

**Minutes of the Housing and Public Realm
Scrutiny Committee
Wednesday 29th March, 2023 at 6.00 pm
At Saltwells Education Development Centre,
Bowling Green Road, Dudley, DY2 9LY**

Present:

Councillor M Westwood (Chair)
Councillor W Sullivan (Vice-Chair)
Councillors A Aston, M Aston, R Collins, J Cowell, I Kettle, K Lewis, A Millward
and P Sahota

Officers:

A Vaughan – Director of Environment, E Bradford – Head of Neighbourhood Services, N McGurk – Head of Traffic and Highways Services and J Deakin – Head of Waste and Transport Operations (Directorate of Environment), K Jones – Director of Housing and Communities and K Malpass – Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Finance and Legal).

Also in attendance

Councillor D Corfield – Cabinet Member for Highways and Public Realm,
together with one member of the public

44 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors K Casey, J Clinton and T Westwood.

45 **Appointment of Substitute Members**

It was reported that Councillor A Millward had been appointed as a substitute Member for Councillor T Westwood, for this meeting of the Committee only.

46 **Declarations of Interests**

Councillor J Cowell declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to Agenda Item No. 8 (Corporate Quarterly Performance Report – Quarter 3 (1st October to 31st December, 2022)), and Agenda Item No. 9 (Customer Experience and Consumer Regulation update), as a Council tenant.

47 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26th January, 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed.

48 **Public Forum**

Sites located at Daniels Land and High Plateau

A member of the public referred to sites located at Daniels Land and High Plateau which had been designated for housing development and urged the Local Authority to pursue the matter urgently. It was reported that in 2022 in the Office of National Statistics that 0.5 million people had left the UK, with 1 million coming into the UK, all requiring housing, which had intensified the housing crisis. Increased low cost, energy efficient one/two bedroom houses were in demand and it was considered that development on the two sites would alleviate the challenges faced by the shortage of housing.

The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the High Plateau site was not in the ownership of the Local Authority, however, she indicated that a joint response with the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise would be provided to the member of public.

Resolved

That the Directors of Housing and Communities and Regeneration and Enterprise provide a joint written response to the member of public in relation to issues associated with sites located at High Plateau and Daniels Land, which had been designated for housing development.

Key Performance Indicator - PI 1899 – Rent Loss

A member of the public referred to the 59 properties that were awaiting investment decision, outlined in the Corporate Quarterly Performance Report – Quarter 3 – 1st October to 31st December, 2022 and requested an update on the reasons why decisions were being delayed on empty properties, particularly as there was a substantial need for properties in the Borough.

The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the matter would be addressed during the presentation of the Corporate Quarterly Performance Report – Quarter 3 – 1st October to 31st December, 2022, and a response would be provided to the member of public.

Resolved

That the Director of Housing and Communities provide a written response to the member of public in relation to issues associated with rent loss and the rationale regarding investment decisions.

Review of High-Rise Properties

A member of the public requested an update on the review of high-rise properties in the Borough. The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the matter would be addressed during the presentation of the Corporate Quarterly Performance Report – Quarter 3 – 1st October to 31st December, 2022, and a response would be provided to the member of public.

Resolved

That the Director of Housing and Communities provide a written response to the member of public providing an update on the review of high-rise properties in the Borough.

49 **Action Tracker/Future Business**

In providing an update on the Action Tracker, the Chair indicated that all outstanding responses had now been actioned. He expressed his appreciation to all officers for the work carried out.

Whilst it was acknowledged that responses had been sent to the members of public in relation to Minute Nos. 28 – Housing Board and Dudley Federation of Tenants and Residents Association and High-Rise Aerial Fund on 6th March, 2023, Councillor J Cowell requested that Members of the Committee also be sent a copy of the responses.

Members were advised that the items relating to the future plans for Lister Road Depot, people and workforce, and the progress work on partnership and neighbourhood, together with the progress on grounds maintenance, green and open spaces, that were originally programmed to be considered at the meeting, had been deferred due to insufficient information being available to update Members and would be rolled over into the 2023/24 Annual Scrutiny Programme.

Resolved

- (1) That the Director of Housing and Communities forward copies of responses in relation to Minute Nos. 28 – Housing Board and Dudley Federation of Tenants and Residents Association and High-Rise Aerial Fund to all Members of the Committee.
- (2) That the items relating to future plans for the Lister Road Depot, people and workforce, and the progress work on partnership and neighbourhood, together with the progress on grounds maintenance, green and open spaces, be included in the 2023/34 Annual Scrutiny Programme for consideration.

50 **Annual Scrutiny Report 2022/23**

A report of the Lead for Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) was submitted on the annual scrutiny report for 2022/23.

Following the presentation of the report, Members were invited to suggest items for consideration for the Annual Scrutiny Programme for 2023/24.

Councillor A Aston suggested that consideration be provided to establishing separate Scrutiny Committees for Housing and Communities and Environment moving forward, as it was considered that there were

insufficient meetings scheduled throughout the year to adequately scrutinise the wide range of services each Directorate managed.

Whilst it was acknowledged that the Management and Officer structure of the Directorates of Housing and Communities and Environment had previously been circulated to Members, Councillor J Cowell requested that a more detailed version of each structure be circulated to include officer roles.

Councillor P Sahota referred to the possibility of including an item on the Directorate investment and spending programme in the draft Annual Scrutiny Programme for 2023/24. It was essential that information in relation to the Council's spending and investment programme was submitted to the Scrutiny Committee, on a six monthly basis, to observe finances, monitor progress/performance and hold officers accountable for decisions made.

Resolved

- (1) That the annual scrutiny report for 2022/23, be noted.
 - (2) That the establishment of two separate Scrutiny Committees for Housing and Communities and Environment be taken into consideration for the 2023/24 municipal year.
 - (3) That the Director of Housing and Communities and the Interim Director of Environment be requested to circulate a detailed version of the Management and Officer structure to all Members of the Committee to include officer roles.
 - (4) That the Directorate's investment and spending programme be considered as an item of business in the draft Annual Scrutiny Programme for 2023/24.
 - (5) That Members be requested to e-mail the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee with any work areas identified for consideration for inclusion in the 2023/24 annual scrutiny programme.
-

51 **Corporate Quarterly Performance Report – Quarter 3 (1st October to 31st December, 2022)**

A report of the Chief Executive was submitted on Quarter 3 of the Corporate Quarterly Performance report for the financial year 2022/23 covering the period 1st October to 31st December, 2022, specifically referring to services within the Directorates of Housing and Communities and Environment. Further detail relating to directorate service delivery were outlined in the Service Summary Sheets attached as appendices to the report submitted.

The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the report provided progress against the delivery of the new three-year Council Plan priorities and the Future Council Programme. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and targets were used to measure performance and were monitored regularly and reported on a quarterly basis. Live performance data was available to Councillors and Officers on the online platform SPECTRUM.

Dashboard summaries highlighted five corporate quarterly measures for Housing and Community Services, two with improvements, zero consistent and three with worsening trends. For Environment, eleven had been measured with six improved, one consistent and four with worsening trends. It was noted that there were three new KPI measures for Environment for 2022/23 with no score available and had not been set against the KPIs for Quarter 3.

Areas of concern were being monitored closely within the Directorates of Housing and Communities and Environment to identify improvements. Targets below KPIs were reported to management teams at both service and strategic levels to ensure understanding of the issues and that appropriate actions were being taken to address the concerns moving forward.

In referring to PI 2027 – Satisfaction on how anti-social behaviour complaints were handled, it was reported that the current outturn was 64.2% against the target of 70%. The performance figure had reduced slightly and represented a downward trend compared to quarter 2. Performance and resourcing issues had been identified, particularly around contact and time taken to resolve matters, however, assurances were provided that the identified issues were currently being addressed and progress would be observed moving forward. The Service had also commissioned a Service Level Agreement with an independent Anti-Social Behaviour Specialist to assist with any additional training needs for staff and would also be reviewing internal policies and procedures.

In terms of PI 1899 – Rent loss, it was reported that the outturn was 1.94% against the target of 1.8%, compared to 1.95% for quarter 2, which represented an improved trend. Whilst the cumulative rent loss in quarter 3 due to voids highlighted a very slight decrease from 1.95% in quarter 2 to 1.94% in quarter 3, the figures presented an improvement on 1.72% for the same period last year. Whilst improvement programmes were currently being identified to improve figures, rent loss associated with strategic voids would continue and be managed through efficient decision making and project management. Rent loss in general was a complex issue, however, a full review of performance data and required improvements would be carried out and reported back to a future meeting.

In referring to PI 2480 – Percentage of safer routes to school schemes completed against annual programme, it was reported that the outturn was 48% against the target of 64%, compared to 32% for quarter 2, which represented an improved trend. Three completed schemes had been delivered with a further two being instructed, one of which, however, would not be delivered until March, 2023 in combination with planned resurfacing work. The remaining school scheme had been rolled into the 2023/24 programme to tie in with an external school scheme funded by a regional grant.

In referring to PI 2479 – Percentage of local road safety completed against annual programme, it was reported that the outturn was 30% against a target of 70%, compared to 10% for quarter 2, which represented an improved trend. It was reported that one scheme had been completed whilst a further scheme was in progress. Two further schemes had been committed and were due to commence on site in the final quarter. External consultants had been commissioned to accelerate with delivery of the local safety scheme programme. All remaining schemes had been designed and would be delivered in 2023, which would enable the Service to move to a different model to provide more confidence in programme delivery from 2023/24 onwards.

In referring to PI 2357 – Percentage of capital programme spent (Highways), it was reported that the outturn was 71% against a target of 75%, compared to 53% at quarter 2, which represented an improved trend. A full programme of work up until the end of March, 2023 was scheduled to be delivered and should spend 100% of the budget. The Summer Commonwealth Games Embargo had compromised the programme, which had impacted on delivery however, it was expected that the programme would be back on track in quarter 4.

Following the presentation, Members had the opportunity to ask questions, make comments and responses were provided, where necessary, as follows:-

- (a) In referring to the KPIs recorded for rent loss as a collective, Councillor J Cowell suggested that, as a high proportion of loss was attributed to the loss of Council Tax through void properties, an additional KPI be included specifically on void properties to include figures on Council Tax loss. The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that there was a possibility that a KPI attributed to lost Council Tax revenue was currently being reported on, however, she would pursue the matter with the Head of Revenues and Benefits with a view to incorporating the figures moving forward.
- (b) Councillor J Cowell referred to the poor state of a number of properties through tenants refusing required work to bring properties up to modern day standards or to carry out essential repair/maintenance work. Improved strategies were required to ensure essential work was carried out which would prevent delays in future lettings, reduce the number of void properties and prevent any unnecessary costs to the Local Authority. The Director of Housing and Communities acknowledged that improvements within the service were essential. Additional information to be included in pre-tenancy conditions on what was expected of tenants in relation to repair/maintenance work was being explored. Concerns around rubbish being left at properties by tenants following a housing transfer was creating a financial implication for the Local Authority and processes were being reviewed to prevent a transfer should tenancy requirements not be met.
- (c) Following a question from Councillor P Sahota in relation to managing void properties, Members were advised on challenges associated with void properties, the investment involved in bringing a property back into use, processes followed to review what properties could be reused, sold or demolished and reinvestment to provide more suitable properties for families. It was acknowledged that some void properties were empty for longer periods than was necessary and improvement work around voids was currently being carried out and improved figures would be observed moving forward. Members were assured that the review around void properties would address the issues with stringent processes in place to prevent future decreasing KPI trends.

- (d) Councillor I Kettle queried the Local Authority's approach to decant and the significant rent loss attributed to those decisions. The Director of Housing and Communities referred to the Local Authority's commitment to maintaining and improving housing stock to a high standard and develop high quality housing for residents in the Borough. Decisions to decant residents to another property varied from significant repairs required that would be unable to be completed whilst a resident was living in a property or due to redevelopment or demolition. Timelines involved with decanting varied depending on the extend of work required, however, practices were being reviewed to streamline the process to ensure quicker turnaround times of empty properties.
- (e) Councillor J Cowell queried the relationship the Local Authority had with EQUANS and what services they were providing. The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that EQUANS was a contractor working with the Local Authority installing kitchens/bathrooms to a number of properties in the Dudley Borough offering financial benefits through energy savings.
- (f) Councillor J Cowell raised concern with the number of potholes reappearing following repair work in the Borough. The Head of Traffic and Highways Services acknowledged the increased number of reported potholes within the Dudley Borough which had been caused by extreme weather conditions. Whilst it was recognised that some deeper potholes required more urgent attention than others, the service was prioritising filling those in the first instance to ensure the safety of the highway infrastructure was maintained. It was acknowledged that some temporary repairs were not as good as resurfacing a road, however, it was assumed that repairs could last for many years. Tackling potholes was challenging, however, an enhanced patching programme was being considered where a road resurface would be considered should a pothole be repaired up to three times.
- (g) In referring to the increased number of fly-tipping incidents recorded, Councillor J Cowell queried what strategies were in place to identify perpetrators and whether collaborative working with other service areas within the Local Authority or voluntary "litter pick" organisations would support increased enforcement action. In responding, the Head of Neighbourhood Services indicated that since the introduction of the Whitespace system, trends, patterns, and hot spot areas had been identified and with the recent integration of Waste Enforcement with the Neighbourhood Services, a more joined up approach would be delivered moving forward. It was intended that further development of the service would be introduced as part of

phase two of the Environment restructure in terms of funding, processes and use of staff.

Whilst it was acknowledged that fly-tipping offences were on the increase in the Borough, detecting perpetrators and issuing fixed penalty notices was a challenge. Enforcement action was taken following adequate evidence/intelligence leading to a conviction, which was not always a straightforward process. A Litter Bug Scheme had recently been launched, working collaboratively with community groups in the Borough to tackle littering, which hopefully would lead to increased prosecutions should any form of evidence be located in litter disposed of illegally. Whilst it was acknowledged that enforcement action remained low, intelligence/data received and collected was mapped and used to determine other interventions, such as the use of deploying cameras to tackle offenders.

- (h) In referring to the amount of fly-tipping recorded in Lye, Councillor A Millward queried what measures had been put in place to prevent increasing numbers of fly-tipping and the costs involved in clearing the waste. In responding, the Head of Neighbourhood Services indicated that whilst accurate figures could not be provided, it was acknowledged that the cost of removing fly-tipping was significant. Lye was an area recorded for high levels of fly-tipping and improved strategies were currently being identified to reduce levels and bring about successful prosecutions. Fly-tipping was a complex issue and challenging to prevent, however, CCTV was now in operation at a number of identified “hot spot” areas in the Borough to catch offenders in the act. An online “You’ve Been Shamed” website was also in operation and Councillors and members of the public were urged to view the page to help identify fly-tippers caught on camera and bring them to justice. It was suggested that all Members of the Council be provided with accurate figures in relation to the number of fly tipping recorded, the cost to the Local Authority and the number of fixed penalty notices issued.
- (i) Councillor P Sahota made specific reference to figures in relation to incidents of fly-tipping and the costs involved in removing waste, together with the repercussions of the Local Authority’s decision to cease the agreement with Wolverhampton City Council for Dudley residents to use Anchor Lane Tip. Whilst the decision had not been taken lightly due to the inconvenience caused to the Dudley residents using Anchor Lane, a temporary pop-up tip had been made available at Lister Road as a short-term solution whilst options for a more permanent solution were being considered. It was important that a balance was maintained between providing first-class,

convenient services and facilities for residents while also providing value for money.

Whilst further questions in relation to the financial position in relation to fly-tipping and the costs involved with the temporary pop-up tip were raised and responded to, Councillor P Sahota indicated that he felt that he had been prevented from asking further questions. He considered that all Local Authorities were duty bound in ensuring value for money and suggested that key performance indicators should be reviewed by external auditors. The Chair indicated that numerous discussions around the matter had been held in various forums and as the decision had already been made, and comments/questions raised by Councillor P Sahota were acknowledged, considered and responded to, he urged that Members move on from the matter.

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Public Realm encouraged all Members of the Committee to observe the pop-up tip in action and the benefits the facility offered. The facility offered a booking system, which prevented queuing and with well labelled receptacles, the amount of time on site was limited. The facility aimed to provide Dudley residents an effective and efficient service whilst a permanent solution was identified.

- (j) Councillor A Aston raised concern at the lack of Arboriculture Officers employed at Dudley which was impacting on delivering the tree inspection programme and queried what motivated officers into leaving to take up opportunities outside the Local Authority. The Head of Neighbourhood Services acknowledged that a number of Arboriculture Officers had recently left the Local Authority for different reasons. There was currently a national shortage of Arboriculture Officers and although several attempts had been made to recruit specialist officers, none had been successful. Whilst a further recruitment exercise would be carried out in the near future, the Service was currently relying on temporary resources from a partner contractor to carry out tree inspections. However, Officers were keen to rectify the issue and opportunities were being explored for further outside support, including shared service arrangements with surrounding local authorities.

Councillor I Kettle expressed gratitude to the officers involved in carrying out tree inspections in the Pedmore and Stourbridge East Ward.

- (k) Councillor P Sahota referred the lack of partnership working between certain areas of the Housing and Communities Directorate, with particular reference to the Anti-Social Behaviour Team, and the Police. He indicated that despite previous comments made by the Deputy Chief Executive in relation to improved services within the Directorate and the commitment to delivering the high standard of services expected, he was struggling to observe improved communication with key agencies. Partnership working was an essential part in delivering the key objectives of the Improvement Plan and indicated that comparison projects with neighbouring authorities would benefit the overall delivery of the service.
- (l) Councillor P Sahota queried the reason for KPIs not being recorded for some services, particularly street cleansing and dog fouling. In responding, the Head of Neighbourhood Services indicated that KPIs were currently being reviewed and would take comments back to the Service to consider additional KPI figures for other services within the Directorate moving forward.
- (m) Councillor P Sahota referred to the lack of investment opportunities for unclassified roads and how the Local Authority planned to evidence what investment had been placed in such roads, particularly between deprived and affluent areas. The Head of Traffic and Highways Services acknowledged that the majority of investment had been used to improve classified roads. A classified and unclassified road programme had been development based on the Asset Management Strategy and investment was based on specific criteria.
- (n) Councillor K Lewis queried the ongoing traffic enforcement/strategies following the implementation of a safer route to school scheme. It was considered that schemes were implemented for safety reasons, however, not all schemes were monitored accordingly. The Head of Traffic and Highways Services acknowledged the comments raised and outlined strategies that would focus on physical measures that could be implemented as well as the behaviours of residents. It was essential that parents, children and schools were educated on the importance and benefits of road safety and alternative modes of travel. Reference was made to the new School Street Initiative pilot to tackle traffic outside three Dudley primary schools during drop off and pick up times. The scheme was aimed to compliment the Safer Routes to School Programme and would see roads turned into pedestrian and cycle zones outside of schools during peak times with the intention to extend the schemes out to more schools should the initiative prove successful. The programme would encourage parents and children to walk or cycle to school rather than taking a

car, which supported the overall Council plan to make Dudley a safe and healthy environment. Information on the School Street Scheme pilot would be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

- (o) In responding to a question by Councillor J Cowell in relation to communities salvaging and disposing unwanted items, the Head of Neighbourhood Services indicated that the new neighbourhood approach would benefit communities that were impacted. Strategies were currently being considered to maximise opportunities to tackle the issues and ensure that communities, particularly the traveling communities, disposed of all rubbish legally prior to moving sites.

The Interim Director of Environment provided an overview of the highlights and challenges associated with the Environment Directorate which were outlined in the Service Summary Sheet submitted to the meeting, with particular reference to the following:

- A new Head of Waste and Transport Operations had been appointed as part of implementing the new Directorate structure and work was underway to strategically review the fleet functions, both from an efficiency and sustainability viewpoint, together with a strategic review of the Local Authority's approach to cleanliness.
 - The Local Authority had appointed a new Energy from Waste contractor (Urbaser) to manage the day-to-day operations at Lister Road providing the Authority with significant savings. Options in relation to waste collections would be considered during the 24/25 municipal year.
 - Phase one of the Environment Directorate restructure had now been implemented, aligning environmental enforcement with street scene operations. Phase two had commenced to embed the principles of neighbourhood working at all organisational levels.
-
- Management within the Directorate would now focus on the implementation of a number of significant initiatives that had been approved as part of the Council's budget, including implementing different delivery models.

Challenges the Directorate faced included high levels of staff sickness, difficulties around recruitment, the costs associated with staff absence and temporary agency workers being recruited in some front-line services, together with the significant financial pressures caused by inflationary pressures such as fuel, utility and energy costs. The Heads of

Service were working closely with Managers and HR colleagues to address the issues.

In responding to a question from Councillor P Sahota, the Interim Director of Environment indicated that improvement strategies and benchmarking exercises were essential in addressing staff sickness levels and would be considered moving forward. Statistics provided on sickness absence were recorded mainly from main operational areas such as office-based employees, however, it was anticipated that sickness levels would be addressed through phase two of the restructure.

Resolved

- (1) That the Quarter 3 Corporate Quarterly Performance report covering the period 1st October to 31st December, 2022, be noted.
- (2) That the Head of Neighbourhood Services be requested to provide statistics in relation to the number of fly tipping recorded and the number of fixed penalty notices issued to all Members of the Council.
- (3) That the Head of Traffic and Highways Services be requested to circulate information on the School Street Scheme pilot to all Members of the Committee.

52 **Housing and Communities Directorate report on the Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

The Committee received a presentation from the Director of Housing and Communities on Customer Experience and Customer Regulation Update. A copy of the presentation was circulated to all Members of the Committee prior to the meeting.

During the presentation, the Director of Housing and Communities referred to the Charter for Social Housing's seven commitments to tenants in which the Local Authority would be judged against, together with the two main objectives required by the Regulator of Social Housing (RoSH). Objectives would be achieved through complying with regulatory standards that contained specific expectations that registered providers must comply with. The Regulator was planning to introduce the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) Standard to form part of the regulatory consumer standards during 2023.

For the Local Authority to comply with regulatory standards, it was expected that a full review of compliance against each of the regulator standards would be undertaken in quarter 1 of 2023/24, with an associated action plan to be developed to address any gaps. Further proposals were to seek external assurance of compliance with the Rent Standard due to the complexity and resources required and self-assessment of compliance against consumer standards to be completed and then shared for discussion with involved customers.

TSM would be introduced from April, 2023 to provide residents with the information needed to scrutinise their landlord and hold them accountable and to also provide a source of intelligence to the RoSH on whether landlords were meeting the regulatory standards. Members were advised that there were twenty-two tenant satisfaction measures (TSM), twelve of which were tenant perception measures with the remaining ten being management information measures, which were referred to at the meeting.

Dudley's customer satisfaction measures included tender for external expertise to undertake customer survey to provide baseline data for TSM reporting and action plan and a review of all current Customer Satisfaction surveys and performance indicators to complement TSM data and inform improvements.

The Housing Ombudsman Service was responsible for dealing with complaints about social housing. The updated Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code became effective from 1st April, 2022 and landlords were now required to carry out an annual assessment against the Code, with the results being published online. It was reported that during quarter 3 (1st October to 31st December, 2022), Housing Services had received eighty three complaints, with only 34% being responded to within the twenty day target. A further 532 enquiries were received from MPs and Councillors.

A review of the current Customer Involvement Strategy was in progress, taking into consideration the following, and would involve consultation with the Dudley Housing Board and Dudley Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations.

- Charter for Social Housing Residents.
- RoSH Customer Standards.
- Tenant Satisfaction Measures.
- TPAS Engagement Standards.
- Current opportunities for customer involvement.

- Current quantitative and qualitative data on customer experience and involvement.

Existing customer involvement groups would also be reviewed to identify any gaps in the services, together with a proposal to develop an overarching Customer Involvement Board to oversee delivery of the revised strategy, to lead on publication of the Customer Annual Report and to scrutinise performance against the RoSH customer standards, TSMs, Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and other customer related activity. Current Terms and Conditions for each group would be refreshed, together with representations from each group on the Customer Involvement Board.

The Director of Housing and Communities provided a timeline of actions reported above to ensure the objectives set out in the Charter for Social Housing were met.

Following the presentation, Members had the opportunity to ask questions, make comments and responses were provided, where necessary, as follows:-

- (a) Councillor A Millward indicated that consideration should be provided to include care leavers in any customer involvement strategies and reviews. There were real issues affecting that cohort and it was essential that they were included and views/feedback received as currently, Housing Officers did not attend any of the arranged meetings, despite being invited, resulting in young people being unaware of who to contact for support/advice.

Councillor J Cowell referred to the lack of arrangements in place for residents of low-rise/communal properties to participate in customer involvement strategies. It was important that representatives from all customer groups be involved to ensure the objectives of the Charter for Social Housing were delivered. Concern was raised at the lack of communication received from the Dudley Housing Board to residents, which required improvement moving forward.

In responding, the Director of Housing and Communities acknowledged the comments raised and assured Members that the overarching Customer Involvement Group was proposed to oversee the delivery of the revised Strategy, to lead on the publication of the Customer Annual Report, and to scrutinise performance against the RoSH customer demands, Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs), Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and other customer related activity. It was proposed that the Membership of the Group would

include a representative from all customer groups, elected Members and Cabinet Members.

- (b) Councillor I Kettle requested a breakdown of statistics in relation to the number of staff employed in the Housing and Communities Directorate and how many officers were involved in dealing with customer, MP and Councillor complaints and enquiries. In responding, the Director of Housing and Communities confirmed that there were approximately 860 staff employed across the Housing and Communities Directorate, however, it was difficult to provide statistics in relation to the number of officers that dealt with complaints and enquiries from customers, MPs and Councillors. Frequently, Members e-mailed officers direct, copying in additional officers in a particular service, in order for enquiries or complaints to be resolved, making it difficult to establish which officer was dealing with the issues, which in some cases, delayed responses. Figures for responding to complaints and enquiries was concerning, however, Members were assured that a review would be carried out to provide a more effective and efficient method of delivering the service and which addressed the issue of unnecessary delays or confusion with officers responses.

Resolved

That the presentation and comments made above be noted and referred back to the Service for consideration.

53 Questions Under Council Procedure Rule 11.8

There were no questions to the Chair pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11.8.

The meeting ended at 8.09pm.

CHAIR