



**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY GROUP
THURSDAY, 27 JANUARY 2022**

Held at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Rushcliffe Arena, Rugby Road, West
Bridgford

PRESENT:

Councillors J Wheeler (Chairman), B Bansal (Vice-Chairman), G Dickman,
L Healy, R Jones, R Mallender, R Walker and G Williams

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

D Burch	Service Manager - Neighbourhoods
D Dwyer	Strategic Housing Manager
M Housden	Democratic Services Officer
E Palmer	Communications and Customer Services Manager
L Webb	Democratic Services Officer

APOLOGIES:

Councillors F Purdue-Horan

11 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

12 Minutes of the Meeting 7 October 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2021 were approved as a true record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman updated the group regarding the action “discussion to take place with the local education authority about methods to educate boys about violence against women” and informed the Group that he was going to hold a meeting with the Chairman of the Children and Young People Committee at Nottinghamshire County Council and would provide an update at the next meeting.

13 Housing Delivery Plan

The Strategic Housing Manager presented the report of the Executive Manager – Neighbourhoods which sets out the Council’s Housing Delivery Plan 2022 to 2027. It was noted that the Housing Delivery Plan would be an overarching document which set out priorities for housing and the actions being taken to secure improvements. It was explained that the proposed plan aimed to link the housing service more closely with corporate priorities, for example the Carbon Management Plan and the South Nottinghamshire Homelessness Strategy. It also aimed to focus clearly measurable targets as opposed to aspirational

assertions.

The Strategic Housing Manager delivered a presentation to the Group which covered:

- Background and Context
- Purpose of Housing Delivery Plan
- Priorities
- Priority 1 – Affordability and Sustainable Housing
- Priority 2 – Housing Quality and Environmental Sustainability
- Priority 3 – Homelessness and Support
- Conclusion

Following the presentation, members of the group asked questions regarding housing available for independent older residents who would like to downsize to bungalows in order for larger family homes to be released. The Strategic Housing Manager informed the Group that it was more challenging to deliver bungalows due to the increased land take and associated costs which may impact on site viability. However, the provision of bungalows was important to support downsizing for older tenants who may be under-occupying family housing. Bungalows would also meet the needs of older and vulnerable people with disabilities who otherwise would have to rely on adaptations to their current accommodation which may only provide a temporary solution. Through successful affordable housing negotiations, a mix of affordable accommodation types, including bungalows were planned on the Council's strategic sites. The Group asked for further information from the planning department regarding what controls they have over bungalows being turned into houses. It was also suggested that the colours in the pie chart at 2.5 be changed to better distinguish the number of bedrooms available.

It was explained that there was a higher need for social rented accommodation rather than affordable housing for sale such as shared ownership and therefore any opportunities to bring forward additional affordable housing would seek to prioritise social rented housing.

The Group also asked questions about the Council's work to secure homes that have been empty for a long time. It was explained that whilst enforcement action and Empty Development Management Orders were options the Council could consider, in the first instance Officers would support owners to bring the properties back into use as a preferred approach. It was agreed that the Group would be provided with further information with a breakdown of the long-term empty homes in Rushcliffe and what action has been taken by the Council to bring them back into occupation.

Clarification was asked on the supply and demand for affordable housing. The Strategic Housing Manager advised that there were approximately 600 people on the housing register, the majority of which could not afford to purchase affordable housing for sale. It was explained that up to 40% of affordable housing delivered on new sites would be affordable housing for sale and not all sites achieved the policy compliant position due to viability, therefore the net need could not easily be achieved by having regard to the overall number of affordable units delivered. This would be further compounded by the

introduction of First Homes, the new affordable housing discount market sale product, which should make up at least 25% of the affordable housing units built on any Section 106 site. Members were advised that this change in policy would likely reduce the overall number of social rented housing units delivered in the borough and impact on housing register waiting times.

The Group raised their concerns about homelessness within the Borough. The Strategic Housing Manager informed the Group that the annual Rough Sleepers Count in 2021, had identified four rough sleepers in Rushcliffe who were 'bedded down' and met the evidence-based criteria. The Group were informed that the Council had a number of landlord incentives to house homeless people in private rented accommodation including rent deposit guarantees, rent in advance and Golden Hello' payments which resulted in a six-month assured shorthold tenancy. It was also noted that two successful bids to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities as part of the Next Steps Accommodation Programme and the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme had provided thirteen units of supported accommodation for rough sleepers across south Nottinghamshire. In addition, a fourth successful countywide bid for Rough Sleeper Initiatives funding had provided homeless people with access to floating support services, health and wound care, a Community Psychiatric Nurse, substance and misuse services and landlord liaison officers to facilitate access to private rented accommodation. The Group were pleased to note that veterans were not disadvantaged in accessing the housing register due to local connection criteria and if they qualified for housing, they were given additional preference.

It was RESOLVED that

- a) The report of the Director – Neighbourhoods be noted.
- b) the planning department regarding what controls they have over bungalows being turned into houses.
- c) the colours in the pie chart at 2.5 be changed to better distinguish the number of bedrooms available.
- d) the Group would be provided with further information with a breakdown of the long term empty homes in Rushcliffe and what action has been taken by the Council to bring them back into occupation.

14 Feedback on Residents Survey 2021

The Communications and Customer Services Manager presented the report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services which outlined the results of the residents survey that took place in summer 2021. It was explained that the Residents' Survey was conducted every three years and asked for feedback from residents on key Council services and suggestions for making the Borough an even better place to live and work.

The Group were informed that there was a small downward trend in the levels of satisfaction indicated by residents in a number of areas which was anticipated given the impact of the COVID-19 over the last 18-months on Rushcliffe communities. It was noted that the Local Government Association has reported that councils who surveyed this year are seeing a drop of 4-6% on previous results – due to the COVID impact and that in local government

surveys residents tend to group all public service providers together and it is often not clear whether views are directed specifically to Borough Council or other parts of the public sector.

The Communications and Customer Services Manager summarised the results of the survey and was pleased to note that out of the 23 questions asked, five were above 80%. However, nine questions solicited a response of less than 60%. It was also highlighted that the largest proportion of less positive comments related to services run by the County Council – out of 264 comments overall, the largest number related to potholes, road and pavement maintenance. In addition, 68 comments were made in regards to services provided by the Police including anti-social behaviour associated with teenagers in villages and the perception that a greater police presence was needed. It was concluded that the fact that so many residents left feedback that relates to other organisations suggests that there is still a lack of understanding of which organisation does what and so feedback that related to levels of satisfaction may also be influenced positively or negatively by residents' perceptions of services that the Borough Council does not provide.

Following the results of the residents survey it was suggested in the report that a focus group be formed so that the Council can target its response to the survey feedback in areas where it believes it can make a measurable difference as well as continuing to deliver positive communications to influence views in other areas. It was anticipated that the focus group would seek to formalise an action plan from its discussions but also other ways the Council can keep residents informed in line with its 2022-2025 Communications Strategy, set to be finalised this Spring.

It was proposed by the Group that the next residents survey in 2024 should ask for residents to submit their postcode so that issues raised could be narrowed down by area. It was also recommended that the survey take place at a different time of year rather than the summer to see if different concerns are raised. The Group suggested that the survey should be promoted on social media including local Facebook groups and at parish council meetings.

The Group provided suggestions for the Council's communications strategy for example, the work of WISE in providing enforcement for littering and fly tipping and the consequences of littering and how it harms the environment. It was also suggested that the contact centre needs to be more prominent as many residents did not know where it was located.

The Group raised concerns about the purpose of the focus group. It was noted that residents involved in the focus group would more than likely be those who already engage with the Council. It was suggested that the Council should reach out to community groups such as the West Bridgford Community Association to improve engagement for example, asking for suggestions about how residents can celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. The Group also suggested that the action plan resulting from the survey should be presented at a future Communities Scrutiny Group meeting before being approved.

The Service Manager - Neighbourhoods advised the group that it was important to note and focus on the fact that the percentage of people having

overall satisfaction in the local area as a place to live remained very high at 84% and had slightly increased since the previous survey. He suggested that rather than re-scrutinise and agree any future action plan the group may wish to consider that any action plan is shared with the group.

It was RESOLVED that

- a) The report of the Executive Manager – Finance and Corporate Services be noted.
- b) An action plan be produced following the results of the survey and for the action plan to be scrutinised by the Communities Scrutiny Group for approval.
- c) The Service Manager – Neighbourhoods raise the concerns about the creation of a focus group and facilitate further discussions with the Chairman, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Customer Access and the Director – Finance and Corporate Services and provide an update at the next meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Group.

15 **Work Programme**

The Chairman presented the report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services, which detailed the proposed Communities Scrutiny Group Work Programme for 2021/22.

It was RESOLVED that the work programme below be approved.

28 April 2022

- Waste Strategy
- Carbon Management Plan

The meeting closed at 9.23 pm.

CHAIRMAN