

**Minutes of:** **PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Date of Meeting:** 24<sup>th</sup> September 2012

**PRESENT:** Councillor McInnes (Chair)  
Councillors Fletcher, Knowles, Procter, Shipley,  
Morris and Roberts

Irene Divine (Co-opted Member)

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Ian Clark, Managing Director, Together Housing Group  
Liz Sandiford, Head of People and Policy  
Carolyn Sharples, Committee and Member Services Manager  
Councillor Serridge, Portfolio Holder for Customers, Legal and  
Licensing  
Councillor Hughes  
Councillor Creaser  
Councillor Gill  
Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer

2 Members of the Public

---

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

**2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

**Resolved:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2012, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**3. URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items for discussion.

**4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Morris declared an interest as he was on the Board of Capita and the Leisure Trust.

Councillor Procter declared an interest as she was on the Board of Green Vale Homes.

## **5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

The Chair agreed to deviate from the Procedure for Public Speaking and allow members of the public to ask questions as the reports were discussed.

A member of the public commented that the minutes of the last meeting suggested that the Council contact him to discuss alternative possibilities for saving fuel, but as yet nobody had been in contact. The Scrutiny Support Officer agreed to make enquiries and ask someone to make contact with the member of the public.

## **6. CHAIR'S UPDATE**

The Chair informed Members that Item D1 was for information only as the Council had authorised directed surveillance on nil occasions. No requests had been refused.

Members were asked to note that under 6.2 of the report there was information on a recent prosecution brought by the Council using evidence obtained under a RIPA authorisation last year.

## **7. PRESENTATION FROM GREEN VALE HOMES (GVH)**

Ian Clark, Managing Director, West Region of Together Housing gave a presentation to Members on Green Vale Homes, which was now part of the Together Housing Group. Ian is also responsible for Twin Valley Homes (Blackburn with Darwen) and Housing Pendle. The group also includes Pennine Housing in Calderdale, and Chevin Housing in Wakefield. Being in a large group brings big advantages for Green Vale Homes, in terms of economies of scale, better buying power and a national voice. At the same time, there will be a strong focus on local delivery through Green Vale Homes and its local board.

There were lots of legislative changes which would affect the way the Together Housing Group works.

In 2006 the Council transferred its housing stock to Green Vale Homes, with a 30 year loan from a High Street Bank. GVH were now in a position to borrow more money, as the value of their stock was more than their debt, but in the present climate it was not easy to raise more money. The group was looking to raise money through the issue of a bond, which would be used to pay off some of Green Vale's existing loan, as well as making new funds available for some new homes.

Ian went on to explain the key areas affecting the Together Housing Group, including the Welfare Reform, which was having its biggest change since the 1940s.

Universal Credit would become an 'all single benefits' into one payment. At the present time tenants pay their rent through the housing benefit system and payments go direct to the housing

association/landlordTenants will receive one monthly payment in the form of Universal Credit, and they will have to budget and arrange to pay rent, utility and other bills themselves.

Also from April 2013, housing benefit would be reduced for any tenants under pensionable age who have 'spare' bedroom/s.

In relation to performance, GVH was in the top 25% housing association nationally. On improvement works, they spent £8m in total including:

- £5m on internal work
- 275 kitchens
- 356 heating systems
- £1m on environmental
- £1.6m on solar panels

They have undertaken 18605 repairs, with an average time of 6 days and have a 93% customer satisfaction rate.

The Managing Director went on to explain other initiatives including the 'homeswapper mutual exchange' and the 'tenant repairs cash back scheme', which provides basic DIY skills training to tenants. Green Vale Homes is one of only three landlords across the country piloting the scheme, giving tenants the opportunity to earn rewards by carrying out maintenance works or minor repairs to their homes.

A number of questions were raised, which the Managing Director responded.

Ian agreed to send additional information to members in relation to welfare reform changes and any other information which would assist members in helping their constituents with enquiries about the new systems.

The Chair thanked the Managing Director for his informative presentation.

## **8. INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 1**

The Head of People and Policy presented the Quarter 1 Integrated Performance Report, indicating that Cabinet had now delegated responsibility to the Performance Scrutiny Committee to monitor and report back any underachieving targets to the Cabinet.

The report confirmed that the Council was on track to deliver all the actions it said it would deliver as detailed in the Council's Corporate Plan.

Members agreed to look at all indicators showing as being 'amber', which were as follows:

HHR15&HHR2 – Improved delivery of support mechanisms and assistance for vulnerable people. Concern was expressed about the explanation given on the number of urgent cases, asking for clarification on this and also the number of cases on the waiting list (20) and how long before these would be classed as ‘urgent’. Clarification was also sought on how the allocation of grants is assessed.

It was agreed that the Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager attend a future meeting to provide a broader explanation on the concerns raised by Members. It was noted that it would also be an opportunity for the Health Housing and Regeneration Manager to update members on any initiatives to redevelop and improve the economic prospects of Rossendale Town Centres.

F&P6 – Review current procedures and status for the control of ‘unmanaged’ open space. It was agreed that the Head of Finance and the Property Services Manager be asked to a future meeting to inform members how the Council manages risk around Council land, linked to the risk management process

L&EU9 – Finalise Service Level Agreement with Development Control in relation to Planning Enforcement. It was agreed that the Head of People and Policy provide a briefing note on the agreements within departments to hit certain targets.

The Head of People and Policy provided explanations for her service areas showing as ‘amber’.

P&P4 – Review the Sustainability Community Strategy and Rossendale Forum. The Head of People and Policy indicated that the Council was commencing consultation with Councillors in relation to areas of Council Priority. However, there were financial challenges which influenced these and the Cabinet had already indicated a strong regeneration focus. The review of the Sustainable Strategy was affected by the legislative position and she agreed to provide a written updated position on this.

LI 79bi and 79bii - regarding the number of local indicators around housing benefits/council tax, which were showing as ‘red’, it was agreed to ask the Head of Customer Services and ICT to attend a future meeting to provide detailed explanations on the reasons for the ‘red’ status, in light of issues with a computer system and how this could impact on new welfare/housing reforms coming in shortly.

LI82ai and LI82b1 – the Committee noted the downward trend in relation to household Waste Recycled and requested clarity in relation to this from the Operations Manager.

Risks - There was detailed discussion around 'Risks' and inconsistencies identified between the assessment of the current risk and the target likelihood of the risk realising. It was agreed it would be useful to understand the process that is gone through to identify the risk, the risk matrix and how this is monitored within the Council. It was agreed that a presentation to the Committee on risk management would be useful.

With regard to performance indicators for fuel, Members agreed that these indicators should continue to be monitored in some form, perhaps by looking at procurement, efficiencies or by monitoring the process used, which could lead to evidence that Council vehicles were not as efficient as they should be. It was agreed that the Director of Customers and Communities or their representative be asked to brief the Committee on the action which was being taken in relation to ensuring a value for money approach to fuel and with a view to suggesting some indicators which would be useful in monitoring this.

**Resolved:**

1. That Performance Scrutiny note the levels of performance and risks detailed in the report.
2. That Officers identified above to be asked to attend a future meeting to provide an overview and explanations on the following:
  - a) HHR15 & HHR2 – The mechanisms and assistance for vulnerable people in relation to disabled adaptations and an update on the initiatives to redevelop and improve the economic prospects of Rossendale Town Centres.
  - b) F&P6 – Review the current procedures and process in relation to managing Council land and in particular the approach to managing risks associated with land.
  - c) LI 79bi and 79bii – The red status of a number of indicators, the issue with the computer system and the impact this could have in light of any benefit changes.
  - d) LI82ai and LI82b1 – The downward trend in relation to Household Waste recycled, the actions being taken in relation to the management of fuel and some suggested PI's.
  - e) That the Head of People and Policy provide a briefing note in relation to The Service Level Agreement with Development Control in relation to Planning Enforcement and the Sustainable Community Strategy.

## 9. COUNCIL COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS REVIEW

The Committee and Member Services Manager presented a report which sets out formal complaints and compliments received during 2011/2012 and included complaints which were received from the Local Government Ombudsman.

Last year there were 142 formal complaints which was an increase of 57, however these were mainly owing to complaints about council policy and procedure and technical/legal/or regulatory issues. The customer services standards for dealing with complaints was 10 working days and the average time taken to deal with complaints was 7.57 days which was well within the required response time.

Email was becoming an increasing popular means of making a formal complaint with letters and feedback forms coming next. Formal complaints were initially registered as stage 1 complaints and out of the 142 formal complaints received 33 were progressed to stage 2 and investigated by a head of service or director (of these 33, 4 were investigated by the Ombudsman who has since closed all 4 of these complaints and discontinued their investigation).

A letter from the Local Government Ombudsman detailed 25 complaints received by the Ombudsman in 2011/2012 and how they were dealt with. Whilst 25 complaints were recorded, the Ombudsman had only notified the Council of 17 of these. There were no findings of maladministration in 2011/2012.

The average response time for Ombudsman complaints was 38.3 days which exceeded the 28 day requirement. However, the target was exceeded owing to 2 complaints for which the Ombudsman had allowed extensions, but unfortunately extensions were not taken into consideration when the Ombudsman reported on average response times.

In relation to compliments the council had received 252 compliments during 2011/2012, and as reported in the previous year the increase was mainly owing to the introduction of the STAN service.

A suggestion was made that for next year it would be beneficial to Members if a breakdown of compliments was provided, similar to that of complaints, in relation to in what format they were received eg email, letter etc.

### **Resolved:**

That the Performance Scrutiny Committee note the number of complaints received by the Council, the compliments recorded and the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Letter for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012, together with the context around the complaints, compliments and timescales outlined in the report.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and finished at 8.30pm

Signed .....  
(Chair)

Date .....