COUNCIL MEETING – 25th January 2011

REPORT OF THE PARTNERSHIPS REVIEW COMMITTEE

10th January 2011

Present: Councillor Allebone (Chairman), Councillor Pursglove (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Graves, Hawkes, G Lawman and J Raymond.

Also Present: Mrs L Flores (Cultural Development Manager), Mr J Hubbard (Chief Executive), Mrs V Jessop (Housing Strategy Manager) and Mr C Pittman (Head of Policy, Partnerships and Property) (Committee Manager).

(Councillors L Lawman and Griffiths attended the meeting)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED to note that an apology for absence was received from Councillor Blackwell.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED to note that in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000, the Code of Local Government Conduct and the Council’s Constitution, the under-mentioned Councillors declared an interest in the following items:

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<td>G Lawman</td>
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<td>Northamptonshire</td>
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3. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 29/11/2010 be confirmed and signed.

4. WELLINGBOROUGH HOMES and EAST MIDLANDS HOUSING GROUP

The Chairman welcomed Mr D Willis, Chief Executive, Wellingborough Homes and Mr J Patman, Group Development Director, East Midlands Housing Group (EMHG).

Mr Willis gave a presentation on the work of Wellingborough Homes as a community based Housing Association and the benefits and examples of partnership working with the Borough Council and other organisations to provide sustainable and cohesive communities in Wellingborough.
Mr Patman then gave a presentation on the work of East Midlands Housing Group (EMHG), the issues facing the development of affordable homes as a result of the reduction of Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) funding and how the partnership will respond.

An overview of Wellingborough Homes and EMHG was attached to the report at Appendix 1 and 2 respectively.

A copy of the presentations and the annual reports of Wellingborough Homes and EMHG were circulated at the meeting.

Mr Willis and Mr Patman responded to questions and comments raised by the Committee, which included the following:

Q. It was noted that in the Wellingborough Homes’ Annual Report 2009/10, 82% of tenants were satisfied with the quality of their home but satisfaction was considerably lower for those tenants aged between 16-34, which was 53%. Is the 16-34 age group unrealistic in their expectations?
A. It may be an age profile and the challenge for Wellingborough Homes is to establish the reason why, as they may be our customer base in the future. It was noted that elderly residents may be more willing to express their satisfaction.

Q. Members were aware of the tremendous amount of work that has gone into Wellingborough Homes’ financial inclusion work and the work with Women’s Aid and ‘Your Home’ course at the Hemmingwell Skills Centre. A request was made that Wellingborough Homes involve and liaise with Ward Councillors when undertaking such work with the community.
A. Noted.

Q. Wellingborough Homes’ officers are very conscientious in dealing with residents’ concerns raised via Ward Councillors. However, there needs to be a better way of incorporating Ward Walks carried out by the Borough Council, Wellingborough Homes and the Police to ensure there is no duplication of effort.
A. Agreed - it makes sense for Ward Walks to be undertaken in partnership in order to get better value for money.

Q. From whom do you borrow your money, what interest rates do you have to pay and are you eligible for any concessions?
A. Barclays funded the stock transfer. If any funding is required for new development, it is likely that traditional high street corporate lending organisations will be approached. However, in the current economic climate, it was noted that Banks were only lending for 5 or 10 years. Housing Associations are exploring investment in Bonds because there are so few lenders. The interest rate for Housing Associations, which have a good credit rating, is at the commercial rate; there is an element of reduction because of the regulatory regime.

Q. How is the Choice Based Letting system working?
A. Choice Based Letting system is very good but it is too soon to obtain customers’ feedback on the change in process in terms of social rent,
affordable rent and market rent. Not sure whether tenants accept a property at a higher rent because they have no alternative option. Have not seen any reduction in void properties.

Q. The Wellingborough Homes’ Annual Report 2009/10 reported that £19.3m was spent during that period, the bulk of which was on management costs (£3.5m), improvement works (£9m) and repairs (£3m). The management costs seem high; what is included in the management figure?

A. The management costs are for providing housing management service to residents and the extra community added value costs.

Q. Councillors have received numerous complaints that Lovells are not performing anywhere near the same level of satisfaction with regard to repairs compared with Rok, in terms of missed appointments and standard of work.

A. Wellingborough Homes accepted it was going to be a challenge to replace Rok as the repairs contractor and being able to link IT systems. Lovells are currently a temporary arrangement. Wellingborough Homes is currently looking to secure a repairs service contractor from April 2012 and further feedback will be provided.

Q. Can Housing Associations work with the Borough Council to get some empty properties in the town back into use in the short term?

A. Discussions are being held with partners about empty properties and whether to retain or sell them back on the market. There was a commitment to work in partnership to facilitate getting empty properties back into use but partners can only negotiate so far with the owners of the properties.

Q. Notice you involve your tenants in all aspects, who also sit on the Asbestos Working Group, potentially with no technical knowledge or expertise.

A. Wellingborough Homes has developed a more comprehensive structure for tenant involvement in all key working groups to enable tenants to voice their opinions and concerns, including issues around asbestos.

Q. Are apprenticeships being provided by Wellingborough Homes and EMHG during 2011 and what sort of jobs are they doing?

A. Wellingborough Homes offer apprenticeships/trainees either directly or indirectly through facilitation with contractors. 12 Future Jobs Fund trainees are with EMHG who expect to offer further apprenticeship opportunities with any new contracts. EMHG provides quarterly returns to HCA on the number of trainee apprenticeships that are sustained or are being created.

Q. What steps are being undertaken to help military families, post active service, find appropriate accommodation?

A. The Borough Council deals with the issue of prioritising applications for housing; under the Borough Council’s Allocations Policy, military families would be given preference if they had a housing need. It was noted that nationally the social housing reform was underway.
The Chairman thanked Mr Willis and Mr Patman for their presentations.

RESOLVED that:

(i) the presentation be noted;
(ii) the Community Committee be asked to consider making changes to the Council’s Housing Allocations Policy such that former members of the armed forces and their families receive as high a priority for housing as is possible.

5. WELLINGBOROUGH WELFARE RIGHTS ADVICE GROUP

The Chairman welcomed Mrs S Paw, Co-ordinator, Wellingborough Welfare Rights Advice Group (WWRAG), Mr P Ainge and Mr J Goodger, WWRAG committee members.

Mrs Paw, Mr Ainge and Mr Goodger gave a presentation on the work of WWRAG, which particularly focused on the preservation of health, the relief of poverty and distress, and the promotion of healthy and comfortable living within the community.

The objectives of WWRAG are to:

- assist and co-operate with member organisations in planning and developing a wide range of services and facilities for the benefit of the community;
- plan, develop and provide welfare rights advice to people living in the town of Wellingborough and surrounding villages.

Services are provided to people with health problems: physical or mental to maximise their income by assisting them in applying for benefits that they may be entitled to. Services are also targeted to members of minority ethnic communities in Wellingborough by holding advice sessions at the Hindu Temple, Wellingborough Afro-Caribbean Association (WACA), and at the Mosque.

Organisation overview and case studies provided by WWRAG were attached to the report at Appendices 1 and 2 respectively.

It was noted that the NCC’s funding awarded to WWRAG was due to cease at the end of this financial year (March 2011), which would be detrimental to the work of WWRAG.

A copy of the presentation was circulated at the meeting.

Mrs Paw, Mr Ainge and Mr Goodger responded to questions and comments raised by the Committee, which included the following:

Q. What sort of funding do you receive as an organisation?
A. 2009/10 funding of £36,000 reduced to £28,000 from Northamptonshire County Council (NCC), £4,000 from the Borough Council and £5,000 from the Primary Care Trust, which covers the cost of the one paid staff member, rent, insurance, transport, insurance and training costs. An additional one-off funding was also received. It was noted that if this
level of funding was not forthcoming, WWRAG would cease to exist at the end of this financial year (March 2011).

Q. Noted that WWRAG is not registered as a charity, which would provide rate relief.

A. There was initially some opposition from the WWRAG Management Committee for applying for charitable status but agreement has now been received and an application put forward. However, as the funding is due to cease, the application has been put on hold. WWRAG had also applied for equality status but this application has also been put on hold until the financial situation is known.

Q. Have you looked at other methods of fund raising and the rational for charging customers? Do you work with other organisations providing a similar service where specialisms can be exchanged?

A. WWRAG did bid for lottery money via Advice Northants but no funding was received. Referrals are made to and from Advice Northants.

Q. Community Law Service in Northampton work with Wellingborough Homes to provide a specialist benefit and debt advice service. Is there a natural overlap of services?

A. WWRAG deal with benefits. WWRAG receives referrals from Community Law Service and works with SureStart, Social Services and Spire Homes. WWRAG is a not for profit organisation.

It was noted that WWRAG should approach Nene Valley Community Action to seek appropriate support and advice on other sources of funding and partnership working. It was suggested that WWRAG should also register as a charitable organisation to obtain concessionary rate relief and also potentially charge for their services.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Paw, Mr Ainge and Mr Goodger for the informative presentation.

RESOLVED that:

(i) the presentation be noted;
(ii) there were no specific matters to be drawn to the attention of the policy committees.

6. NORTHAMPTONSHIRE SPORT

The Chairman welcomed Mr C Holmes, Director of Northamptonshire Sport.

Mr C Holmes gave a presentation on the work of Northamptonshire Sport, which operated through a Partnership Group, Executive Board and Themed Strategy Groups to provide opportunities for everyone to be able to access and participate in sport, physical activity and recreation.

The aim was to make Northamptonshire one of the fittest, most active and successful sporting counties in England by 2020.

The work of Northamptonshire Sport was structured around the Northamptonshire Sport and Active Recreation Strategy and was co-ordinated by a Core
Team, whose role was to facilitate the work of the partnership.

A copy of the presentation, Northamptonshire Sport Annual Report and the Northamptonshire Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2010-2015 were circulated at the meeting.

Mr Holmes responded to questions and comments raised by the Committee, which included the following:

Q. The survey of School Sports Partnership revealed that Wellingborough and East Northants are slightly above average in the county for the percentage of pupils participating in 3 hours PE and out of hours school sport, which is good news for Wellingborough. However, 25% of adults in Northamptonshire are categorised as being obese in comparison with the national indicator of 24%.

A. Physical activity is vital to tackling obesity. Northamptonshire Sport’s aspiration is to work 50% with sports clubs and 50% with providing recreational activity that people can do in their own time, e.g. jogging.

Q. Northamptonshire Sport is a key partner in the Healthier Delivery Group of the Wellingborough Partnership. It was noted that a lot of money recently passed to NCC from Government for health and well being. Is there any money for sport and will it benefit Wellingborough?

A. Nothing has been heard yet on that funding. Meeting to be held with Stephen Horsley of PCT to start discussions on positioning Northamptonshire Sport within the new structure of preventative health when the services are transferred from PCT to NCC.

Q. Noted that there are 64 sport volunteers in Wellingborough; what work are they doing?

A. Large number of residents in Wellingborough have signed up to be on the sport volunteer data base. Volunteers work at club level 1 coaching course, either as a permanent assistant coach or on an ad hoc basis.

Q. What sort of impact will the 2012 Olympics have on sport participation? It was noted there were 6 training camps in the county. With a lot of encouragement, there could be more uptake in sport.

A. There was no facility to cater for every sport in Northamptonshire but hopefully Northamptonshire Sport will end up with sections of teams that base themselves in the county. It was noted that a good number of businesses in Northamptonshire are winning contracts in London for the 2012 Olympics.

Q. Noted that Northamptonshire Sport divided its time 50/50 to work with clubs and individuals. Would it not be beneficial in the long term to encourage sporting activities with organisations that already have volunteers and structures in place?

A. Agreed that sporting clubs were more sustainable in the longer term. However, there was a strategy of providing stepping stones to provide sport, (e.g. running, cycling), to encourage people to join sporting clubs.

Q. Noted there was a drop off at the age of 16 in the number of participants in sporting activities. Is this due to examinations?
A. Northamptonshire Sport has seen the greatest drop off between the ages of 14-16, which ties in with the GCSEs. The greatest problem appears to be with 14-16 year old girls and the challenge is to provide sporting activities that appeal to that gender. Northamptonshire Sport aims to encourage sport prior to the age of 14.

Q. A community sports facilities strategy has been undertaken by outside consultants. What is more successful: promoting a large sporting facility or smaller disparate and separate facilities?
A. If smaller and separate facilities can be acquired, funding may be available locally.

Q. Do all the checks to comply with legislation for coaching at clubs, scouts and other organisations put people off coaching?
A. CRB checks have to be undertaken for each individual club. Northamptonshire Sport’s coaching agency is a central coaching agency and requires only one CRB check. The Northamptonshire Sport structure makes it easier for people to obtain and build up coaching hours either in a full or part time capacity.

The Chairman thanked Mr Holmes for the presentation.

RESOLVED that:

(i) the presentation be noted;
(ii) there were no specific matters to be drawn to the attention of the policy committees.

The meeting concluded at 9.15pm

Chairman