

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

HOUSING REPAIRS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Wednesday, 15 November 2006

PRESENT:

Councillor Anjona Roy (Chair)
Councillor Sally Beardsworth
Councillor Michael Hill
Councillor Elizabeth Tavener
Ann Timson (Co-Optee)
Norman Adams (Co-Optee)

Carl Grimmer	Corporate Manager
Richard Fitzhenry	Property Maintenance Manager
Bob Turrell	Corporate Property Manager (Voids) (Item 7)
Dale Robertson	Performance Manager (Item 3)
Tracy Tiff	Scrutiny Officer
Margaret Martin	Consortium

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Malpas.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2006

Subject to Councillor Michael Hill being removed from the list of attendees and the following amended to read:-

B Turrell confirmed that he **would** provide details of the seven properties.

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2006 were agreed as a true record.

3. BVPI INFORMATION

D Robertson, Performance Manager, provided Best Value Performance Information in relation to Housing Repairs. The Service Managers would provide information on local performance indicators.

The Group was informed that:-

B184a – The proportion of local authority homes which were

non-decent at 1 April

BV184b – The percentage change in proportion of non-decent local authority homes between 1 April and 31 March

Both of the above Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI's) are reported annually, usually in April, for the previous year. This is because the data about decent homes work, which is essentially any maintenance works which affects a property's decent status, carried out on every property during the year, is batched up and loaded onto the Stock Condition Survey once a year by an External Consultant.

The Stock Condition Survey reports the information from which the Authority runs the decent homes BVPI's.

Therefore, the report dated April 2006 stated:

BV184a - 25.4% (the amount of non decent at April 2006).

BV184b - $25.4\% - 21.4\% / 25.4\% = 15.74\%$. (the percentage change in proportion of non-decent homes between 1 April and 31 March)

KPMG has confirmed that the above calculation methodology is acceptable.

R Fitzhenry, Property Maintenance Manager, advised that the local performance indicators HPL12, LPI: HPL13, HPL15, HPLI6, PL19 and BV1212 are revised annually. It was emphasised that the fitness standard will be replaced with the health and safety standard.

The target for BVPI212 (average time to re-let Local Authority housing) is 50 days. The service is attempting to achieve 35 days by the end of this financial year. C Grimmer confirmed that it was recently reported that this figure had improved to 45 days. It was recognised that this was an area that required improvement and actions were in place.

D Robertson advised that the Authority had successfully challenged the Audit Commission regarding the method that it had audited the Council on BVP1212.

The Group heard that during the first three months of this year 85 properties were re-let. Over the last three months this had improved to 122 properties.

The total number of void properties during May/June 2006 were 392, this figure had reduced to 306 in November 2006.

B Turrell confirmed that he could provide details of void properties for the last four years. Figures for this and last year were given:-

2006

August	91
September	109

October 103

2005

August 82

September 63

October 44

In response to the Chair's concerns regarding the inconsistency of reporting for BV212, B Turrell confirmed that this could be checked and he emphasised that PWC and KPMG are currently auditing these BVPIs and the report would be available within the next two weeks.

The Group asked questions and heard:-

- Satisfaction Indicators BVP174a, 74b, 74c and BVP175a, 75b and 75c are assessed tri-annually.
- MORI is undertaking the survey for tri-annual BVPIs and the results are due around February 2007.
- No information was reported for April for local indicator HPL16 (percentage of tenants satisfied with the quality of repairs) due to the fact that the new system *Uniclass Enterprise* had been introduced at this time.
- Questionnaires are now issued with every repair and maintenance job.
- The Improvement Delivery Plan supersedes the Recovery Plan.
- The Property Maintenance Service review is now complete and it is envisaged that vacant posts will be filled imminently.

4. TASK AND FINISH GROUP'S INPUT INTO DRAFT CORE QUESTIONS TO BE PUT TO THE PORTFOLIO HOLDERS (LOCAL ENVIRONMENT) AND (RESIDENTIAL OPERATIONS)

The Chair advised that the draft core questions to be put to the Portfolio Holders – Councillors Flavell and Miah had been reduced and were relevant to the review scope. She added that it was possible that the scope was too broad and it might be salient to see whether it could be narrowed down.

In response to a comment that the questions were not entirely in plain English, the Chair agreed to reword them and forward a copy to both Portfolio Holders in advance of the meeting.

AGREED: That the core questions to the Portfolio Holders be reworded and forwarded to the Portfolio Holders – Councillors Flavell and Miah in advance of the next meeting.

5. DOOR ENTRY SYSTEM

The Group received a report that detailed the progress made against each individual recommendation contained in the report to a previous Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2004. R Fitzhenry advised that some of the

recommendations had not been actioned.

The Group commented:-

- Some of the recommendations contained in the previous Overview and Scrutiny report had been actioned such as the installation of steel doors in high risk areas, for example, Broadmead Avenue, an area of high vandalism and in a number of single persons accommodations blocks.
- In response to a query that this work had been carried out some two years previously, there was no available budget at present and any further budget would be subject to the Capital Programme. There is a need to establish what resources are needed for long term planning.
- There is a need to make properties safe for tenants to live in.
- It was established that the proposals had never been discussed by the (cross service) problem solving group. It had been viewed as a Housing issue, rather than and crime and disorder issue and no comprehensive attempt had been made to get this issue on the Crime and disorder Reduction agenda for the town.

6. DECENT HOMES DELIVERY AND COMPLIANCE

R Fitzhenry updated the Task and Finish Group on the strategy, delivery and compliance to the Decent Homes Standard 2010 adopted by the Council's Property Maintenance Department.

The Group asked questions and made comment:-

- During the visit to the voids properties last month the Group had been informed that if a previous tenant had put in flooring or fireplaces, such as laminate or slate flooring this would have to be removed. However, if it had been laid to a high standard, staff is instructed to leave it in the property.
- Tenants have their own perception of the Northampton Standard. R Fitzhenry emphasised that the report should have stated to deliver a Northampton Standard.
- N Adams, Co-Optee, commented that the previous report produced by Tribals (HACAS Chapman Hendy) had cost £25,000.
- R Fitzhenry advised that there is a need to consider the previous report but highlighted that it had been produced solely in respect of the Stock Options Appraisal and had been finalised in 2003. At this stage there was a need to fit in a longer-term procurement in order that value for money is obtained for the Authority.
- Concerns were raised that the initial survey allowed for just 1,700 survey inspections (13% of the stock) and that it was cloned data. Further surveys could be undertaken so that cloned data is kept to a minimum. It was emphasised that it would not be feasible to survey 100% of the stock.
- In response to a concern regarding the use of consultants to carry out the survey, R Fitzhenry apprised that the consultants were recognised as the top surveying company in this field and there were no such available skills in house.

- The Authority has an obligation to meet the Private Sector Delivery Standard by 2012.

7. VOIDS REVIEW ACTION PLAN

B Turrell advised that he had produced a version of the Voids Review Action Plan that detailed the salient points that relate to the scope.

A meeting would be held shortly regarding difficult to let properties and the difficult decisions that have to be made such as use for temporary accommodation and when they are re-let.

The Group requested that further information be given to the next meeting such as target dates for actions.

The Choice Based Lettings Manager was due to be in post shortly. It was suggested that M Spencer, Housing Services Manager, be requested to attend the next meeting to provide details on Choice Based Letting.

**AGREED: (1) That further information on difficult to let properties be given to the next meeting, such as target dates for actions.
(2) That M Spencer, Housing Services Manager, be requested to attend the next meeting to provide details on Choice Based Letting.**

8. CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND PRIORITIES

Further to the previous meeting the Chair and Councillor Beardsworth had compiled a list of questions to R Fitzhenry on Capital Programme and Priorities.

The Group made comment:-

- N Adams commented that the response to question 6 detailed that £29,000 had been spent on underpinning 37/39 Ham Meadow Drive, this should read 34-39 as the properties are a block of six.
- In response to a query regarding whether any leaseholders of the block had been charged a percentage of the cost, the Group heard that in respect of leasehold the Council takes responsibility and pays the total bill. When an individual purchases a leasehold flat they are obliged to pay ground rent. A review is currently being undertaken on service charges.
- The Chair stated that some of the questions required a more comprehensive response.

The Chair suggested that this item required further discussion and suggested that it be deferred to the next meeting for full debate. R Fitzhenry asked the Group to contact him with any comments on his written responses.

AGREED: (1) That consideration of this item be deferred to the next meeting.

(2) That the Group contacts R Fitzhenry with any comments on the written responses.

9. UPDATE - VISIT TO BEST PRACTICE COUNCIL

The Group was advised that the Chair had devised a list of potential best practice Councils for a visit to:-

- Leicester City Council
- Warwick District Council
- Charnwood Borough Council
- Ipswich Borough Council
- London Borough of Camden

Concerns were expressed regarding charges made by some Local Authorities for such a visit and it was suggested that the Scrutiny Officer contacts the above Local Authorities and arranges visits with two Local Authorities that do not make a charge for a best practice visit. Dates would then be circulated to the Group.

AGREED: That the Scrutiny Officer contacts the above Local Authorities and arranges visits with two Local Authorities that do not make a charge for a best practice visit. Dates would then be circulated to the Group.

10. REPORT BACK FROM VISIT TO VOIDS PROPERTY

The Group received a briefing note on its site visit to a selection of void properties.

The Group made comment and heard:-

- There is a need for all tenants to be informed about asbestos issues especially in properties that were built where asbestos may have been used.
- If there is an asbestos problem in a property this can delay re-let turnaround times.
- At the site visit the Group had been informed that the flooring and fireplace that had been put in by the previous tenant would be removed before the property was offered to a prospective tenant. The Council has a policy to remove all such flooring because if a property is let with such flooring, the tenant might expect the Council to maintain it.
- Regarding broken tiles on the floor at 39 Redruth Close, R Fitzhenry advised that the department now had multi skilled teams that would be able to facilitate this work.
- **AGREED:** That the Chair's final report contain details regarding the need for all tenants to be informed about asbestos issues especially in properties that were built when asbestos may have been used.

11. EXTERNAL RESEARCH - PROGRESS REPORT

It was agreed at the initial scoping meeting that evidence from an expert, such as a fellow researcher from a local University, be acquired.

Contact has been made, both by email and telephone, with De Montfort University and Northampton University regarding the possibility of either an under graduate or a post graduate student providing information or evidence to help inform this Overview and Scrutiny review which might also assist with their current studies.

Contact was made with the Universities late September and again early in October 2006 but a response has not been received from either University. It has therefore been assumed that a student is not available from either University to provide information or evidence to help inform this Overview and Scrutiny Review.

The Chair suggested that the Universities be re-contacted to ascertain whether under graduate or a post graduate student providing information or evidence to help inform this Overview and Scrutiny review which might also assist with their current studies.

AGREED: **That the Universities be re-contacted to ascertain whether under graduate or a post graduate student providing information or evidence to help inform this Overview and Scrutiny review which might also assist with their current studies.**

12. PUBLICITY POSTER FOR THE PUBLIC SESSIONS ON 25 JANUARY 2007

The draft poster promoting the Task and Finish Group's public meeting on 25 January 2007 was circulated.

AGREED: **That the poster promoting the Task and Finish Group's public meeting on 25 January 2007 be distributed to various locations such as housing offices, community centres and community rooms.**

13. SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

The schedule of meetings was agreed as:-

- 13 December 2006 4.15pm – Evidence gathering
- 25 January 2007 4.15pm and 6.30pm – Public sessions
- 15 February – 5pm – To finalise the Chair's report

Any Other Business

At this point the Chair conveyed her apprehension about the Task and Finish Group,

she was concerned that the Group could not complete its scope within its allocated timescale. She suggested that the Task and Finish Group recommends to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that it is felt that the review cannot be completed in the allocated timescale due to both political and operational issues and that the review be suspended until a later date. It was further commented that there was a need for Officer training on the Overview and Scrutiny process.

C Grimmer commented that the scope of this review was too large for the allocated timescale and it would be beneficial for it to be narrowed down.

AGREED: That the Chair recommends to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that that it is felt that the review cannot be completed in the allocated timescale due to both political and operational issues and that the review be suspended until a later date.

The meeting closed at 18.40pm