

Central Dudley Area Committee – 14th September, 2010

Report of the Area Liaison Officer

Matters Raised at the Meeting of the Committee held on 8th June, 2010 other than those relating to the Directorate of the Urban Environment

Purpose of Report

1. To note progress on issues raised at the meeting of the Committee held on 8th June, 2010, other than those relating to the Directorate of the Urban Environment.

Background

2. The issues set out in paragraphs 3 to 11 (inclusive) below were raised at the meeting of the Committee held on 8th June, 2010, progress on which is as follows:
3. **Petition in respect of Council House Regeneration**

A petition from residents of Mayfield Road, Linwood Road, Rosewood Road, Wrens Nest Road in Priory North was submitted requesting that the regeneration of houses and flats be looked into.

The Area Liaison Officer has responded as follows:-

The Council has limited resources available to invest in improvements to its housing stock, and over the past eight years or so investment has primarily been targeted to delivering the Government's Decent Homes Standard by 2010. The stock options appraisal undertaken in 2005 and recent annual consultation with Area Panels concerning the Council's housing capital programme for 2010-15 both identified that whilst Dudley is on target to deliver the Decent Homes Standard by 2010, the financial situation is still that there are few resources available to deliver programmes in excess of achieving the Decent Homes Standard.

The Council's Decent Homes programme is now in its final year, and if there are any Decent Homes works required in the above streets in the Priory area then they will be undertaken. This will deal with rewiring homes where it is necessary to do so, and replacing boilers that cannot be repaired. However, this does not deal with providing new double glazing, additional radiators or external wall insulation, all of which are above the Government Decent Homes Standard. The authority is also required to ensure that decency levels are maintained, and it is

currently envisaged that given current estimations of future resources a future programme in excess of decency post 2010 will be difficult to achieve.

Government initiatives to encourage investment in energy efficiency measures have already been taken up in partnership with utility suppliers who have provided some levels of additional funding which has allowed some limited investment in a standard that exceeds decency. The Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP) is one such initiative that the Council is currently exploring with energy providers to seek to provide funding for energy (or carbon) efficient measures to homes in the areas of the borough. Should any further resources become available that would allow a Decent Homes plus programme to become deliverable, any potential works will be considered on a Borough-wide basis and works on the Priory estate will be considered alongside other Borough priorities.

4. **Petition in respect of residents of Foxglove Road**

A petition from residents of Foxglove Road, Wrens Nest Estate, Dudley was submitted in relation to ongoing anti-social behaviour from residents in that Street. The Head of Housing Management – North responded to the residents who submitted the petition in writing on 2nd July, 2010 outlining the steps the Council have previously taken and offered to meet with the residents to discuss where they feel the service they have received has fallen below what they would have expected from the Directorate.

5. **Option Cards**

A Member of the public referred to the Option Card, which was available to people in managed areas, and expressed the view that its allocation was a postcode lottery. In response, the Head of Community Renewal indicated that when the 'Option Card' was launched it was marketed on the basis of it being for people in Managed Neighbourhoods, however, in fact the card is issued where the resident living within super output areas (SOA) which features in the top 10% or 20% most deprived SOA areas. She reported that she had discussed the issue with the appropriate officers in Leisure Services and stated that they were happy to alter the catchment areas to match the information on the leaflet and send updated list to all leisure centres.

6. **Work carried out for disabled private residents and disabled council residents**

Concerns were made by a member of the public in relation to the work carried out for disabled private residents and disabled council residents. In responding, the Head of Physical Disabilities Services indicated that a response had been sent directly to the questioner.

7. **Community Renewal Officer – Russells Hall**

A Member of the Committee referred to the transfer of a Community Renewal Officer to another area and the impact this was considered to have. In responding the Head of Community Renewal sets out below the new arrangements for coverage for the central area.

- Sean Coughlan - Castle and Priory

- St Thomas' and St James - John Fisher - with back up from the neighborhood resource centre "action in neighborhoods" team and volunteer graduate placements
- Netherton, Woodside and St Andrews and Quarry Bank and Dudley Wood - Martin Shaw with support from Graduate Volunteer placement

8. **Wrens Nest Estate Office**

A Member of the Committee queried when the Wrens Nest Estate Office would be opened. In responding, the Assistant Director of Housing reported that this matter was currently being investigated.

9. **Charges for Housing Repairs**

A Member of the Committee requested that consideration be given to the applicability of call out charges when employees responded to requests for work to be carried out.

In responding, the Head of Housing Management – North indicated that the Tenants Charges policy and the procedure which supports it was developed in consultation with Dudley Federation of Tenant and Residents Association (DFTRA) and has not been changed since its implementation in 2008. The policy was also endorsed by way of decision sheet by the Cabinet Member for Housing.

We do charge tenants for repairs that have not resulted from fair wear and tear but instead from the tenant neglect or malicious damage, however there are also a number of repairs which are defined as the 'tenant's responsibility' and should they request we carry out the work they will be charged the cost of doing so, common examples are blocked sinks and toilet pans. These repairs are clearly defined in the tenant's handbook and there are some exceptions made for OAPs and disabled tenants.

Tenants who ask us to carry out this type of work would be advised at the time of reporting the repair to the Repairs Management Centre that a charge will apply.

DFTRA have expressed concern that on occasions tenants have been sent a bill for a repair defined as been their responsibility but have been told by the operative or contractor carrying out the work that it is a fault that is not their responsibility, for example a blocked sink could on investigation turn out to be a blockage in the drainage system. In these circumstances the procedure is clear that this information should come back to the Housing Manager to determine if the charge is fair and reasonable or should be waived.

10. **Ball Pool for residents in St James's Road**

A Member of the Committee queried the possibility of purchasing a ball pool for younger residents in St James's Road as referred to in the report Progress of Elected Member Visits to Adult and Children's Social Care Establishments 2009/10 submitted to the meeting. In responding, the Quality and Complaints Manager indicated that discussions have taken place with the Assistant Director in Children Services and with the relevant managers.

He stated that whilst resources to provide a ball pool is a factor for Children Services, there are other sound reasons for not prioritising this at the moment. The young people at St James do use the garden but Managers and staff at the Home have been trying/encouraging the young people to increase their social skills, increase their connections within the local community by making more use of community facilities such as youth clubs, swimming and running clubs, again so that they can develop peer relationships and be involved in structured leisure activities. The recommendation of a Ball Pool is not being rejected, therefore, but cannot for the moment be prioritised.

It is also the case that Children Services are reviewing the age range at the establishment and this could impact on the type of facilities they need.

11. **Issues raised by Councillor J Martin**

A number of issues were raised by Councillor Martin, some of which have already been responded to and others being subject to active consideration.

Finance

12. This report has no direct financial implications.

Law

13. Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council is empowered to do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or conducive to, or incidental to the discharge of its functions.

Equality Impact

14. This report complies with the policies of the Council on Equality and Diversity.

15. Children and young people have not been consulted on the preparation of this report, as report seeks only to note progress on issues raised at its previous meetings.

Recommendations

16. That the information above be noted.



.....
LINDA SANDERS
AREA LIAISON OFFICER

Contact Officer: Karen Farrington – Democratic Services Officer
(Democratic Services)

Telephone: 01384 818219

Email: Karen.Farrington@dudley.gov.uk

List of Background Papers

Minutes of the meeting of the Central Dudley Area Committee held on 8th June, 2010