

**NOTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GROUP
TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER 2015**

Held at 7 pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Pavilion Road,
West Bridgford

PRESENT:

Councillors T Combellack (Chairman), B Buschman, L B Cooper,
M J Edwards, J E Greenwood (Substitute for J Donoghue), R A Inglis,
A L R A Pell and R G Upton

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor R L Butler
S Short East Midlands Councils

OFFICERS PRESENT:

D Banks Executive Manager - Neighbourhoods
D Dwyer Strategic Housing Manager
A Goodman Member Support Officer
J Sheil Housing Strategy and Development Officer

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Councillors J Donoghue and K A Khan

8. Declarations of Interest

There were none declared.

9. Notes of the Previous Meeting

The notes of the meeting held on Tuesday 14 July 2015 were accepted as a true record.

The Group noted Councillor Pell's comments in respect of the Item on New Energy Initiatives. The Chairman informed the Group that the Notes of the meeting were designed to be a summary of the discussion and not a verbatim record.

Members were pleased that an article on nature conservation and grants had been included in the latest edition of Rushcliffe Reports, the Council's residents' magazine. The Chairman requested that a Briefing Note be sent directly to the Parish Councils.

Action The Community Development Manager to send a briefing note on the availability of conservation grants to the Parish Councils

10. **Asylum and Immigration**

A copy of a Home Office briefing note containing key facts on the Syrian Resettlement Programme was circulated to Members of the Group.

Ms Short, the lead officer on the East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership, informed the Group that the Partnership was hosted by East Midlands Councils and included representatives from local government, health, education, police and the Home Office. She explained that the refugee situation was moving quickly and updates on information were being regularly issued. On 24 August 2015 the Government sent a letter to Chief Executives of Councils that did not already participate in asylum dispersal, to request their involvement. Currently Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire County Councils already participated in asylum dispersal schemes. The increase in asylum numbers and the current housing market meant that it had become difficult to procure enough properties to meet the need. East Midlands Councils supported this initiative of writing to local Councils. Broxtowe Borough Council and Gedling Borough Council had already agreed to become dispersal areas as part of a two tier arrangement, involving the district councils providing housing and Nottinghamshire County Council providing social care. It was envisaged that 2,600 people would be accommodated over five years in the East Midlands, 1,000 in Leicestershire, 800 in Nottinghamshire and 800 in Derbyshire. This was the equivalent of 9% of the intake for the United Kingdom, of which 30% would be families, the rest single males.

In September the Government agreed to expand the existing Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme to resettle 20,000 refugees during this Parliament. Participation in the Scheme was voluntary, however following various meetings with Council Leaders and Chief Executives, there appeared to be broad support. The Government had announced a funding package for year 1 of the scheme, of £8,500 per adult, with additional money for health and education. Currently discussions were ongoing in respect of the funding for years 2 to 5 and an announcement was expected before the Local Government Settlement announcement. Additions to the programme included people with medical needs, survivors of torture, a connection to the United Kingdom, gender issues and those with different political views. An application process would be used to identify those eligible and security checks would be carried out at three stages in the process, in addition to medical assessments. Conversations would then take place with local authorities to match families to the appropriate location and to identify housing and support packages. Refugees would be able to access the job market and be eligible for benefits.

In response to questions Ms Short confirmed that security checks would be carried out prior to the refugees arriving in the United Kingdom. The first check would be done as part of the initial application to the Home Office against their name and date of birth. The second check would be against the Department of Work and Pensions records to see if they had previously resided in the United Kingdom. The third would be carried out when the travel documents were examined by Border Control. Once an individual had been accepted under the resettlement scheme they would have refugee status for five years.

In respect of the settlement scheme for 20,000 refugees announced by the Government, Members enquired if these were in addition to the 30,000 already agreed. Ms Short explained that there were 26,000 asylum seekers at present about 5,000 of which were Syrian. She confirmed that the figure of 20,000 was individuals not families and that these included the most vulnerable to life in the refugee camps. The Syrian Resettlement Programme would be in addition to other schemes and would be at a rate of 4,000 per year over the next five years. Members questioned the numbers in respect of net migration and the numbers of asylum seekers. Ms Short explained that the number of asylum seekers was low, as it was mainly students and people with firm offers of work that entered the United Kingdom. She agreed to provide Members with up to date figures.

Action Ms Short to provide the Group with up to date figures in respect of asylum seekers and net migration

Members were disappointed that there would be no Government funding to provide language support for refugee children, as learning English was vital. Ms Short explained that the original scheme had included language support and agreed to feedback Members comments to the Local Government Association. The wrap around support package included transport from the airport, initial help with the house and translation services. In respect of other forms of support, Coventry Council had done a lot of work already in respect of English language courses and childcare support. The Nottingham Refugee Forum was an existing organisation that provided support and Nottinghamshire County Council would commission services on behalf of the district councils. The cost of health treatment was included in the Government package however it was uncertain whether the cost of translation services was included. Ms Short agreed to investigate how this would be funded.

Action Ms Short to provide the Group with information in respect of the funding for translation services

In response to questions on how many refugees would be allocated to Rushcliffe, Ms Short confirmed that currently the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme was voluntary and there were no allocations. The individual authorities would decide the numbers they received based on the level of housing they could provide, however it stated in the dispersal letter that the Government could instruct Councils to accommodate asylum seekers. If additional family members applied to join the refugees in the United Kingdom they would be subject to the normal immigration process and as such there would be no additional funding for the Council

The Chairman thanked Ms Short for attending the meeting and answering Members questions.

The Group received a presentation by the Executive Manager – Neighbourhoods on the Council's current position in respect of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. He reminded Members that at the meeting in September, Council had agreed a motion 'to reaffirm the Council's commitment to work collaboratively with neighbouring Councils and East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership to support the Home Office in identifying appropriate solutions in line with government policy, available

resources and local expectations. He explained that the main focus of the Council's involvement in the scheme was not to provide a dispersal centre.

The Executive Manager – Neighbourhoods outlined the recent activity undertaken in respect of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. Officers had been working closely with East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership and had been liaising with Ms Short. A Nottinghamshire and City Local Authority's Coordinating Group had been formed to prepare an offer to the Home Office on how many people could be accommodated, where they would be housed and when the Councils would be in a position to receive them. Representatives from Social Services, health, education and the Police were also involved in the planning of the implementation of the scheme. The Coordinating Group were looking to utilise the services of an existing refugee support network based in Nottingham, to lead on the day to day funded support for families irrespective of their location. Funding details had been released by the Government for year one of the scheme, based on the principle that partners should not be economically disadvantaged, however details for years two to five were yet to be received.

The Executive Manager – Neighbourhoods informed the Group of the options available to the Council for participation in the scheme. These included setting aside rooms Hound Lodge in West Bridgford to provide accommodation for up to eight families at one time. Hound Lodge was owned by the Council and currently provided 16 units of accommodation for accepted homeless households. However, due to excellent prevention work by officers, there was a low occupancy level by Rushcliffe residents. Therefore income had been maximised by renting rooms to neighbouring local authorities, aiming for maximum occupancy at all times. Consideration needed to be given to the suitability of the accommodation for housing 'vulnerable' people, potentially with health needs, for periods of up to five years, in small rooms with shared facilities. There would be an impact on the Housing waiting list and availability of general accommodation.

The Strategic Housing Manager confirmed that a kitchen and toilet facilities were shared by the occupants of two bedrooms. Currently the Lodge could be used by other local authorities to house homeless asylum seekers outside of this scheme, usually supported by Nottinghamshire County Council. The turnover of occupants varied, depending on the time it took to find suitable housing, however refugees would be given priority and could be rehoused within six weeks. The eight rooms that would be set aside would be clustered together in order that the refugees were not isolated.

Another option would be to utilise the currently empty former Caretakers Bungalow on Boundary Road in West Bridgford. The three bedroomed property had recently been vacated and authorisation had been given for a capital disposal of between £175,000 and £200,000. The property needed an estimated £20,000 to £30,000 of remedial work to improve the heating system and address other defects, before it could be brought into use. However participation in the Scheme would give the Council the opportunity to seek government funding to finance the work. The bungalow could be used to provide accommodation for a family of up to five and the layout could benefit families with a physical disability, subject to further adaptive work.

Other options available to the Council included working in partnership with Metropolitan Housing to proactively identify suitable properties in the borough. Allocations would still be via the Choice Based Lettings scheme, although this would impact on the number of properties available to those already on the housing waiting list. Another option would be to utilise offers of help from local residents, of which four had been received. However consideration would need to be given to the suitability and size of accommodation given the 'vulnerable' status of the refugees and the sustainability of the offer over a five year period.

The Executive Manager – Neighbourhoods concluded the presentation by requesting Members' feedback on their desire to participate in Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, any preferred method of support, the scale that could be offered and the proposed timing. Following consideration by the Group, a future report to would be presented to Cabinet to agree the Council's strategy and approach.

In response to questions, the Strategic Housing Manager confirmed that any refugee family housed in the bungalow would be eligible to be put on the housing list. Although it was envisaged that this was unlikely and as councils could not offer short term tenancies, they would probably stay for the duration. However Members felt that some families might feel isolated and would seek to be relocated to different areas to be nearer to their family or other refugees. If the Council disposed of the bungalow, the capital receipt would only cover the cost of purchasing one flat in West Bridgford.

In respect of timescales, Members were informed that rooms in Hound Lodge could be made available in six to eight weeks and the bungalow could be ready after Christmas, subject to completion of the works.

Some Members expressed concern that unless there was a supply of suitable homes available to move on to, families housed initially on a temporary basis at Hound Lodge could remain there indefinitely. The Strategic Housing Manager explained that, as refugees they would qualify for inclusion on the housing register and would be allocated housing through the Choice Based Lettings Scheme. Some Members questioned the impact this would have on the people already on the waiting list and how this would be justified to those unhappy at having to wait longer. The Strategic Housing Manager explained that individual details of allocations were not made available, only that the applicant had qualified. Although the Council could not control local views, it was always transparent about how they qualified. As Hound Lodge and the Bungalow were temporary accommodation they were exempt from the allocation system. Currently the average waiting time on the housing list for high priority applicants was between eight and twelve weeks, with low priority having to wait longer. Refugees could be directed to private landlords, however it was unlikely they would be able to afford the rent as they would only be in receipt of housing benefit. Although there were incentives available for private landlords it would still be difficult. Members felt that other options should be explored including the Watersports Centre, although it was accepted that the location was isolated.

Members felt that there was an urgent need to provide accommodation and as Rushcliffe was a prosperous area, the Council should be proactive and willing to voluntarily participate in the scheme from its commencement.

It was AGREED that:

- a) Cabinet be informed that the Community Development Group support the Council's voluntary participation in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, and
- b) Officers further investigate the Hound Lodge and Caretakers Bungalow options.

11. **Housing Delivery Plan 2016 - 2021**

The Strategic Housing Manager gave a presentation to the Group on the Rushcliffe Housing Delivery Plan 2016-2021 and the plans to address key housing priorities during the lifetime of the Plan. She explained that housing was important as there were clear linkages with health and it had a major positive effect on the local economy. By the year 2031, the overall population of Rushcliffe was projected to increase by 11%, with the number of residents over 65 increasing by 47%. Over 3,000 new affordable homes were required over the next seven years to meet the new and emerging need. Although Rushcliffe was an affluent area there were pockets of deprivation and large rented areas. As house prices were higher they were least affordable and the demand for social housing outstripped supply. In the Borough 16% of all households were in fuel poverty.

The Strategic Housing Manager outlined the reasons for producing the Housing Delivery Plan. She informed Members that the aim was to raise awareness amongst key stakeholders about the housing challenges facing the Borough and the Council's actions in response. It would also position the Council as a forward-looking and flexible authority, focused on outcomes and projects. In addition it would establish a framework for working with a range of partners to improve housing and housing support, and would accord with the Council's priorities. She explained that the Council's current Housing Strategy, which was published in 2009, ran to 2016 and contained 51 actions. The Deregulation Act which came into force in March 2015 repealed the statutory duty stated in the Local Government Act 2003 for Local Authorities in England to prepare a Housing Strategy. The changing economic climate and devolved powers would bring greater freedom and opportunities to find local solutions to increase housing supply. It was therefore proposed to publish an accessible and concise Housing Delivery Plan as a public statement of priorities for housing and the actions being taken to secure improvements which would link to the revised Rushcliffe Borough Council Corporate Plan.

A consultation was undertaken, for an eight week period during July to September 2015, with over 500 key stakeholders including, neighbouring Local Authorities; members of the Rushcliffe CVS, Registered Providers, Town and Parish Councils, Elected Members and a range of other key stakeholders. Consultees were asked to give their views on whether the vision/ themes of the Housing Strategy 2009-2016 were still appropriate, the main challenges and opportunities around housing, how other organisations could assist in the

delivery of key priorities and how the priorities linked with those of partner organisations. The majority of respondents agreed that the overall vision and themes of Supply, Quality and Inclusion, contained in the 2009-2016 Strategy were still appropriate. Respondents recognised the challenges of delivering the Plan with reduced resources. They also highlighted the need for more older person's accommodation and to ensure homes were energy efficient. The issues of long term empty homes and the affordability and quality of rented accommodation were also raised.

The Strategic Housing Manager informed Members that the Vision of the Plan was for every household to have real housing choice and to enjoy living in a good quality home that meets their needs'. The three Key Priorities that officers would work with Partners to achieve this were as follows;

- Supply – delivering housing growth including affordable housing to meet the needs of our diverse communities
- Quality – ensuring that existing and new homes are of a high standard and contribute to improving the health of our residents
- Inclusion – tackling homelessness and provision of effective housing related support for residents

During the life of the Plan there would be many key challenges and opportunities for the Council. These included reducing resources, the high cost of housing in Rushcliffe, welfare reform, Government announcements relating to Right to Buy, reduction in social rent allowance, Devolution, working in different ways to deliver affordable housing and encouraging investment in homes to promote independent living. It would be supported by an action plan containing targets against the three priorities identified, which would be updated on an annual basis. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken and no major changes or adverse impacts had been identified.

In response to questions the Strategic Housing Manager explained that there would be some exemptions as part of the current national proposal to extend the Right to Buy. As developers were no longer required to provide housing for socially rented schemes, there had been much discussion regarding developers providing “starter homes” for first time buyers at below the market rates. As some developers were unable to provide the required level of Affordable Housing due to viability issues, one option was that the Council could subsidise schemes through its Capital Programme. The Executive Manager – Neighbourhoods confirmed that, as recently considered at the Budget Workshops, there was £1.2 million currently left in reserves to deliver housing. Although the money had been used carefully over the years, alternative models for delivering affordable housing would be required once the fund had exhausted.

In respect of the Housing Register and bedroom eligibility, Members requested a breakdown of the numbers on the list and how many bedrooms the applicants required.

Action The Housing Strategy and Development Officer to provide the Group with a breakdown of the numbers on the Housing Register and the amount of bedrooms they required

The Strategic Housing Manager confirmed that under occupancy was a priority and that incentives were given to assist residents to move to smaller properties in order to free up family houses. The Council had a policy of requesting that bungalows were provided on new housing developments. However this was increasingly difficult due to viability issues and developers could “meet the need” by providing flats, although bungalows had been provided on some sites.

In respect of empty properties in the Borough, the Executive Manager – Neighbourhoods informed Members that the Council had been successful in reducing the number of long term empty properties from 629 in 2009 to 379 in October 2015. Empty properties were inspected every three months and were now subject to the full council tax charge after six months, as a deterrent to keeping properties empty for a longer period than necessary.

It was AGREED that the Group endorse the draft Housing Delivery Plan, prior to it being presented to Cabinet for approval.

12. Work Programme

The Group considered the report of the Service Manager – Corporate Governance that set out details of the proposed work programme for the municipal year 2015/16.

The Executive Manager – Neighbourhoods informed the Group that an Item on the Review of the Waste Strategy would be considered at the meeting in January 2016. Consequently, the Item on Reputation Management would now be considered at the meeting in May and the Work Programme was amended to reflect the changes.

The Group AGREED the Work Programme as set out below:

Date of Meeting	Item
26 January 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rural Broadband Update• Review of Waste Strategy• Work Programme
May 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reputation Management• Work Programme

The meeting closed at 9.35 pm.

Action Sheet

Community Development Group - Tuesday 20 October 2015

Minute Number	Actions	Officer Responsible
9 Notes of the Previous Meeting	Send a briefing note on the availability of conservation grants to the Parish Councils	Community Development Manager
10 Asylum and Immigration	a) provide the Group with up to date figures in respect of asylum seekers and net migration b) provide the Group with information in respect of the funding for translation services	East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership
11 Housing Delivery Plan 2016 - 2021	Provide the Group with a breakdown of the numbers on the Housing Register and the amount of bedrooms they required	Housing Strategy and Development Officer
12 Work Programme	None	

RESPONSES

Minute Number	Actions	Officer Responsible	Response
9 Notes of the Previous Meeting	Send a briefing note on the availability of conservation grants to the Parish Councils	Community Development Manager	A briefing on nature conservation and grants will be sent to Parish Councils before the start of the next financial year, as the budget for nature grants has been fully allocated for the 2015/16 financial year
10 Asylum and Immigration	a) provide the Group with up to date figures in respect of asylum seekers and net migration b) provide the Group with information in respect of the funding for translation services	East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership	All the latest government information on asylum seekers and immigration can be found at the following https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-april-to-june-2015/asylum There is no specific funding identified for translation as this is a matter for local authority discretion particularly in relation to children who need English as an additional language
11 Housing Delivery Plan 2016 - 2021	Provide the Group with a breakdown of the numbers on the Housing Register and the amount of bedrooms they required	Housing Strategy and Development Officer	Information emailed to Group