



**NOTES**  
**OF THE MEETING OF THE**  
**PARTNERSHIP DELIVERY GROUP**  
**TUESDAY 7 JANUARY 2014**

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 S J Boote

N Adie Group Head of Development, Waterloo Housing Group

M Duffy Communities and Neighbourhood Director, Waterloo  
Housing Group

C McCurdy Project Co-ordinator, Rushcliffe Advice Network

**OFFICERS PRESENT:**

J Buxton Housing Options Advisor

D Dwyer Strategic Housing Manager

D Hayden Principal Community Development Officer

K Marriott Executive Manager - Transformation

V Nightingale Senior Member Support Officer

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:**

Councillors T Vennett-Smith

**6. Declarations of Interest**

There were none declared.

**7. Notes of the Previous Meeting**

The notes of the meeting held on Thursday 3 October 2013 were accepted as a true record.

**8. Annual Review of the Partnership with Waterloo Housing Group**

The Strategic Housing Manager presented a report which highlighted the partnership between Rushcliffe Borough Council and Waterloo Housing Group. She informed the Group that Waterloo was the second largest provider of rented accommodation in the Borough, with approximately 500 properties which equated to about 10% of the stock held by Metropolitan Housing Trust. Waterloo Housing Group worked closely with the Borough Council and others as part of the Trent Valley Partnership to deliver rural housing on exception sites. Six sites, totalling 41 homes, had been completed and further homes were being developed in Cropwell Bishop. It was acknowledged that, due to the current economic climate, it was a challenge to build new properties. She stated that the success of these rural projects was

due to the close working relationship and the support of the parish councils. Other aspects of the Partnership were how Waterloo Housing Association engaged with the Choice Based Lettings scheme and worked with the Borough Council to deliver Section 106 requirements.

Mr Adie and Ms Duffy gave a presentation which outlined the work of the Waterloo Housing Group. He explained that the Group had been formed four years ago and it incorporated the Waterloo Housing Association, which had been based in the West Midlands, New Linx Housing Trust, which had been based in Lincolnshire and De Montfort Housing Society, from the East Midlands and Waterloo Homes which had specialised in the sale of shared ownership properties. The Group had 19,500 homes across 40 local authority areas.

He stated that there had been changes made during the last year to encompass all the group into one association. This had included centralising their operations and developing a new business centre in Solihull. However, he assured Members that there was still a local presence in the East Midlands with offices in Leicestershire and Louth. Following on from this amalgamation a new contact centre had been developed for all customer enquiries which operated seven days a week. This had been helped by the introduction of one IT system. Following a question he explained that there had been difficulties and that service had declined over the first six months however, he was confident that this had now been rectified.

With regard to their 2011-15 Affordable Housing Programme he was pleased to state that the programme had not been affected by the restructure. Mr Adie explained that they had been awarded £39,000,000, the largest allocation in the country, by the Homes and Community Agency to build 1,645 homes. This would consist of 1,226 to rent and 419 shared ownership properties in nine geographic areas. The Homes and Community Agency had also given grant funding to developers and Waterloo was managing 150 units on their behalf. Since the original allocation the award had risen to £42,000,000 which equated to 1,900 homes. He stated that all were on target to be completed by March 2015. At present they were awaiting the prospectus for the 2015-18 funding, for which bids would have to be submitted by April 2014 with confirmation of allocation in July. Members were informed that the Homes and Community Agency had stated that any bids this time had to be for named sites and would only be accepted for shared ownership or affordable rent properties, not social rented. Mr Adie stated that he was confident that their bid would be accepted however, it would be a challenging programme due to the rise in land values and market prices.

Within the Rushcliffe area the Waterloo Housing Group had been developing properties over 20 years and had 500 properties, mostly for rent. These were mainly in the rural villages but some were in West Bridgford and Bingham. As part of the Trent Valley Partnership 41 properties had been built and 12 were being developed in Aslockton, Tollerton, Cropwell Bishop, Kinoulton and East Bridgford. Schemes had been delayed in Costock and Gotham and were being considered at Flintham, Whatton and Orston. It was acknowledged that these sites would be challenging to deliver due to the lack of availability of any other suitable sites. Also as part of the work with the Borough Council the Group had worked on delivering Section 106 requirements, including homes in

Bingham. In response to a question Mr Adie explained that, following Section 106 agreements the developers would decide which parcel of land would be developed for affordable housing and approach a housing association to assist them to meet their obligations.

Ms Duffy completed the presentation by informing Members of their key performance indicators. She was pleased to announce that none of their properties failed the Decent Homes Standard, that 100% of properties had received a gas certificate and satisfaction with repairs and maintenance was high. Following a question she stated that overall satisfaction for shared ownership properties was 83%, this was an initial impression when the property was handed over and related to defects rather than the service received.

In relation to shared ownership Members were informed that this type of dwelling was classed as an affordable home as it allowed people to buy part of a house and rent the remaining parts. Also over time people could buy more of the home until they owned 100%. Following a question Members were advised that on an exception sites part of the criteria was that the properties remained as affordable housing in perpetuity. This could be accommodated either by an 80% restriction on purchasing the property, or if 100% purchases was allowed then the Housing Association would be approached to re-purchase the property at market value when these were sold on.

Ms Duffy described the changes Waterloo had introduced for the tenants. The estate staff now worked from home, were more visible and could provide a local service for tenants. In late December 2013 the Waterloo Group had launched a single website with a tenants' portal, where they could track their repairs, pay their accounts, calculate and find advice on benefits, and be signposted to other agencies. A new initiative which gave a discount for goods in the local area had been introduced to reward tenants for good behaviour/prompt payment. She was pleased to announce that over 1,000 people had registered for this scheme. Following a question Ms Duffy explained that Waterloo was working to support people with access to the internet by opening 'digi lounges' also all sheltered schemes had access to the internet and there were some very pro-active 'silver surfers'. She stated that it was important that tenants were encouraged to access services on line in order for them to be prepared for the implementation of Universal Credit.

Members felt that the good behaviour scheme was very innovative but had concerns for people who did not want to use direct debits. Ms Duffy explained that tenants could also pay via Allpay at many local shops. She also stated that the scheme was flexible so that tenants could build up a reserve on their account and then reduce their payments at other times. With regard to rent arrears Ms Duffy was pleased to say that following the changes to benefits tenant arrears had only increased slightly but officers were concerned that this could increase further when Universal Credit was introduced.

In relation to Members' questions regarding complaints Ms Duffy described Waterloo's three stage complaints process. She stated that very few complaints escalated to stage three and the majority were dealt with at stage one. As part of their process it had been agreed that if any complaints were not settled after stage three then they would be referred to a designated

person, who was a tenant, to make a compromise, however no complaint had reached this stage. Any cases that had been sent to the Housing Ombudsman had not resulted in a decision of maladministration.

Members had also queried the impact of the new spare room subsidy benefit cap. They were informed that 1,429 tenants were affected, 28 in the Rushcliffe area, and that these people had been visited to ascertain if they required any assistance or wished to downsize. Although this had led to a slight increase in rent arrears there were no real problems yet. Concerns were raised that if people had rent arrears then they could not move to a smaller house owned by another housing provider. Ms Duffy explained that each area had its own local board, which had been allocated a fund of money to help people to move, or clear their debt if it was solely due to under occupancy. Although it was noted that approximately 50% wished to downsize they only wished to move within their current location. It was also noted that there were people who were overcrowded and were using the Choice Based Lettings scheme to find bigger properties. Members were informed that the Waterloo Housing Group was introducing its own scheme 'Move to Homes Direct' where people could look for properties within its wider area, however this did not affect a local authorities' local connections criteria.

In response to a question regarding people who occupied an adapted property the –Strategic Housing Manager 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.

With regard to what properties were built Mr Adie explained that, on the rural exception sites, a housing needs survey was carried out. On other sites it was envisaged that there would be a mix of accommodation however the site had to be viable. 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.

In response to a question regarding properties at Kinoulton Mr Adie explained that the housing market had just crashed when this scheme had been completed, which resulted in properties being left empty for longer than anticipated. This resulted in some maintenance issues arising outside the defects period and it was later recognised that there had been no procedure in place to address this issue and the eco-heating and ground water harvesting systems were then recommissioned at Waterloo's expense. It was also accepted that this new technology was not always understood by the occupants even though instructions and training were provided at the outset as its usage was different to the conventional gas heaters. Members were informed that similar technology would be used on a site near Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire. It was part of Waterloo's practices to use renewable energy, however by improving the fabric of the buildings they could achieve the new Homes and Communities design and quality standards without the need for the same technology to be used in all cases ie the ground water harvesting systems.

It was AGREED that the Partnership Delivery Group endorsed the work of the Partnership.

The Chairman thanked Mr Adie and Ms Dufy for attending the meeting, their informative presentation and answering Members' questions.

#### **9. Review of the Partnership with Rushcliffe Advice Network (RAN)**

The Principal Community Development Officer presented the second report detailing the work undertaken by the Rushcliffe Advice Network. He explained that there had been a successful bid to the Big Lottery in 2011 by the Borough Council, Rushcliffe Community & Voluntary Service and other partners which had resulted in the Network being created to assist and support the advice groups in the Borough. The Network provided training for the volunteers and helped to improve the availability and consistency of the advice given by all the groups. Performance indicators had been developed to ensure that the Network was meeting the criteria of the funding received and these were reported as part of this review of the second year of the five year project.

Ms McCurdy gave a presentation which outlined the trends and demands of year two, their key challenges and future plans. She informed the Group that there had been an increasing number of debt and benefit advice requests which was mainly as a result of the new welfare benefit reforms. The Network had assisted with 114 tribunals during the year and were pleased to state that many of these had been won 'on paper'. These included appeals against being determined fit to work and sanctions imposed by the Department of Work and Pensions. Following on from the new reforms the Network had introduced drop in training sessions to assist the advisors. As advice numbers were growing the Network was considering where the advice centres were and were looking to expand into Keyworth and Bingham. Also this year they had been working in partnership with the Borough Council on the Universal Credit pilot scheme. Ms McCurdy stated that as the Network had office space within the Civic Centre it had helped them to develop a proactive and strong working relationship with the Borough Council, especially the Revenue and Benefit section.

In relation to the advice given Members were informed that this varied from specialist support, including access to legal information, income tax advice, to signposting people to other agencies such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau. In respect of tribunals the Network had helped people to be awarded over £203,000 and it was estimated that over £900,000 had been gained from benefit advice. Members were also informed that advice for debt totalling £525,704 had been recorded. One of the actions for this year had been to ensure that all debt was recorded accurately and consistently which had not happened in year one, as this would help to identify if the problem was rising or not. Other key challenges for this year included further data matching, funding, awareness raising and increasing the number of volunteers and opening hours in the Borough. In response to a question Members were informed that it was often difficult to get feedback from clients as this was often an extremely stressful time.

Ms McCurdy concluded her presentation by highlighting the Network's future plans. It was envisaged that, by the end of the project, all the centres would

be sustainable and that there would be skilled and confident volunteers that were appropriately trained. It was anticipated that there would be better access to services for the rural communities and continued support for residents to access benefits and deal with debts.

With regards to the specialist support Members were informed that each centre had access to a currently practising solicitor and other volunteers were often retired people with a background in welfare rights, social workers, solicitors and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. Ms McCurdy stated that volunteers worked in pairs as this built up their confidence and breadth of knowledge.

The Group asked for an update on the proposal to open a new centre in Keyworth. Ms McCurdy explained that there were some volunteers that had expressed an interest in working at a centre; two venues had been considered and two other centres had stated that they will help support the new centre when it opens. There would be an event held at the end January to raise awareness and encourage people to volunteer. It was hoped that any new volunteers could then start training in February. She stated that the Customer Services Manager had been working with the Network to understand the potential demand. The proposal was that the new centre would open for one session a week and then increase this when appropriate.

Following a discussion on the impact of national policy on residents Ms McCurdy stated that the Nottinghamshire advice centres do discuss case studies and present a collective voice to Central Government.

In respect of funding Members were informed that it would be unlikely that a further bid to the Lottery would be supported and therefore it was important that alternative funding was investigated. Ms McCurdy hoped that the role of the consultant advisor could continue. She stated that trying to raise funding was time consuming for many volunteers. At present she was helping one centre which was in need of funding to continue but this was a continual cycle for the centre and she was hopeful that, yet again, they would secure the money required. Other avenues that were being investigated included discussions with the Citizen's Advice Bureau who as a registered charity could act as a conduit.

In conclusion, the Principal Community Development Officer explained that the Network was progressing well, that it was introducing consistent practices across the Borough and was capturing data about who was being helped and why. It was envisaged that the data collected would provide evidence for a future business case.

It was AGREED that Members endorsed the work of the partnership with Rushcliffe Advice Network (RAN).

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

10. **Work Programme**

The Group considered its work programme. Members were asked to consider any questions they would like to submit for the next meeting when the Group would be considering the work of the South Nottinghamshire Community Safety Partnership, Members were reminded that the Group had wanted to focus on the health aspects of the work especially the problems associated with drugs and alcohol. Officers explained that representatives from the Clinical Commissioning Group would be attending.

The Group noted that, at its meeting in July, it would be scrutinising the Service Level Agreement between the Council and the Rushcliffe Community & Voluntary Service and Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire; this would look at the second year of the three year agreement.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm.

**Action Sheet**

**PARTNERSHIP DELIVERY GROUP - TUESDAY 7 JANUARY 2014**

Minute Number	Actions	Officer Responsible
There were no actions recorded.		