



**NOTES  
OF THE MEETING OF THE  
PARTNERSHIP DELIVERY GROUP  
THURSDAY 8 JANUARY 2015**

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, J E Fearon, J E Greenwood, E J Lungley, Mrs M Stockwood, J G A Wheeler

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

Councillor S J Boote.

N Adie Group Head of Development, Waterloo Housing

M Duffy Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods, Waterloo Housing

C Grainger Chief Executive, Healthwatch Nottinghamshire

**OFFICERS PRESENT:**

D Dwyer Strategic Housing Manager

E Mano Housing Options Team Leader

K Marriott Executive Manager – Transformation

V Nightingale Senior Member Support Officer

C Taylor Community Development Manager

**APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE:**

Councillor T Vennett-Smith

**12. Councillor J Greenwood**

The Chairman, on behalf of the Group, congratulated Councillor J Greenwood on receiving a British Empire Medal in the New Year's Honours' List.

**13. Declarations of Interest**

There were none declared.

**14. Notes of the Previous Meeting**

The notes of the meeting held on Wednesday 15 October 2014 were accepted as a true record.

In respect of Metropolitan Housing Members were informed that, following a review, that Mr Maxwell was now the Regional Director for both the north and south regions and that Mr Walker had left the company. It was envisaged that Ms Watson, who had been the contact person for Members would attend the Group's meeting in October. The Executive Manager - Transformation stated that she had spoken to Metropolitan Housing Trust and emphasised that Members valued continuity.

With regard to service charges Members queried the service charge for replacing a roof and were informed that this would refer to shared ownership properties.

At the last meeting the Group had queried the turnaround time for properties. Metropolitan Housing Trust had provided a response of 57 days on average. Members felt that this length of time was unacceptable. Officers explained that there had been a problem with the previous maintenance contractors and that since the contract had been let to another company there had been an improvement. Officers agreed to ask for further clarification on Metropolitan's targets for turning properties around and how the performance measured up.

## 15. **Healthwatch**

The Community Development Manager presented a report regarding Healthwatch Nottinghamshire. He explained that this organisation had been created in April 2013 as a result of the Social Care Act 2012. One of its main aims was to gather and represent the views of the public/users of services. He stated that the organisation had attended some of the Council's events in order to promote themselves. He introduced the Chief Executive of Healthwatch Nottinghamshire Claire Grainger to address the Group.

Ms Grainger gave a presentation which explained the work being undertaken by the county-wide organisation, its statutory powers and how it linked in to the national body, Healthwatch England. Also on a local level the organisation was a member of the Health and Wellbeing Board. She stated that, unlike previous organisations, their remit covered health and social care for children, young people and adults. It had been recognised that young people and children should be given the opportunity to engage in the process.

Members were informed that the organisation comprised a Board, an Advisory Group, a Prioritisation Panel, a staff team and a Volunteer team. She was pleased to say that the Volunteer team was growing and that this included some specialist volunteers, including dementia champions.

Ms Grainger explained that as an organisation they actively sought people's concerns and issues and collated information from other sources to help identify trends and patterns. If a trend was identified then they undertook an 'Insight Project' to gather more detailed information and data. From all their data and information reports were collated for service providers, health commissioners and regulators, such as the Care Quality Commission. Following a question she explained that each geographical area had a Healthwatch organisation and that there was a quarterly meeting so that information could be shared across the region as it was recognised that people could access health services from other areas.

Specifically in Rushcliffe, there had been a number of 'Coffee and Chat' events, which had been attended by 121 people. It was envisaged that there would be more sessions held but that these would link into events that were already held in the Borough, such as exercise classes, tea dances, etc. There was an online 'Have your Say' point at the Rushcliffe Community Contact Centre where people could leave their feedback. Contacts had been made with local care homes and other organisations and it had been identified that

people in care homes found it difficult to access many services, such as dental treatment. Also visits had been made to schools and youth groups to engage with local children and young people. Also the organisation was supporting the South Notts Health and Social Care Transformation work.

In conclusion, Ms Grainger outlined their website and how the software behind it helped to analyse the information received. She stated that the organisation was keen to work with local councils and Councillors and asked Members to provide feedback on any information they were given and to encourage people to contact Healthwatch Nottinghamshire to give their views and experiences. She also said that they would like to help with any work that the Council was doing locally or to provide any information that they had collected about services in the area.

Following a question Ms Grainger stated that the organisation had been operational for nearly two years and they had had some impact. It had taken some time for the organisation to publicise itself and for people to know how to give their feedback. She said that over the initial 15 months they had gathered a wide range of knowledge about services and that they would now be able to focus on issues. One issue that had been identified from the 'Coffee and Chat' sessions was people's ability to make appointments with their GP's. They would now consider the different methods and give feedback on what was considered best practice.

Following a discussion regarding a particular issue for renal patients in respect of parking it was recognised that the lack of parking spaces at all hospital sites was a wider issue, which had gathered momentum on social media. Ms Grainger stated that the Chief Executive of the Nottingham University Hospitals was aware of the issue.

In respect of other useful organisations/associations Members suggested that information could be obtained from the Stroke Association and that the University of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age could be contacted regarding future 'Coffee and Chat' meetings.

Members were concerned with the length of time taken at the City Hospital to obtain a prescription, it was felt that this had an impact on bed management. Ms Grainger informed the Group that the slow service had been acknowledged and that extra staff were being recruited.

In respect of mental health issues Ms Grainger was pleased to say that there had been a focus on dementia and that two volunteers were now champions and had been given training. She said that they had to be proactive as this was a difficult group to reach, however approximately 100 comments had been received and an interim report was being produced to identify where further work was required.

The Chairman thanked Ms Grainger for her informative presentation and for answering Members' questions.

RESOLVED that the Group had considered the work carried out and how it linked into the priorities in Rushcliffe.

## 16. **Waterloo Housing Group Annual Partnership Review**

The Strategic Housing Manager presented the report regarding the Council's partnership with the Waterloo Housing Group. She stated that the Group was the second largest housing provider in the Borough and that it worked closely with the Council as part of the Trent Valley Partnership, which provided affordable houses in the rural areas. She outlined the significant issues in relation to rural exception sites and how the Group had developed 53 homes on seven sites. She explained that the Group had received £1.5 million grant funding from the Homes and Communities Agency and £450,000 from the Borough Council. She emphasised that any rural exception site needed the support of the parish council.

Mr Adie gave a presentation on the work of the Group. He stated that two schemes had been completed during the year. One at Cropwell Bishop, which had provided eight houses for affordable rent and four for shared ownership. The other scheme, which was not a rural exception site, was at Bingham. This had produced 27 properties, 22 for affordable rent and five for shared ownership. There was a mix of housing with 10 flats and 17 houses. Mr Adie explained that the number of sites was less than in previous years as it was becoming more difficult to find suitable, available sites. He stated that the villages under consideration at the moment were Sutton Bonington, Whatton, Costock, Flintham and Gotham.

Members were informed that as part of the Homes and Communities Agency's 2011-2015 programme all properties had to be completed by the end of March 2015. Last year the Waterloo Group had bid for the 2015-2018 programme and had been allocated £52 million across the Midlands to provide 2,750 new homes. It was anticipated that there would be 170 units in the Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire area. He explained that only 50% of the funding had been allocated and that there was a possible £1 billion to bid for which could assist if new schemes came forward during the three years. Following a question Members were informed that there were different levels of subsidies for properties, with shared ownership receiving less than properties for affordable rent.

Ms Duffy continued the presentation explaining the Group's operational work during the first three quarters of the year. There had been 35 void properties in Rushcliffe which equated to a 7% turnover, with 50% of all properties advertised via Homesearch, the Council's Choice Based Lettings scheme. She stated that the Group also used Homes Direct which was a national scheme.

In respect of stock improvements and responsive repairs Members were informed that the Group had committed in excess of £375,000 to spend in 2014/15. This was mainly being targeted at improving the energy efficiency of the properties and sheltered dwellings' facilities. This would be achieved by replacing inefficient boilers, communal lighting, a warden call system and upgrading the lifts at Epperstone Court.

With regard to anti-social behaviour Ms Duffy stated that there had been 37 cases, with 49% relating to noise, 19% to verbal abuse and 14% to drug use, which was consistent with national trends. No legal action had been taken,

one case had been progressed through mediation and there had been two acceptable behaviour agreements signed. The Group had a specialist anti-social behaviour co-ordinator and the Group was increasingly using 'good neighbourhood agreements' on new schemes and hotspot areas. She was pleased to say that these were being successful.

Ms Duffy gave Members an update on the Group's work in relation to welfare reforms. There was an internal working group which was profiling the impact on tenants and how they could be supported. Customer data was being improved to help target assistance and they were working with the Department of Work and Pensions and the Council's benefits sections to ensure that tenants maximised their entitlement. As there was now an emphasis on on-line applications the Group was working on digital inclusion initiatives, including an internet café at one of their sites, which had already been accessed by over 100 people. In Rushcliffe 17 tenants had been affected by the spare room subsidy and the Group had introduced a 'best use of stock' budget which assisted people who were willing to downsize move. Also there was a tenancy support team who could assist people access grants. One of the main issues that had been identified was that benefit payments were not paid on the same date and that housing benefit was paid every four weeks.

In respect of income recovery Ms Duffy explained that the Group had a set procedure which involved a 'pre-action protocol' which aimed to put in support for tenants and to set up an agreement. She stated that court action was the last resort. The Group had an arrangement with Birmingham Settlement which gave independent, impartial advice. Of the 365 general tenancies there were average arrears of £368. However, approximately 50% of these tenants would be in receipt of housing benefit which was paid in arrears.

Ms Duffy explained the Group's complaints process which had a three stage process, although very few went to the third stage the complaints panel. With regard to customer services all calls went to the Group's contact centre in Birmingham. Members were reassured that this was an 0800 number.

Members were informed that tenants were involved in the running of the service through scrutiny panels and local boards. Residents had online engagement through a tenants' portal. Other initiatives included a hardship fund which was managed by the local boards and a dream scheme fund where tenants could bid for money for community projects or events.

Following a query Members were informed that new build properties were let within two days after the developer had finished, with the majority being handed over on the same day. As for rented properties these were advertised during the months' notice period and it was envisaged that they would be relet within 15 days unless there was any major damage. With regard to sheltered accommodation, repairs were done sympathetically and following consultation with the tenant.

The Chairman thanked Ms Duffy and Mr Adie for their presentation and for answering Members' questions.

RESOLVED that the Group had considered, and endorsed, the work of the partnership.

## 17. Choice Based Lettings

The Strategic Housing Manager informed Members of the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme. She explained that following the introduction of the new Housing Allocations Policy in November 2013 the number of people who qualified to join the scheme had reduced to approximately 500 people. Under the new policy people had to have both a housing need and a local connection to qualify. Members were informed that there were some exceptions; anyone from the armed forces who had a housing need could join without a local connection and people over 50 could join the scheme without a housing need but they were restricted to bidding on sheltered properties only. Following a question Members were informed that due to the low demand for sheltered housing the age had been set low. Members also asked if cases of domestic violence were classed as exceptions. The Strategic Housing Manager explained that all cases of domestic violence were treated sympathetically and investigated through the homeless route or where appropriate considered as an urgent move through CBL.

Properties were advertised via the Homesearch CBL scheme which was operated in conjunction with Gedling and Broxtowe Borough Councils. She stated that each council had its own, slightly different allocations policy and that there was restricted mobility between the Boroughs.

She explained how people used the Homesearch system, how the properties were publicised and how the person with the highest need, and who had been on the waiting list the longest, was offered the tenancy.

The Strategic Housing Manager explained that, despite the changes to the allocations policy, there was still the same number of people applying to join this year. The number of properties being let through the scheme was gradually increasing. From analysing the applications it was noted that the majority of people were in band 3. People applying and qualifying for bands 1 and 2 were consistent with lettings and these numbers were low enough for staff to actively manage their applications and assist people. Officers were pleased to say that over 85% of all applicants were actively bidding. Mainly bids were made online through the website with a third of people using the autobid facility. Text messaging had been one of the bidding process when the system had been set up, however due to the very low numbers of texts received this had been discontinued.

The Strategic Housing Manager explained that in the 12 months since the policy had changed there had been 6,665 bids made. This was 10% fewer bids than the year before but due to the smaller number of people on the register this equated to more bids per person.

Following an analysis of the register it was noted that there was approximately 14% of people from minority ethnic backgrounds, which was twice the proportion of the population of the Borough; disabled applicants made up 55% of the register, and they received 44% of all the lettings. Although there was 66% of current applicants over 50 years of age the majority of lettings went to people under 50 as they were mainly in the higher bands. Officers were pleased to say that age was not a barrier to people using the system.

With regard to preventing homelessness Members were informed that the new allocations policy was working well. There had been 254 cases during 2013/14, with 33 formal applications and 13 cases being accepted. Social housing was a key tool to prevent homelessness but officers also used private renting, problem resolution and mediation.

Members were pleased to note that the new policy was being successful and that this was evidenced by the number of bids having increased, the age difference in people bidding having been eliminated and that the average length of stay in Hound Lodge had been reduced. Also 21 applicants had been given band 2 priority due to medical conditions, 1 armed forces personnel had been given a 9 months 'headstart' and 34 working applicants had been given a 6 months 'headstart'. Cross-borough mobility had stayed at the same level as before the change, which ensured that Rushcliffe residents were given priority for properties in the Borough.

In conclusion, the Strategic Housing Manager stated that in 2015 a dedicated mobile website was being rolled out as more than 50% of people accessed the system via a mobile device. Another priority for the service was to continue to increase the bidding rate and support the corporate priority to move services online.

Following a question the Strategic Housing Manager stated that providers reviewed their housing stock to ensure that they were providing the mix of properties that were required. She emphasised the fact that there were a large supply of three bedroomed properties but not many two bedroomed. Also some of the properties for older people did not meet demand and became very hard to let, these properties were assessed and if required demolished and new properties built.

Members felt that the scheme was working well. It was felt that, following the elections in May 2015, this topic should be explained to all the newly elected Councillors.

RESOLVED that the Group had considered the report and would undertake a bi-annual review of the Choice Based Lettings scheme.

## 18. **Work Programme**

The Group considered their work programme. It was noted that representatives from the Police would be invited to the next meeting to discuss the work of the South Nottinghamshire Community Safety Partnership. Members were asked to email any questions they wished to be addressed.

In July 2015 the Group would be considering the garage co-operation agreement and the Rushcliffe Business Partnership. Members noted that neither of these had been considered before.

Members felt that meetings should not include more than two substantive items.

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm.

**Action Sheet**  
**PARTNERSHIP DELIVERY GROUP - THURSDAY 8 JANUARY 2015**

Minute Number	Actions	Officer Responsible
	There were no actions recorded	