tenants in the first 3 months of 2014/15, saving the HRA an estimated £37,953.

## 5 **Learning from other local authorities' approaches to welfare reform**

- 5.1 The welfare reform update report which was received by the Committee in January 2014 considered how other local authorities are responding to welfare reform. When researching best practice in welfare reform amongst local authorities it was apparent that many of the positive actions that other authorities had taken in response to welfare reform had already been adopted in Sheffield.
- 5.2 However, we did find examples of good practice in other local authorities which to date has not been trialled in Sheffield. The two authorities where we discovered examples of innovative practice in response to welfare reform were Bristol City Council (BCC) and Manchester City Council. The full details can be found in the [January 2014 report](#), however a summary is provided below.
- 5.3 We reported that in Bristol a joint working arrangement between the local Job Centre Plus and the Council had seen two Job Centre Plus employment advisers seconded to the Council's Revenues and Benefits Service. These members of staff are badged as BCC employees and work closely with the Revenues and Benefits Service, Landlord Services for Council tenants and Housing Solutions for private tenants, to provide support and assistance to households affected by the Benefit Cap.
- 5.4 The previous report also highlighted Manchester City Council's involvement in setting up 'Lets Help You', a free service for private landlords and people looking for a home in Manchester. This brings landlords and tenants together in a fast and easy self-service website. Potential tenants can calculate their likely benefit entitlement to see which properties they can afford, and can then choose from lists of homes that match their circumstances.
- 5.5 During the meeting in January the Committee noted the aspects of good practice operating in Bristol and Manchester and requested that consideration be given to adopting these measures in Sheffield.
- 5.6.1 **Response to the Bristol case study**  
The Council considered the possibility of holding joint surgeries with DWP staff in order to provide advice and assistance to the initial group of customers affected by the Benefit Cap. However it was felt that this approach, which placed an obligation on the customer to contact us was, at this stage, too passive, given both the impact that the cap is expected to have and the customer group we were dealing with e.g. large families with school age children, customers who don't have English as a first language etc.
- 5.6.2 Instead, the Council decided that a proactive targeted approach would have a better chance of engaging with the customer group. The Council's benefits service provided case level data on all affected households to colleagues in Council Housing Services, Housing Solutions (to assist private sector tenants) and to all registered social landlords (RSLs) whose tenants were included in the initial implementation of the Benefit Cap.

- 5.6.3 This allowed a targeted approach of joint visits with Jobcentre plus staff to be undertaken. As a result of this approach Council tenants, RSL tenants and tenants in private rented accommodation affected by the Benefit Cap have been offered advice and support in managing their reduced income. This includes being supported to make a claim for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) where appropriate. Following briefing sessions from colleagues based in Job Centre Plus, Council Housing Service officers have also been given advice on how to make referrals for support into employment, Universal Job Match and the claimant commitment, allowing them to provide a more holistic service.
- 5.6.4 Where tenants have not found work and continue to be affected by the Benefit Cap, ongoing support is provided which includes support in applying for further DHPs, opening Credit Union budgeting accounts and becoming digitally enabled. In addition, tenants from all tenures continue to benefit from attending the Welfare Reform advice sessions held at Howden House.
- 5.6.5 Having delivered a targeted approach to provide advice and support to the group of customers initially affected by the Benefit Cap, officers are now discussing the possibility of undertaking joint advice surgeries with colleagues from Job Centre Plus, both to assist customers affected by all aspects of welfare reform and to prepare customers for the introduction of Universal Credit.
- 5.7.1 **Response to the Manchester case study**  
Since January, further research into the 'Lets Help You' website has been undertaken. The site is currently licensed for use by Manchester City Council for 2 years; it is up for renewal in April 2015. It is free at point of use for private landlords and applicants to use the site. The 2 year deal costs Manchester City Council £12,000 per annum.
- 5.7.2 100 private landlords are now registered users of the site, although they clearly do not all use the site at the same time. Manchester makes it clear that they do not necessarily endorse the standard of any particular accommodation advertised – and that they are not responsible for any tenancy resulting from the use of the website.
- 5.7.3 The site receives between 1,500 and 1,800 hits per week. It's not known how many tenancies occur as a result of this, but the consensus is that the number is not very high. In the week commencing 7 July 2014 there were 68 adverts on the site for the whole of the Manchester region.
- 5.7.4 After talking to Manchester regarding costs and results, officers feel that there is not a strong case for exploring this specific option further, although it may be possible to develop a similar service within the Sheffield Property Shop website. Discussions are ongoing within the Council to consider and develop options.

## 6 Conclusions

- 6.1 As this report demonstrates, work is ongoing within the Council, and with partners to understand the impact that welfare reform is having on Sheffield residents and to put measures in place to help local people to deal with the changes. The Council is committed to continuing this work.

## 7 Recommendations

- 7.1 The Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee is asked to:
- i. note the contents of the report and the progress made on understanding the impact of welfare reform on Sheffield's residents;
  - ii. consider the response from officers regarding the aspects of good practice operating in Bristol and Manchester and the request from the Committee in January 2014 that consideration be given to adopting these measures in Sheffield;
  - iii. provide views or comments on the Council's approach on responding to the welfare reform agenda; and
  - iv. give consideration to whether the Committee wishes to continue to receive further update reports on this issue.

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<sup>i</sup><http://sheffielddemocracy.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s11959/Welfare%20Reform%20Report.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup>[http://www.advicesheffield.org.uk/images/directory/Documents/JSA\\_Sanctions\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](http://www.advicesheffield.org.uk/images/directory/Documents/JSA_Sanctions_Full_Report.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup>[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/335144/jsa-sanctions-independent-review.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335144/jsa-sanctions-independent-review.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup><http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-vote-office/July-2014/22%20July%202014/31-DWP-JSASanctions.pdf>

<sup>v</sup><http://www.thestar.co.uk/news/local/blunkett-demands-action-as-food-bank-usage-soars-1-6723504>

<sup>vi</sup>[http://www.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/hitting-poorest-places-hardest\\_0.pdf](http://www.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/hitting-poorest-places-hardest_0.pdf)



## Report to Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee 31<sup>st</sup> July 2014

**Report of:** Executive Director, Communities and Executive Director, Place

**Subject:** Council House Building

**Authors of Report:** Liam Duggan, HRA Business Plan  
Dave Mason, Housing and Regeneration

### Summary:

One of the top priorities for the HRA Business Plan is the delivery of new/ additional council homes through either acquisition or new build.  
Phase 1 of the Council Housing New Build programme is due to complete in March 2016 and will include around 48 new build council homes across three sites.  
All properties in phase 1 will meet the Lifetime Homes standard and 25% properties will meet in full the wheelchair standard.  
Sites are currently being identified for phase 2.  
The New Build project is being managed by the City Council with specialists procured as necessary.  
Most of the Council's existing cleared sites will be developed by the Sheffield Housing Company which has a 15 year plan to build 2,300 new homes in seven of Sheffield's neighbourhoods.

**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	<b>x</b>
Other	

**The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:** Provide feedback on current proposals

### Background Papers:

*Report to Cabinet: Delivering More Council Housing, 19<sup>th</sup> February 2014*

<http://sheffielddemocracy.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=123&Mid=5151&Ver=4>

*Report to Cabinet: Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan update report, HRA Budget and Rent Increase 2014/15, 15<sup>th</sup> January 2014*

<http://sheffielddemocracy.moderngov.co.uk/ieIssueDetails.aspx?IId=12818&PlanId=0&Opt=3#AI7171>

**Category of Report:** ~~OPEN/CLOSED~~ (please specify)

# **Report of the Director of Communities**

## **Council House Building**

### **1. Summary**

- 1.1 One of the top priorities for the HRA Business Plan is the delivery of new/ additional council homes either through acquisition or new build.
- 1.2 Phase 1 of the Council Housing new Build programme is due to complete in March 2016 and will include around 48 new build council homes across three sites.
- 1.3 All properties in phase 1 will meet the Lifetime Homes standard and 25% properties will meet in full the wheelchair standard.
- 1.4 Sites are currently being identified for phase 2.
- 1.5 The new build project is being managed by the City Council with specialists procured as necessary.
- 1.6 Most of the Council's existing cleared sites will be developed by the Sheffield Housing Company which has a 15 year plan to build 2,300 new homes in seven of Sheffield's neighbourhoods.

### **2. Background**

- 2.1 In January 2014 the Council made a commitment to make full use of the capacity of the HRA to deliver the maximum number of new/ additional council homes possible under the current borrowing rules. In order to make the schemes viable, and so as not to compromise existing investment priorities and the wider business plan, all new units must be self-financing over the long term.
- 2.2 At an individual property level this means that the rental income generated by a new property over 30 years must be equal to or exceed the cost of delivering that unit plus the 30 year costs associated with that property. The key factors determining viability are
  1. The purchase/ build cost of the home
  2. Rental income from the home once it is delivered and
  3. The availability of match funding to part fund the scheme and so reduce the need for HRA borrowing
- 2.3 Consequently and where this is consistent with Government guidance many new units and all additional new build units will be let at Affordable Rent. However where circumstances permit, for example for more cheaply acquired property (such as former council homes) purchased using RTB receipt, a Social Rent can and will be charged.
- 2.4 Also schemes will only be brought forward when there is sufficient match funding to make them viable. Initially around 600 units (plus the 30 already delivered in 2013) are forecast in the coming 6 years. This number will be updated as forecasts of match funding develop.
- 2.5 At least 120 of these homes will be new build council houses, 75 of which will be delivered by March 2016.



### **3. New Build proposals**

- 3.1 Phase 1 of the Council Housing New Build Project includes delivery of around 48 new council homes. Procurement will be undertaken in late summer 2014 with an expected start on site in Spring 2015. The property types to be built will be determined by the needs of the local area. Local consultation will be undertaken later in 2014.
- 3.2 Phase 1 includes three proposed sites: Ouse Road, Scotia Drive and Westfield Crescent.
- 3.3 Ouse Road is the site of a former tool works and terraced housing at Kettlebridge in Darnall, which could accommodate around 30 properties. The proposed mix includes 2, 3, 4 & 5 bed houses, with the emphasis on the larger properties required by families in the local area.
- 3.4 Scotia Drive is a cleared site in Manor, adjacent to Manor Fields Park. A scheme of 2, 3 & 4 bed homes is proposed, around 16 in total. Most properties will be 2 bed, in line with local demand. A new pedestrian link into the park will be explored.
- 3.5 Westfield Crescent is a small infill site in Mosborough. It is proposed to develop a pair of 3-bed bungalows, given the particularly high demand for such accommodation in the south of the city.
- 3.6 It is planned to develop 100% of the properties to Lifetime Homes standard including 25% to full wheelchair standard.
- 3.7 The sites identified for Phase 2 so far are infill sites in Parson Cross: Palgrave Road, Wordsworth Avenue and Knutton Rise. Other additional sites are likely to be proposed.

### **4. Project approach**

- 4.1 The project is being led within the Housing & Neighbourhood Regeneration Team and will eventually pass over to the Council's Capital Delivery Service to manage the construction stage.
- 4.2 It is proposed to use the Sheffield Housing Company's portfolio of housetypes as a base for a new suite of Council housing archetypes. A waiver from Standing Orders is being sought to appoint the SHC's Phase 1 Design team to amend their own designs for social housing purposes.
- 4.3 The design team will take the project up to planning stage, after which a contractor will be procured to deliver the schemes on site. The method of contractor procurement is currently being considered by officers.

### **5. Timeline**

- 5.1 The projected Phase 1 timetable is as follows:
  - Design and Consultation (Autumn 2014)
  - Planning (Winter 2014/15)
  - Start On Site (Spring 2015)
  - Completion (March 2016)
- 5.2 The timeline for Phase 2 has yet to be confirmed but would probably start on site in 15/16 and complete in 16/17.

## **6. Risk**

6.1 The main risks for the Council Housing new build programme are as follows:

- Build costs increase faster than rents making schemes less viable. This is the key risk to the current programme.
- Availability of land limits future ambitions. Land availability is likely to be the main restraint on the delivery of new build via the HRA.
- Availability of match funding and borrowing capacity in the HRA. These may limit development through the HRA in the longer term.

## **7. Sheffield Housing Company (SHC)**

7.1 Sheffield Housing Company (SHC) is a developer partly owned by the City Council which was established to build high quality new homes in the City.

7.2 The SHC has a 15 year plan to build 2,300 new homes in seven of Sheffield's neighbourhoods. The majority of the new homes built by the SHC will be available to buy outright although some of the new homes will be for rent and advertised via the Sheffield Property Shop.

7.3 The SHC comprises SCC and Keepmoat & Great Places (KGP). SCC contributes land (mostly from the HRA), KGP contributes equivalent finance, the SHC together raises any additional borrowing required and any eventual profits are split between SCC and KGP.

7.4 The SHC was not procured as a vehicle for building Council housing. Great Places owns and manages the affordable rented homes that the SHC is contracted to provide.

7.5 However, SCC has acquired 30 properties from the SHC in Phase 1 of development at Parson Cross, Shirecliffe and Norfolk Park. These properties would have been sold on the open market if the Council had not acquired them. They are in addition to the affordable housing managed by Great Places on the same phases.

7.6 It remains an option for the Council to acquire further properties from the SHC, as it could from any other developer, if those purchases were viable and met the criteria in the Acquisition Strategy.

7.7 The SHC is due to develop around 60ha of HRA land, so one effect of the SHC is to limit the amount of developable HRA land remaining for SCC new build. Most of the remaining HRA land is smaller infill or garage sites, with the exception of a few very large sites that would be more suitable for mixed tenure or perhaps Extra Care development (e.g. Skye Edge, Manor 14, Adlington).

## **8 What Does This Mean For The People Of Sheffield?**

8.1 The 2013 Strategic Housing Market Assessment considered there to be an overall annual shortfall of market housing in Sheffield of 1,250 – 1,700 units and an overall annual shortfall of affordable housing of 725 units. A council housing new build programme contributes towards the overall need for new homes in the City as well as the target for affordable homes meaning an improved availability of homes for current and prospective council tenants without detriment to the wider market.

- 8.2 Because new build offers the council the opportunity to determine the specification and standards of new homes this means higher quality standards for tenants than might be delivered through other routes.
- 8.3 New Build can lead to greater choice for tenants in terms of the design, size and type of council home which in turn can lead to improved community sustainability.
- 8.4 House building has a role in stimulating the local economy and it has been reported that for every £100,000 invested in building houses, one job is created for one year.
- 8.5 New housing brings additional funding into the City Council in the form of grant and council tax income.

## **9. Recommendations**

- 9.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to provide feedback on current proposals

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## Report to Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee

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

**Subject:** Work Programme 2014/15

**Summary:**

This report sets out potential topics for the Committee to consider for the 2014/15 Work Programme.

**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	<b>X</b>

**The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:**

To discuss and agree a Work Programme for 2014/15.

**Background Papers:** None

**Category of Report:** OPEN

## Work Programme 2014/15

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out potential topics for the Committee to consider for the 2014/15 Work Programme.
- 1.2 Members were asked to contribute ideas on potential review topics through a consultation process and these ideas, along with contributions from officers, have informed the topics outlined below.

### 2. Potential Topics for the Work Programme

Potential topics for the Work Programme and the approach that could be taken are suggested below:

Topic	Reasons for selecting topic
<b>25th September 2014</b>	
Housing Plus	This would involve a one hour 'walkabout' followed by the Committee's formal meeting and could involve TARAs and other stakeholders.
Housing Revenue Account Business Plan	The Committee's March 2014 meeting requested an update report on the HRA following the Tenant Conference in the autumn and that tenant representatives be invited to that Committee meeting.
Challenge for Change - Community Engagement	The Council Housing Service's scrutiny group Challenge for Change (made up of customers) have undertaken their third review – looking at community engagement and would like to present to the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee.
<b>27th November 2014</b>	
Community Safety Partnership	The Council has a legal responsibility under the sections 19 and 20 of the Police and Justice Act 2006 to annually scrutinise the Community Safety Partnership. This could also pick up the impact of reduced resources for the Police which has been requested a Committee member.
Anti-social behaviour	The Committee added Anti-Social Behaviour to its list of topics for the 2014/15 work programme at its March 2014 meeting. This item could look at Sheffield's response to ASB legislation expected to become law in October 2014
Partner Resource Allocation Meeting (PRAM)	At its September 2013 meeting the Committee requested an annual presentation on the Partner Resource Allocation Meeting, with up to two additional partners to attend
Domestic Violence	Requested by two Committee members during 2014/15 as an issue the Committee could look at, following discussion at the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel.

<b>22nd January 2015</b>	
Private Sector Landlords	The Committee's January 2014 meeting requested that a report on the introduction of Selective Licensing in the Private Rented Sector be presented to the Committee in December 2014.
Social Housing Repairs and Maintenance Contract (Kier Contract)	To look at the repairs and maintenance services to tenants' homes provided by Kier Services which started on 1 April 2014 and runs for 3 years
Implementation of the Allocations Policy	At its March 2014 meeting the Committee requested an update report on the Implementation of the Allocations Policy, to including examples of how the associated risks had been managed; and local tenant representatives who had been involved in the consultation process, be invited to the Committee meeting
<b>26th March 2015</b>	
tbc	
tbc	
tbc	
<b>To schedule</b>	
Challenge for Change: Grass Cutting	The relevant Cabinet Member report back to Scrutiny on the Council's response to the recommendations a further report on the actions resulting from the report's recommendations be presented a future meeting of the Committee, with all the scrutineers involved in drafting the original report being invited to attend.
<b>Written briefings</b>	
PRAM	A quarterly written report on actions relating to the development of the Partner Resource Allocation Meeting in other parts of the City be provided to the Committee
Right to Buy Update	Written briefing circulated with the papers
Welfare Reform	Written briefing circulated with the papers
Management of HRA Land	Written update circulated with the papers on the project between the Communities and Place portfolios to carry out a review of land management arrangements.

### **3. Other issues**

- 3.1 The Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee will be considering as part of their work programme discussion at their meeting on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> July setting up a Task Group looking at 'house building and the local economy'. If the E&EW Committee does choose to set up a Task Group on this topic

then membership of the Task Group would be open to Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Committee.

**4. Recommendation**

4.1 The Committee is asked to:

1. Discuss the potential topics for inclusion on the Committee's 2014/15 Work Programme
2. Agree a Work Programme for 2014/15



## Right to Buy Update July 2014

### Government Initiatives

Further to the March update to this Committee, the Governments planned increases to Right to Buy discounts had been delayed, however DCLG have now given notice that the implementation date for the increases will be July 21<sup>st</sup> 2014. The new discounts will apply to all current and new applications.

The changes will see

1. An increase maximum percentage discount available for those purchasing a house, from 60% to 70% (this maximum applies to applicants with tenancies of 40 years or more). This change brings the percentage rate for maximum discount for houses to the same level as for flats and maisonettes)
2. An increase maximum cash discount available from £75,000 of £77,000. (this is the maximum cash discount an applicant can receive irrespective of the number of years of tenancy they have). Government now uplift the maximum cash discount annually in line with the Consumer prices Indexes (C.P.I)

Changes still to come

As part of the Deregulation Bill it is still the government's intention to cut the qualifying years for Right to Buy from five to three. This is likely to be implemented in January 2015.

### Statistics and Future Projections

2013 / 2014

The total number of Right to Buy sales for last year (2013/14) was 255. The average selling price after discount was £39,350. The average discount tenants received was £38,200. The split of sales was 204 houses and 51 flats and maisonettes.

2014 / 2015

The forecast for sales in 201/15 is 288 with a predicted average selling price of £40,500.

Actual sales in quarter one was 61 which is slightly down on the forecasted figure of 72 at this stage of the years. The average sale price however was slightly up at £40,187.

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## Report to Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 31 July 2014

**Report of:** Janet Sharpe (Interim Director of Council Housing)

**Subject:** Review of the Partner Resource Allocation Meeting (PRAM)

**Author of Report:** Bethan Williams, Acting Safer Neighbourhood Manager.

### Summary:

Following a presentation on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2013, the Committee requested a quarterly progress report regarding Partner Resource Allocation Meeting (PRAM), with a particular focus on:

- Improving the relationship between PRAM and the Neighbourhood Action Groups; and
- The development of a citywide PRAM.

This is the second of the quarterly reports.

**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	<b>X</b>
Other	

**The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:**

The Committee is asked to note progress and provide views, comments and recommendations.

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**Background Papers:**

Previous Scrutiny Committee minutes

**Category of Report:** OPEN

## **Quarterly Report of the Interim Head of Council Housing** **Review of the Partner Resource Allocation Meeting**

### **1. Introduction/Context**

1.1 In August 2012, the Partner Resource Allocation Meeting (PRAM) was introduced to the East of the city in order to:

- Improve the way in which we identify and support vulnerable people experiencing ASB;
- Provide leadership and accountability; and
- Better link ASB resources with Health and Social Care colleagues.

1.2 Following a presentation on 26th September 2013, the Committee requested a quarterly progress report regarding Partner Resource Allocation Meeting (PRAM), with a particular focus on:

- Improving the relationship between PRAM and the Neighbourhood Action Groups; and
- The development of a citywide PRAM.

1.3 This is the second update report submitted.

### **2. Improving the relationship between PRAM and the NAGs**

2.1 As previously emphasised, it is important that the NAGs are not viewed as the first port of call for ASB cases where a multi-agency response is required. With this in mind, officers are being encouraged to utilise the NAGs for more challenging cases, providing greater focus on vulnerable people experiencing ASB; improving the level of support; and speeding up resolution.

2.2 The primary focus of the NAGs is to support vulnerable people experiencing ASB and manage those committing ASB. This work continues to be best addressed with by specialist agencies and pre-existing structures.

2.3 The PRAM continues to offer an important touchstone for officers involved in 'by-exception' cases, ensuring that the primary focus remains on people experiencing ASB and strengthening the link with colleagues in Health and Social Care.

2.4 There are some geographical gaps in NAG coverage. However, the work of the Safer Neighbourhood Manager has progressed to ensure that each area of the City now has or has a planned NAG meeting or equivalent, the details of which will be circulated to officers and Elected Members in the relevant areas.

### **3. The development of a citywide PRAM**

3.1 The Community Safety Team now has a dedicated officer who provides analytical support.

3.2 The PRAM has been rolled out Citywide from 22 July 14, with support from partners.

- 3.2 The Acting Safer Neighbourhood Manager will, with partners continue to review and monitor the Citywide role out over the next quarter and report back to the committee in the next quarterly report.