

Review Committee – 9 February 2010

Minutes of the meeting of the **Review Committee** held on **9 February 2010** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr Mrs J R Lumley
Vice-Chairman: Cllr M Maddocks

Cllr T Livings
Cllr Mrs G A Lucas-Gill

Cllr P R Robinson
Cllr M J Steptoe

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr Mrs T J Capon

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr K A Gibbs.

OFFICERS PRESENT

G Woolhouse	-	Corporate Director (External Services)
J Bourne	-	Head of Community Services
P Gowers	-	Overview and Scrutiny Officer
M Power	-	Committee Administrator

36 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

37 ROCHFORD HOUSING ASSOCIATION

The Committee heard from Emma Keegan, Managing Director of Rochford Housing Association (RHA), Maureen Vince, Chairman of RHA Board, Derek Head, Vice Chairman, Alex Coulson, Chair of Housing Committee and Rowan Kirk, Sanctuary Group Director of Development Services on how the organisation is developing and on the progress being made towards delivery of the promises made in the transfer offer document.

In response to Member questions relating to the main promises contained within the offer document, RHA representatives responded as follows:-

Aim to provide at least 50 new affordable homes each year

- The Committee expressed concern, in view of the large waiting list for housing, at the failure of RHA to achieve the aim of at least 50 new affordable homes each year. Mr Kirk advised that the Sanctuary Group was committed to delivering the stated development programme of affordable rented housing but since the stock transfer in 2007 the property market, including new-build developments, had seen a sharp down-turn in

activity. As provision of affordable housing is largely reliant on mixed tenure schemes in new-build developments, opportunities were currently difficult to find. Sanctuary Group has a pipeline programme of projects for the Rochford District, which was reliant on getting funding from HCA and being granted planning permission. It was important that a coherent joint approach by Sanctuary Group and Rochford District Council (RDC) be made for funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). As a strategic partner, RDC was committed to supporting Sanctuary in its funding bids for appropriate schemes. However, throughout the country HCA funding was becoming increasingly more difficult to obtain. Work had been undertaken to try to identify land within RDC ownership that would be suitable for development.

- The Sanctuary Group would consider all opportunities in Rochford in order to achieve its targets for the provision of affordable housing. The possibility of an acquisition programme to buy individual properties as they come onto the market, could be discussed in detail with Council officers. Buying existing housing stock that was appropriate for the needs of the District and appropriately situated was paramount. It was confirmed that Sanctuary currently has no shared ownership schemes in the Rochford District.
- One issue the District was facing was the lack of availability of land. However, it was anticipated that the Local Development Framework Core Strategy, which was due to be finalised in the summer, would identify a number of strategic sites. The Sanctuary Group confirmed it had strong contacts with large national house builders, as well as a range of regional developers, and it had impressed upon these developers that the Group had given a commitment to Rochford, however, the process of selection as a partner by house builders was often a competitive process.
- RDC officers receive a regular progress report from the RHA.
- Due to technical difficulties, it had not been possible to develop 'garage sites' that had been identified. However, it may be possible to look at these again.
- Without external funding the Sanctuary Group would not be in a position to provide a full programme of affordable housing due to prohibitive costs.

Major Repairs and Improvement Programme

- In response to a Member question asking how RHA determined what their residents wanted and how happy they are with the service offered, RHA advised that tenants are provided with regular programme updates in the tenant newsletter. Residents' views are ascertained via the Residents Forum, which meet 6 times a year and by means of surveys undertaken by independent organisations. Members of the Residents Forum also sit on the Resident Association Panel.

- To date only four residents had decided to decline to have the proposed work done to their properties. This could be for a variety of reasons and was the tenant's choice, unless it compromised health and safety.
- In response to a request from Members that they be permitted to visit and talk to tenants on an informal basis, to ascertain their views, Mrs Keegan advised that RHA would have no objection to the Ward Councillor for a property visiting a resident to ask questions. However, the RHA collates tenant feedback following completed work as well as undertaking tenant surveys, which achieve a return rate in the region of 50-75%. In a recent survey 86% of tenants had expressed satisfaction with the services offered by RHA.
- A proposal to conduct a survey of RHA tenants in the Council's publication 'Rochford District Matters' was discussed. It was noted that Sanctuary Group commissions an independent survey each year but RHA also encourages tenants to raise any specific concerns through its established complaints process. The matter could be explored further and a joint RHA/RDC survey of tenants may be possible.

Have two accessible local offices for all tenants' enquiries

- Initial feedback from a tenant consultation has indicated that tenants are happy with the location and opening hours of the existing office. It was noted that the office sees very little passing traffic and most residents will either telephone or pass their comments/complaints to the housing officers that regularly visit the estates and schemes. The final findings of the tenant consultation, which should be ready in time for the April Residents Forum meeting, would shape and determine what sort of presence a new office may take. It was felt by RHA that a second office with similar opening hours may not be necessary as it would not be well-used for reasons stated above. A Member suggestion that a regular drop in session, held in public libraries for example, was noted as a possible option. Surgeries are currently held in the RHA sheltered schemes and residents are advised of details of these in advance.

Dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

- There are very few cases of anti-social behaviour on the RHA estates (in the region of 60 per year) and the majority of these are low level. During the past two and a half years there had been only 3 cases of ASB that were serious enough to be taken to court.

In response to additional Member questions, the RHA advised that:-

- It was currently reviewing the possible introduction of a policy around Pets in Sheltered Accommodation. The issue had been taken to the Residents' Forum and was currently in the consultation phase although cases could

be reviewed on an individual basis. The Pets as Therapy Association (PAT) could provide an opportunity for residents in sheltered schemes to have access to animals.

- A Rochford Housing Association tenant could transfer to a Sanctuary Group property in another part of the country.
- In respect of the possibility of providing extra care schemes in the District, as stated in the original document, consultations had commenced to establish both the level of need and what model of provision would be appropriate for older people generally. The future of all 12 sheltered schemes would be fully appraised and, by Year 4 of the programme, there would be more detail around which of the schemes may be suitable for the provision of extra care facilities.

38 THE FORWARD PLAN

The Committee reviewed the Forward Plan and noted its contents.

07/10 Rochford Reception and office improvements

The Review Committee Chairman would meet with the Head of Legal Services to gather more detailed information about what is being proposed and would report back to Review Committee Members.

11/10 Annual Efficiency Statement

More detailed information would be provided at the next meeting regarding National Indicator 179.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm.

Chairman

Date

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