



**NOTES**  
**OF THE MEETING OF THE**  
**PARTNERSHIP DELIVERY GROUP**  
**THURSDAY 3 OCTOBER 2013**

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

**PRESENT:**

Councillors Mrs J A Smith (Chairman), Mrs D M Boote, H A Chewings,  
L B Cooper, R Hetherington, E J Lungley, F A Purdue-Horan,  
Mrs M Stockwood,

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

Councillor J E Greenwood

R Walker Regional Director, Metropolitan Housing Trust  
N Raffell Housing Services Officer, Metropolitan Housing Trust

**OFFICERS PRESENT:**

D Banks Executive Manager - Neighbourhoods  
D Dwyer Strategic Housing Manager  
V Nightingale Senior Member Support Officer

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:**

Councillor T Vennett-Smith

**1. Declarations of Interest**

Councillor F A Purdue-Horan declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 4 – Review of Partnership with Metropolitan Housing.

**2. Notes of the Previous Meeting**

The notes of the joint meeting with the Community Development Group held on Tuesday 2 July 2013 were accepted as a true record.

Following a query the Executive Manager - Neighbourhoods agreed to provide Members with further information on the DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks that had replaced the CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checks.

**3. Review of Partnership with Metropolitan Housing**

The Strategic Housing Manager presented a report outlining the partnership the Council had with Metropolitan Housing. She stated that they were the main provider of social housing in the Borough with just under 4,000 units. The Partnership was well established and she felt that its continued success was due to the fact that Metropolitan

- Was held accountable as they attended a scrutiny meeting annually
- Had regular meetings with officers regarding service delivery
- Had an input into strategic housing issues

- Was part of the introduction and development of the Choice Based Lettings scheme and Housing Allocations Policy
- Worked with officers to tackle anti-social behaviour issues
- Was a major stakeholder in the Council's Cotgrave regeneration scheme, with a specific remit on the housing sub group

In addition to these the Strategic Housing Manager explained that as part of the Partnership Metropolitan Housing helped deliver the Council's affordable homes programme by donating land and funding. She was pleased to inform Members that, with additional funding from the New Homes Bonus, 30 units of affordable housing would be delivered over a number of Metropolitan garage sites in the next two years

Members had submitted several questions to Metropolitan Housing and Mr Walker had provided written answers to these. He also gave a presentation outlining a number of issues raised by Members and the new structure of the company. He stated that there had been a number of significant changes in the previous twelve months following the appointment of a new Chief Executive. It had been recognised that there had been several different organisations brought together and these had now been redefined as one organisation with clear outcomes and goals, and targets which were customer and business focussed. In respect of the housing service it had been recognised that there had been a lack of joined up services and to address this the area had been redefined as 'patches'. Each patch would have a weekly task and problem solving meeting to identify local needs and issues, repairs, anti-social behaviour and income. Following a question Members were informed that Rushcliffe was a large patch with smaller patches within it.

Mr Walker was pleased to inform Members that of the 95 reported cases of anti-social behaviour so far in 2013, 89 had been closed. The majority of complaints were about noise, although not statutory noise nuisance, vandalism and harassment. The service had dedicated anti-social behaviour officers who worked closely with the Police on any serious cases. He informed the Group that customer satisfaction levels were normally high, except for June 2013 which he was investigating. As part of their continual improvement programme a definite contact person was now assigned to each incident and cases were not closed until the customer was satisfied with the outcome.

Several Members' questions had focussed on the new welfare reforms and how tenants were affected by these. He explained that income collection was deteriorating with low level cases, under £2,000 of arrears, getting steadily worse, this had coincided with the introduction of the spare room subsidy. In Rushcliffe 468 households were affected by this subsidy with 63 under occupying by 2 or more bedrooms. Of these 468 households over 50% had increasing rent arrears. To help combat this Metropolitan Housing had introduced several initiatives, including a mutual exchange campaign, financial inclusion to help people manage their money, a rent in advance scheme and metroployment to help people get back to work. This last initiative would, in future, be targeted at areas of deprivation and people affected by welfare reforms. Following several questions Mr Walker explained that staff were promoting mutual exchanges between tenants, introducing a 'home-swopper' initiative and also looking at how tenants could budget better if they did not

want to move but were affected by the spare room subsidy. As part of the Company's preparations for the introduction of Universal Credit Mr Walker was working with financial inclusion officers to help and support tenants who did not have bank accounts and found budgeting difficult. The alternatives for people were to have post office accounts or join a Credit Union. The Strategic Housing Manager explained that the Council was working closely with the Nottingham Credit Union to raise awareness of this service. The Union provided various accounts including a 'jam jar' account where people could prioritise where their money was allocated. To assist people the Citizen's Advice Bureau were being funded to provide a debt counselling service at the Rushcliffe Community Contact Centre. Also housing officers, benefit officers and Metropolitan Housing worked together to help and support tenants to avoid people being evicted.

In relation to people requiring overnight carers who were affected by the spare room subsidy the Strategic Housing Manager informed Members that the legislation provided for an additional bedroom for non-resident carers but not for family members. People who were affected could apply for discretionary housing benefit and this had been awarded to 26 claimants to date.

In response to a question regarding people who occupied an adapted property the Executive Manager - Neighbourhoods explained that if the occupant was affected by the spare room subsidy they could apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant to adapt another property. However, officers would look to see if it would be more beneficial to award discretionary housing benefit to allow them to remain in the adapted property.

The Group queried if there was a need to build more one or two bedroomed properties as 12.5% of tenants were affected by the spare room subsidy. The Strategic Housing Manager explained that when considering new builds there was a sophisticated model used to determine what housing was needed in the Borough, this took into account current requirements, future population projection and local policies. Current developments are a mixture of one or two bedroom flats, two, three and four bedroomed properties. It was felt that one bedroom properties did not represent value for money. Following a question regarding the model the Strategic Housing Manager stated that the Council had a target to build 30 affordable homes by March 2014, with an additional 260 relets per year this did not meet current or future demand as there were currently 950 people registered for housing. Therefore officers had to ensure any grant provided for the development of affordable housing achieved best value to meet local housing need. An example of this was the redevelopment of the garage sites with Metropolitan which had the potential to lever in an additional £1.2m from external funding.

Members were informed that under the Allocations Policy people who were under-occupying a property were given priority on the waiting list. During the last 12 months out of 85 people who had an urgent or high priority, 35 people were under occupying their properties and, of these 12 people had been rehoused. Following a question the Strategic Housing Manager explained that 23 people had been bidding for suitable properties, 9 of which had never placed a bid. Housing officers encouraged people to bid but it was up to the person involved to choose which properties were suitable.

Councillors said that in a recent article it had been stated that Nottingham City had approximately 1,000 one bedroomed flats unallocated and Members wondered if these could be used to help people who were under-occupying properties in Rushcliffe. Officers informed the Group that most local authorities had a 'local connection' criteria when allocating properties. However, housing advice officers were encouraging people to look at the private rented sector as well as social housing. Also there were incentives for private landlords to let private tenancies to people where this prevented someone from becoming homeless. The Strategic Housing Manager also explained that if someone presented themselves to the Council as homeless and no suitable social or private rented properties had become available in the Borough within the allocated timeframe then the Council could discharge its homeless duty into private rented accommodation in a neighbouring Borough. Similar provisions also applied to other local authorities which could further reduce the availability of private rented accommodation in the Borough..

In order to consider the impact on tenants Members queried how many people were living in overcrowded conditions. The Strategic Housing Manager agreed to provide these figures.

Members asked Mr Walker if Metropolitan Housing had re-defined bedrooms as something else as had happened in other areas of the Country to avoid properties being under occupied. He said that this had not happened yet but was being considered as some rooms were only large enough to put a cot in and not a full size bed.

In respect of asset management 95% of repairs were completed on time. In future the service would focus on improving diagnosis and getting it right first time and having a proactive communications scheme about late repairs.

Following the successful introduction of a single customer contact centre in April 2012 the company was now piloting extended hours, developing their website to include 'self service' functionality and promoting digital inclusion. As part of this initiative customers would be able to report repairs and check on their progress; make rent payments and check their account balances. Members had previously been informed of a Councillor hotline to the interim Head of Housing Services, which would continue, however Beth Watson would be returning to work and replacing Mr Cregg in January 2014. He agreed to provide further details in due course.

In respect of complaints 205 had been received so far this year with only nine progressing to stage two of the complaints process, this meant that 96% were dealt with at stage one. Several Members stated that when contacting the Customer Service Centre they had encountered problems with obtaining replies, Mr Walker apologised for this and informed them that they should receive an acknowledgement email and a fuller response in due course. Members queried if the small number of complaints progressing past stage one could be due to a lack of knowledge of the process. Mr Walker agreed that, in the past, there had not been a coherent approach, however there were now standardised letter templates which, in the last paragraph, informed people what they could do if they were still unhappy with the response provided.

With regards to sheltered housing schemes Mr Walker stated that there were 16 in Rushcliffe and that as a company Metropolitan Housing had supported 5,447 people in 2012/13. These schemes were managed by the Care and Support Directive which was undergoing a review and restructure. Within the current economic climate and with supporting people funding reducing this would be a challenging time for this area.

In conclusion Mr Walker informed the Group of the many community projects Metropolitan Housing was involved in, including the Council's Make Cotgrave Smile project, a targeted youth programme, Ready4Work and Metroployment to help people get back to work.

It was AGREED that the work of the partnership with Metropolitan Housing be endorsed.

Councillor Mrs Smith, on behalf of the Group, thanked Mr Walker and Ms Raffell for attending the meeting and answering Members questions. She also thanked Metropolitan Housing for their input into the many community schemes, especially the Make Cotgrave Smile and Positive Futures which had had a very positive impact on the area.

#### **4. Updated List of Partnerships**

The Group considered the report of the Executive Manager - Transformation regarding the many partnerships the Council was involved in. Members were informed of the nature of the partnership, ie voluntary, statutory, contractual, etc; who was in the partnership; the Council's financial implication and how its performance was measured. Members were asked to consider the list and to ascertain if the partnership should be scrutinised.

Whilst considering the partnership Members felt that the following should be included as items in the Group's future work programme:

- Metropolitan Housing
- Waterloo, Members queried the Council's relationship with other Registered Social Landlords and it was noted that there was no relationship between the Council and the other providers
- Choice Based Lettings, officers suggested combining this with scrutiny of the strategic housing service. It was noted that this scheme had been scrutinised in its development and introduction stages but Members felt that it was now appropriate to scrutinise again.
- Community Safety Partnership, it was felt that a possible topic could be health related aspects of community safety e.g. alcohol abuse, with representation from the Police and the Clinical Commissioning Group
- Positive Futures, this had been scrutinised before the new loan and the plan was to roll this out to other areas of the Borough
- Safeguarding vulnerable adults and children, it was noted that this was a formal partnership with no financial implication for the Council
- Nature Conservation
- The joint Service Level agreement with Rushcliffe Community & Voluntary Service and Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire

Other items considered, but not to be pursued at present, were:

- the recycling contract however it was noted that the strategic issues were mainly governed by the 25 year contract between Nottinghamshire County Council and Veolia
- Car parking, although at present scrutinised by the Performance Management Board this could be a topic for scrutiny arising from the forthcoming budget workshops
- Emergency planning, however it was noted that this was under the remit of the Corporate Governance Group
- Preventative Adaptations and Handy Persons services, it was noted that this was a contract with Nottinghamshire County Council and not a partnership. It had also been discussed at previous budget workshops and would probably be included in this year's potential savings
- Shared ICT services, officers explained that there was a shared vision to harmonise software across Rushcliffe, Broxtowe and Gedling to allow for closer working relationships to be developed. This was also under the remit of the Corporate Governance Group

## 5. Work Programme

The Group considered their work programme. It was agreed that the items considered in the previous agenda item should be included within the programme over the next few years. Another item for inclusion could be the East Midlands Ambulance Service. Members were asked to consider whether scrutiny or a workshop would be more beneficial.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm.

## Action Sheet

### PARTNERSHIP DELIVERY GROUP - THURSDAY 3 OCTOBER 2013

Minute Number	Actions	Officer Responsible
2. Notes of the Previous Meeting	Further information to be provided to Members regarding the DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks that had replaced the CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checks	Executive Manager - Neighbourhoods
3. Review of Partnership with Metropolitan Housing	a) The Strategic Housing Manager agreed to provide details on how many people were living in overcrowded conditions. b) Further details on who would be the Councillors point of contact at Metropolitan in January 2014.	Strategic Housing Manager  R Walker, Metropolitan Housing
5. Work Programme	The Group's work programme to be updated to include the items agreed in the previous agenda item	Member Services

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2. Notes of the Previous Meeting	Further information to be provided to Members regarding the DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks that had replaced the CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checks	Executive Manager - Neighbourhoods	
3. Review of Partnership with Metropolitan Housing	<p>a) The Strategic Housing Manager agreed to provide details on how many people were living in overcrowded conditions.</p> <p>b) Further details on who would be the Councillors point of contact at Metropolitan in January 2014.</p>	<p>Strategic Housing Manager</p> <p>R Walker, Metropolitan Housing</p>	<p>Currently there are 22 applicants that are living in overcrowded conditions. 18 were overcrowded by one bed and 4 were cases of gender overcrowding.</p> <p>Further information will be provided after Ms Watson's return</p>
5. Work Programme	The Group's work programme to be updated to include the items agreed in the previous agenda item	Member Services	