



**NOTES**  
**OF THE MEETING OF THE**  
**PARTNERSHIP DELIVERY GROUP**  
**TUESDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2010**

Held at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Pavilion Road, West  
Bridgford

**PRESENT:**

Councillors N C Lawrence (Chairman), R L Butler, L B Cooper, B G Dale,  
Mrs C E M Jeffreys, R M Jones, B A Nicholls, Mrs M Stockwood,  
T VennettSmith

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

Councillors S J Boote and B Tansley  
D Clarke Director of Asset Management, Spirita  
T Coull Sure Start, Nottinghamshire County Council  
G Newton Director of Community Services, Spirita

**OFFICERS PRESENT:**

C Bullett Deputy Chief Executive (CB)  
D Dwyer Strategic Housing Manager  
K Marriott Head of Community Shaping  
V Nightingale Senior Member Support Officer

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:**

There were no apologies for absence.

**7. Declarations of Interest**

There were none declared.

**8. Notes of the Previous Meeting**

The notes of the meeting held on Thursday 10 June 2010 were accepted as a true record.

With regard to the actions from the previous meeting Members were informed that the National Place Survey due to be undertaken this year had been cancelled by the Government in August 2010. Members were informed that the County Council were the responsible authority for the production of a Strategy as part of the Child Poverty Act, with the Borough Council having an input through the Local Strategic Partnership.

The Head of Community Shaping provided Members with information regarding incidents of child abuse and geographic information in relation to Domestic Violence. She explained that, having taken advice from the police, it was not appropriate to provide the amount of detailed information that had been requested.

## 9. Partnership Work with Sure Start

The Head of Community Shaping presented a report outlining the partnership work undertaken by the Borough Council and Sure Start, which was a national initiative undertaken in Nottinghamshire by the County Council.

Ms Coull, the Senior Children's Centre Co-ordinator in Rushcliffe, gave Members a short presentation. She explained that Sure Start aimed to give early support to young children and that they were the first point of contact for parents, grandparents and carers. It was a government initiative and was to provide access to safeguards for children and to help them to attain achievements. She informed Members that their key performance indicators were:

- to increase the percentage of children registered with Sure Start, especially those from hard to reach families
- increase user satisfaction
- increase the number of babies breast fed
- reduce obesity in reception year children
- reduce percentage of mothers who continue to smoke during pregnancy
- reduce percentage of children in workless households
- narrow the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest of the population
- reduce the rate of hospital admissions caused by unintentional harm

Ms Coull explained that in Rushcliffe 19% of the 5,514 under 5's were registered. Following a question she explained that each child's needs could be identified through the registration process, which was run in partnership with Health Visitors. Another project that Sure Start was working on in partnership with Health Visitors was teenage pregnancy as this was especially high in the Borough. She stated that there was a high percentage of breastfed infants, low percentage of both obesity and children in workless households. The service targeted their efforts at pockets of deprivation and need and therefore each area did not require the same support and targeted initiatives were used. She informed the Group of the various resources that were used, including libraries, schools etc, and the different agencies involved, including job centre plus, adult education, midwifery, etc. She outlined the future of the service and although economically this was unclear she emphasised that this was still a national priority.

In conclusion Ms Coull outlined the work undertaken with officers from the housing options team to help provide continuity for people who were, or had moved from, one of the Council's lodges. She also outlined the partnership work with the Domestic Violence Co-ordinator in providing support. She felt that the Council and Sure Start had an excellent partnership in Rushcliffe.

Following a question Ms Coull explained that when running course or events a number of places were discreetly reserved for those in need to ensure that no one was disadvantaged.

With regard to funding Members were informed that it was based on the indices of deprivation and therefore an area such as Mansfield had fewer children but had more budget than Rushcliffe.

Ms Coull outlined some of the work undertaken in the larger towns and villages in Rushcliffe and highlighted some of the rural issues that had been identified. Members praised the work undertaken by Sure Start, especially in the East Leake and Cotgrave areas. They also felt that services had to be open to all as it would not draw attention to those in need and deemed vulnerable.

The Chairman thanked Ms Coull for her presentation and for answering Members questions.

It was AGREED that the Partnership Delivery Group endorse the work being undertaken by Rushcliffe Borough Council in partnership with Sure Start.

#### 10. **Annual Review of Partnership with Spirita**

Mr Clarke and Ms Newton gave a presentation on behalf of Spirita outlining seven areas of partnership working. Mr Clarke explained that since 2003, when the housing stock was transferred, 250 affordable homes had been built which had far exceeded the target of 150. He also explained that, due to the current economic climate, building was more subdued at present. He highlighted the improvements that were being made to properties especially those that would ensure that all stock met, or exceeded, the Decent Homes Standard. Members were informed that Spirita were on target to meet the Standard by the end of 2010.

One area that had been of concern at the last review was tenant's problems with responsive repairs. The Group agreed that the number of complaints had greatly receded and Mr Clarke explained how working with their new contractor had been successful. He stated that they were at present developing a partnering arrangement with the contractor to ensure value for money. The Group congratulated Spirita on their improvements in a short period of time.

Another area of improvement was the programme of estate inspections, which were publicised and residents were encouraged to become involved. Mr Clarke explained that by visiting the area and discussing any issues with residents work on estates could be identified; these could include security or environmental issues.

At the previous review Members had been interested in the number of voids and allocations. Mr Clarke explained that there was approximately 1,000 voids per year, which equated to 10% of the stock. He stated that turn-rounds could be anything from changing the locks to a full refurbishment. He also highlighted a new initiative where tenants were offered a monetary incentive to leave the property in a decent condition as this could greatly reduce the amount of time a property would stand empty.

Ms Newton explained to Members about the company's sheltered housing stock and services. She stated that people's expectations were changing and that research was being undertaken on how these could be met in the future. She informed the Group that they focussed support on those with the greatest need and also promoted the different retirement living options that were available, including warden aided, alarm services and support from other

agencies. Following a question she explained that some of the housing stock that had been built over 30 years ago did not now meet the requirements of the elderly. She stated that there was very little capital available at the moment to create new opportunities. Members were informed that there was a group looking at new ways to address the Greater Nottinghamshire housing needs which was led by the Council's Strategic Housing Manager, who agreed to provide a briefing note for Members on this in the near future.

Following a statement it was acknowledged that shared ownership bungalows were hard to let as people of that age were not looking to get on the property ladder.

Members asked if there were any incentives to encourage people who were left in family housing to move into smaller properties. Ms Newton explained that they were looking at incentives and the Strategic Housing Manager stated that through the Choice Based Lettings system people downsizing would be given priority.

The Group was informed of the new initiative for customer care where Borough Council staff were trained to offer a walk in advice service for Spirita customers at the Civic Centre; with staff having a shared access to Spirita's information systems. Another improvement was that customers had a dedicated phone line at the Civic Centre to report repairs, anti-social behaviour, etc. Also there was an integrated call back system where key Spirita staff had targets to follow up enquiries in person.

Ms Newton updated the Group on several improvements to customer care, including that 92% of calls were answered within 20 seconds and the 50% reduction of the number of secondary calls regarding repairs. Members were also informed of a tenant led panel that scrutinised feedback and complaints and of a MHT partnership wide 'customer first' group that was led by Spirita's Chief Executive.

With regard to scrutiny Ms Newton stated that residents had an increasing role to ensure that their needs were being met. There had been training for resident board and committee members to ensure that there was effective, open and transparent working. She also explained about how Spirita were meeting the requirements of the new Tenant Services Authority (TSA). She also outlined the proposals for a new committee structure, which was one of their key challenges for 2010/11. Other challenges included maintaining effective communications, reviewing sheltered housing, Choice Based Lettings and the impact of efficiency savings.

In relation to the change in the committee structure the Deputy Chief Executive (CB) highlighted that at present three Members sat on geographical based committees and that it was proposed to reduce the number of Members and committees. Ms Newton explained that in future the committees would be based on functionality and that it was proposed to reduce the number of committees to two, with 12 representatives on each. Councillors Boote and Tansley, present Council representatives, gave the Group an outline of their roles on the committees. Both Members felt that the relationship between the Council and Spirita was vital and that as Councillors they could help members of the committees understand the work of the Council and how this could

benefit/help tenants, also they had a wider view when considering issues. However, there was no mechanism for them to report back to the rest of the Council. The Deputy Chief Executive (CB) agreed to consider this issue and advise Members how this could be achieved.

The Group agreed that it was important to have a Council representative on Spirita's committees, especially as it had worked very well for a number of years and that some people often felt that they could not approach the company directly. Mr Clarke and Ms Newton clarified that Spirita valued its partnership with Rushcliffe and that no decision had been made about removing local authority representatives from the committees. However, as part of the TSA's requirements they had to demonstrate that these committees were tenant led.

Following a query Ms Newton explained that housing some individuals did cause greater problems for officers, however they tried to consider everyone involved and make the best decision for all concerned. The Strategic Housing Manager explained that in some cases, ie homelessness, there was a time constraint involved and people often had to consider accommodation that they had not previously thought about.

With regards to the Handyman Service and the Preventative Adaptations Scheme Members were informed that the continuation of these schemes would be dependent on Nottinghamshire County Council's budget arrangements. The Deputy Chief Executive (CB) agreed to investigate and provide a briefing note for Members.

Following a question regarding the use of Section 106 money for affordable housing officers explained that the developer has ultimate control but Spirita were the Council's preferred partner, however, in rural exception sites other registered social landlords had been involved.

The Chairman thanked Mr Clarke and Ms Newton for attending the meeting and answering questions. They replied that it had been very beneficial to find out how Members felt about being on the committees. They also stated that it was very good to hear the positive comments on their improved repairs service and that this demonstrated how the partnership was working.

#### **11. The Partnership with Spirita – Value for Money and Affordable Housing**

The Deputy Chief Executive (CB) presented a report outlining the partnership agreement with Spirita to facilitate the provision for affordable housing in Rushcliffe. This issue had been raised by the Council's Internal Auditors and they had proposed a review. He explained that this review would not consider those developments where a grant subsidy was not required as the site was deemed viable by the developer.

Members were informed that it was not easy to judge value for money due to the wide variation of the components of a scheme, eg whether land was given, Section 106 agreement, cost of land, size of scheme, specialist finishings, etc.. Originally, the individual schemes were benchmarked against similar schemes within Rushcliffe, but now a more sophisticated model was used. Another

indicator of value for money would be if the scheme received Homes and Communities Agency grant funding, as this was one of their key criteria.

The report highlighted the number of schemes undertaken, the number of units built and the total amount of funding each scheme had achieved from the Borough Council, Spirita or the Homes and Communities Agency. Following a question officers explained that Spirita were the preferred partner under the Partnership Agreement, but this did not preclude the Council working with other Social Landlords. Spirita had agreed, as part of this Agreement, to make £2,000,000 of Recycled Capital Grant Funding available to build Affordable Homes. It was felt that if the Council did go out to tender this would break the Agreement at a time when £800,000 of this funding was still uncommitted. It was also acknowledged that as part of the Large Scale Voluntary Transfer agreement the Council still had £1,200,000 to invest in schemes.

Officers also explained that with having a preferred partner had achieved successes when obtaining funding. It also meant that the partnership had schemes available if the Homes and Communities Agency had an excess of money at the end of their investment period.

Following a question officers explained that the rural exception sites cost less per unit as the land was valued as agricultural and therefore the cost was far less to buy.

Members queried if either partner could make additional funds available. Officers stated that normally registered social landlords did provide either money or land for schemes. As for the Council this would be a matter for Members to discuss when the funding had been spent.

With regard to the involvement of more than one Registered Social Landlord officers stated that, as they were competitors, it was difficult to negotiate joint working. Also as other Registered Social Landlords only had a smaller number of properties they had less Recycled Capital Grant Funding to allocate.

Members felt that the report had been very comprehensive and that the arrangements should remain the same with a review in the future linked to when the guaranteed funding from Spirita was coming to an end.

It was AGREED that:

- a) the Partnership Agreement with Spirita had worked well with regards to providing value for money in the provision of affordable housing, and
- b) that options other than continuing with the existing Partnership Agreement should be explored at an appropriate time in the future.

## 12. **Rolling 2 Year Work Programme**

The Group considered its work programme and felt that Choice Based Lettings should now be considered by another scrutiny group as the partnership had now been established.

The meeting closed at 9.50 pm.

## Action Sheet

### PARTNERSHIP DELIVERY GROUP - TUESDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2010

Minute Number	Actions	Officer Responsible
10. Annual Review of Partnership with Spirita	<p>a) The Strategic Housing Manager agreed to provide a briefing note for Members on the outcomes of the group considering the Greater Nottinghamshire housing needs in the near future.</p> <p>b) The Deputy Chief Executive (CB) agreed to consider the issue of how Members representing the Authority reported back to the rest of the Council and advise how this could be achieved.</p> <p>c) The Deputy Chief Executive (CB) agreed to investigate and provide a briefing note for Members regarding the Handyman Service and the Preventative Adaptations Scheme.</p>	<p>Strategic Housing Manager</p> <p>Deputy Chief Executive (CB)</p> <p>Deputy Chief Executive (CB)</p>