

**REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE**

17th November 2010

**EXTERNAL REFURBISHMENT OF HOUSING STOCK SHORT, SHARP  
REVIEW – FINAL REPORT**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Brandon Clayton, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Local Environment and Health.
Relevant Head of Service	Liz Tompkin, Head of Housing
Non-Key Decisions	

**1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS**

The External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short, Sharp Review Group is proposing that a number of actions be taken to improve the appearance of properties in the Council's housing stock and the surrounding environment. Whilst the Group focussed on conditions in Woodrow many of the actions they have recommended could be implemented in other parts of the Borough and at a relatively low financial cost to the Council.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee is asked to **RECOMMEND** that

- 1) **light colour paints be utilised to decorate garage doors to improve their visual appearance;**
- 2) **the lintels featured on Council properties be decorated to improve the visual appearance of those properties;**
- 3) **the retaining wall to the rear of 1-12 Martley Close be redecorated as part of a Council arts project;**
- 4) **the Council assume responsibility for the maintenance of small strips of land located close to private properties and public spaces;**
- 5) **the Council ensure that, when replacing diseased and dead plants, different types of plants are introduced to ensure there is a variety of leaf colours and foliage in any given area;**
- 6) **the remaining section 106 money available for use on capital landscaping work on the Greenlands Open Spaces be allocated to soft landscaping work in the courtyard area located in Wishaw Close;**

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- 7) in order to minimise the level of disruption experienced by local residents, there should be a holistic approach to the delivery of frontline services;**
- 8) representatives of local schools be invited to participate in estate walkabouts; and**
- 9) representatives of the local GP's Consortium be invited to participate in the estate walkabouts once the consortia have been introduced in 2012/13; and**

**to RESOLVE that**

**the report be noted.**

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1** The review of the external refurbishment of the Council's housing stock was launched in September 2010. Initially, it had been intended that this review would be considered by a Task and Finish Group over a period of six months. However, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested on 15th September that the exercise be completed as a short, sharp review. The Committee requested that Councillor Vickery, who was appointed to lead the review, report back to the Committee by 17th November. Councillor Norton was also invited to participate in the exercise.
- 3.2** The review was launched to address concerns about the aesthetic appeal of some of the Council's housing stock. Members recognised that many of the Council's properties in the Borough were maintained to a high standard both in terms of internal facilities and external appearance. However, concerns were expressed about the urban design of many of the Council's properties, particularly on the estates in Woodrow. The design of these buildings was generally not considered to be aesthetically appealing. Moreover, it was suggested that the outward appearance of a property was important as this could impact on: the morale of local residents; the extent to which they felt that they were valued as members of a local neighbourhood or community; and also on the perceptions of other residents and visitors towards the area.
- 3.3** The review was completed in two parts. In the first place, Councillors Vickery and Norton attended a walkabout in Woodrow on 6th October 2010

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and were accompanied by relevant expert Officers. During the course of this walkabout Members visited Marley Close, Ombersley Close, Rushock Close and Wishaw Close and observed the condition of Council properties and the surrounding environment in those areas.

- 3.4 A number of issues were identified during the course of the walkabout which Members agreed required further consideration. In particular, issues were identified which had implications for: repairs and maintenance; housing; landscaping; and highways services. These were discussed in further detail during a meeting on 1st November, which formed the second part of the review. Based on these discussions Members proposed a number of recommendations.

### **4. KEY ISSUES/RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 Further information about each of the External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short, Sharp Review Group's recommendations is provided below:

4.2 **Recommendation One: We recommend that light colour paints be utilised to decorate garage doors to improve their visual appearance.**

- 4.2.1 During the course of the walkabout Members observed a number of garage doors for Council properties which had been painted brown. Members were concerned that this might not be the most suitable colour to apply to those garage blocks as the impact was to create an unappealing visual image, particularly for residents living in properties overlooking garage blocks. By contrast, Members agreed that where lighter colours could be used the appearance of such buildings was improved. Moreover, this served to improve the aesthetic appearance of local neighbourhoods, which it is contended could have a beneficial impact on local residents' quality of life.
- 4.2.2 Brown paint has been applied to numerous Council garages across the Borough. The supply of the paint and reapplication of paint to the garage doors is currently funded as part of the Council's standard repairs and maintenance process. Officers have advised that the introduction of lighter coloured paints into the Council's paint supply could be achieved relatively easily using existing budgets.
- 4.2.3 The Group were made aware, during the course of the walkabout, that a fresh coat of paint would recently have been applied by the Council to some garage doors. To ensure that the Council secures value for

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money, Members are suggesting that recently painted surfaces should not be reassessed immediately. Instead the lighter colour paint would only need to be applied as and when required.

4.3 **Recommendation Two: We recommend that the lintels featured on Council properties be decorated to improve the visual appearance of those properties.**

4.3.1 Lintels feature on the exterior façade of a number of properties in the Council's housing stock. Currently, these lintels are often plain features on similarly plain brick or concrete walls. However, the Group noted that the lintels could alternatively be painted in a bright colour to improve the visual appearance of these properties.

4.3.2 Officers have advised that this action could be completed at a relatively limited financial cost to the Council. The supply of paints used to decorate the garage doors could be utilised for this purpose.

4.4 **Recommendation Three: We recommend that the retaining wall to the rear of 1-12 Martley Close be redecorated as part of a Council arts project.**

4.4.1 Members observed a concrete wall to the rear of 1-12 Martley Close during the walkabout. As this was a retaining wall Members accepted that this feature could not be demolished. However, because the wall had been constructed using concrete Members expressed concerns that this feature was not aesthetically appealing to view. This added to the generally unattractive view to the rear of Martley Close, where a series of brown garage doors and a visibly large wall stain could be observed. In particular, the view was considered potentially oppressive for residents living in properties located along Woodrow Walk which overlooks the area. Members therefore agreed that particular action needed to be taken to improve the appearance of this local feature.

4.4.2 A number of community arts projects have been delivered in recent years which have involved both Redditch Borough Council, local partner organisations and local residents. These art projects have been delivered in a range of locations including pedestrian subways, bus shelters and the shutters utilised for shop units. Frequently, local young people have been involved in producing the artwork and this involvement has helped to encourage a feeling of community ownership and pride in the feature.

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- 4.4.3 It is difficult to provide an exact estimate for how much this project would cost to deliver. Financial costs will vary according to a variety of factors including: the ambition of the project; the charges levied by the professional artists; and the materials that are used. However, Officers have estimated that the minimal costs for the project that has been recommended would be approximately £400. (Further information about the financial costs involved in delivering this type of arts project are provided in Appendix 2)
- 4.4.4 Members believe that the wall to the rear of 1-12 Martley Close could usefully form the focus for another community art project. Indeed, Members are keen to encourage community pride in the local area as this could help to secure greater community cohesion.
- 4.5 **Recommendation Four: We recommend that the Council assume responsibility for the maintenance of small strips of land located close to private properties and public spaces.**
- 4.5.1 During the course of the walkabout Members observed a case of fly tipping in Rushock Close, which was subsequently reported through the Council's standard reporting channels. The particular case involved the disposal of a certain amount of debris in both the garden of a property and on a narrow strip of public land bordering a public footpath.
- 4.5.2 Officers have advised that similar small or narrow strips of land are located at various locations across the Borough, and often border both private properties and public spaces. These small strips of land can become overgrown and are unfortunately sometimes used for the disposal of litter.
- 4.5.3 Ownership of these areas of land is sometimes open to interpretation. However, the Group noted that inappropriate use of such areas could have a detrimental impact on the local environment and on the quality of life for local residents. Therefore, they are recommending that the Council should assume responsibility for the maintenance of these spaces.
- 4.6 **Recommendation Five: We recommend that the Council ensure that, when replacing diseased and dead plants, different types of plants are introduced to ensure there is a variety of leaf colours and foliage in any given area.**

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- 4.6.1 Members agreed that the numerous plants, particularly the trees, located in Redditch overall created an appealing visual image for the town. However, Members expressed concerns that in some neighbourhoods there was a lack of variety amongst the plant life. As a consequence, Members are suggesting that sometimes the view created by this plant life could be considered potentially dull and uninspiring.
- 4.6.2 Members have been advised that the Council does not have a programme for planting work in the Borough. In the early years of the Development Corporation numerous trees and other plants were grown in local neighbourhoods. However, over time this had created difficulties. Many plants had unfortunately attracted vandalism or had not been properly cared for, which had created long-term maintenance problems. Consequently, to avoid extending this problem it was not considered appropriate to introduce additional plants into neighbourhoods in order to create greater diversity in the local foliage.
- 4.6.3 Due to the limited availability of resources planting often now only occurs when there is a need to replace diseased or dead plants. The Group are suggesting that when replacing these plants consideration should be given to introducing different plants to a Neighbourhood in order to encourage greater diversity.
- 4.7 **Recommendation Six: We recommend that the remaining section 106 money available for use on capital landscaping work in the Greenlands Open Spaces be allocated to soft landscaping work in the courtyard area located in Wishaw Close.**
- 4.7.1 Members visited a courtyard area in Wishaw Close during the course of the walkabout in Woodrow. This courtyard area bordered a number of residential properties as well as a small area of grassland. The ground surface lacked consistency and there was evidence that sections were overgrown with weeds whilst separate patches of tarmac had been added to fill the spaces that had been left when former children's play features had been removed.
- 4.7.2 Originally a couple of drains had been located on the ground surface of this courtyard. However, over time these drains had become overgrown with weeds and filled with debris. A number of residents encountered during the course of the walkabout explained that the problem had been consistently reported and, whilst the Council's landscaping and cleaning teams did clean these drains when they

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received reports, it remained a recurring problem. The residents also explained that the drainage problem was compounded by the increasing introduction of driveways throughout the area which was replacing formerly green spaces. This had reduced the surface area for natural drainage so that flooding was increasingly experienced in the neighbourhood following periods of heavy rainfall.

- 4.7.3 Attempts had been made in the past to improve the visual appearance and practical use of the space for the benefit of local residents. The children's play features and a bench had been installed at the location some years previously. However, residents reported that these features had attracted anti-social behaviour and had eventually been removed.
- 4.7.4 The Group was keen to resolve the continuing problems associated with the courtyard area to the benefit of local residents. They believe that an appropriate solution to the problem would be to extend the soft landscaping, or grassy area, to cover the whole of the outside space. This would help to resolve the existing problems with the ground surface and would extend the area of natural drainage that might help to reduce the impact of flooding in the neighbourhood.
- 4.7.5 Members have been advised that a proportion of section 106 money was secured in recent years for investment in projects that could be delivered in areas defined as the Greenlands Open Spaces. A portion of this funding, has been retained by the Council but the exact amount remains to be clarified. An estimate remains to be provided outlining how much the project recommended by Members would cost. However, the Group believes that, if the project is affordable, the soft landscaping work they are proposing would represent a suitable project to fund using this section 106 money.
- 4.8 **Recommendation Seven: We recommend that in order to minimise the level of disruption experienced by local residents, there should be a holistic approach to the delivery of frontline services.**
- 4.8.1 During the course of the walkabout Members discussed the arrangements in place for the delivery of frontline services. The Council delivered a variety of services which could impact on local tenants and residents, including repair and maintenance work to Council properties and landscaping work on local greenery.

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- 4.8.2 However, delivery of these services was not co-ordinated but tended to be undertaken as and when required throughout the year. Members expressed concerns that this could potentially lead to a greater degree of disruption to residents' lives than might be necessary. The Group are contending, therefore, that there should be corporate planning over the timetables for delivering these services. As part of this process Officers from different departments would be required to liaise over forthcoming works and to attempt to co-ordinate service delivery so that such frontline services were delivered at the same time. Officers would potentially need to spend an extended period of time planning service delivery. However, the Group contends that this would minimise the level of disruption then experienced by local residents.
- 4.9 **Recommendation Eight: We recommend that representatives of local schools be invited to participate in estate walkabouts.**
- 4.9.1 Estate Walkabouts are increasingly taking place in all wards across the Borough. The walkabouts provide an opportunity for representatives from a variety of services and organisations to work together to address residents', including Council tenants', needs at the local neighbourhood level. This could include reviewing many of the issues assessed by the Short Sharp Review Group and identifying suitable solutions to any problems that are observed.
- 4.9.2 The Council's Housing Team co-ordinates an annual schedule of Estate Walkabouts around the Council's housing estates. Frequently, representatives from the local Landscaping; Community Safety; Tenancy; and Anti-Social Behaviour teams are invited to participate in these walkabouts alongside local Police Officers and ward Councillors.
- 4.9.3 The value of these walkabouts has been recognised by Councillors in previous years and was promoted as an example of best practice for community engagement by the Neighbourhood Groups Task and Finish Group in 2009. However, the Group are suggesting that the value of these walkabouts could be further extended to help address some of the differences in quality of life affecting Redditch which were identified in the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) for Worcestershire in 2009.
- 4.9.4 The CAA identified low educational attainment amongst young people in Redditch as a cause for concern. Members recognise that the CAA has now been disbanded. However, they are also aware that this does



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not mean that the problems with educational attainment in Redditch have been resolved.

- 4.9.5 The Group are suggesting that the conditions in which young people live, socialise and study indirectly impact on their achievements in education. As such, local schools should be familiar with these conditions so as to address the many factors impacting on the educational experiences of their pupils. The Group contends that participation in estate walkabouts would help representatives of local schools to develop this familiarity.
- 4.9.6 The Redditch Partnership has taken a strategic lead in addressing the low educational attainment levels that were identified in the CAA. The Group are therefore suggesting that it would be appropriate for the partnership to be advised about this recommendation.
- 4.10 **Recommendation Nine: We recommend that representatives of the local GP's Consortium be invited to participate in the estate walkabouts once the consortia have been introduced in 2012/13.**
- 4.10.1 Health inequalities were also identified as a cause for concern in the CAA. Within Worcestershire Redditch was discovered to have the highest smoking levels and the least healthy lifestyles.
- 4.10.2 The Group is suggesting that the conditions in which a resident lives, works and socialises may impact on the health of local residents. Some residents may also have received limited education about healthy lifestyles. Under these circumstances the Group are contending that it would be appropriate to invite an expert medical practitioner to participate in the estate walkabouts as this could lead to improvements in public health. The participation of these medical practitioners would provide them with an opportunity to share ideas with local partner organisations as well with the chance to educate any local residents encountered during the course of the walkabouts about healthy lifestyles.
- 4.10.3 The Group are aware that the GP's Consortia are not scheduled to be launched until 2012/13. However, Members noted that these consortia would have a more localised focus than the current Primary Care Trusts (PCTs). Consequently, the Group contends that it would be appropriate to invite representatives of the consortia to participate in the estate walkabouts once these consortia have been established.

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- 4.10.4 The Redditch Partnership has taken a strategic lead in addressing the health inequalities that were identified in the CAA. The Group are therefore suggesting that it would be appropriate for the partnership to be advised about this recommendation.

### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The majority of the recommended actions could be implemented not just in Woodrow but also in other parts of the Borough at a relatively low financial cost to the Council.
- 5.2 Implementation of the actions requested in recommendation six would require a greater degree of expenditure. However, the Group has been assured that the funding required is available in the form of the section 106 funding secured on a previous occasion. This can be utilised to fund projects that would benefit the local community and should be spent in accordance with set rules and procedures. The Group has been advised that the project they are proposing would comply with these requirements.

### **6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal implications.

### **7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The Group are recommending a number of changes to working practices which could have policy implications for particular Council services.

### **8. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES**

The Group's recommendations are designed to enable the Council to meet the objective to be a well managed organisation. In addition, the Group believes that many of the actions they are suggesting, particularly with regards to the visual appearance of Council properties, would help the Council to meet the corporate aim to be clean and green.

### **9. RISK MANAGEMENT INCLUDING HEALTH & SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS**

There are no direct risk management including health and safety implications.

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### **10. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS**

The Short, Sharp Review Group are recommending actions which are designed to improve living conditions, particularly for the Council's tenants. Furthermore, the Group are suggesting that if the Council was to adopt a holistic approach to service delivery the level of disruption experienced by local residents, including Council tenants, would be minimised. Implementation of this recommendation would therefore have positive implications for local customers.

### **11. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct equalities and diversity implications.

### **12. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS, PROCUREMENT AND ASSET MANAGEMENT**

The Group recognises that any measures which are implemented in response to this report should be cost effective and represent value for money. In particular, the Group are requesting that if recommendation one is approved, any Council garage doors that were recently painted brown should only receive a fresh coat of lighter paint once redecoration is required. This would ensure that the Council obtains value for money from work that has already been completed.

### **13. CLIMATE CHANGE, CARBON IMPLICATIONS AND BIODIVERSITY**

The introduction of soft landscaping features in the courtyard area located in Wishaw Close would expand the surface area suitable for natural drainage. This would help to address some of the problems that residents have recently reported with flooding in the vicinity.

### **14. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct human resources implications.

### **15. GOVERNANCE/PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct governance or performance management implications.

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**16. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS INCLUDING SECTION 17 OF  
CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998**

During the course of the walkabout on 6th October Members and Officers observed some evidence of anti-social behaviour. Evidence of anti-social behaviour is generally identified by Anti-Social Behaviour and Community Safety Officers when conducting regular site visits to locations across the Borough and is not strictly within the remit of the Group to review. The evidence that was observed has been referred to the Redditch Community Safety Partnership's Tasking Group for further consideration.

**17. HEALTH INEQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

The proposal to involve representatives of the local GP's Consortium in estate walkabouts does have health inequalities implications. The inclusion of representatives from the health service in these walkabouts might help local partners to identify issues within the local environment which encourage unhealthy lifestyles. Moreover, medical practitioners could provide expert advice on healthy lifestyles to any residents encountered during the walkabouts.

**18. LESSONS LEARNT**

Short, sharp scrutiny reviews have rarely been undertaken in Redditch. However, this review has demonstrated that short sharp reviews can add value and can be completed relatively quickly. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee might therefore wish to consider expanding the use of short sharp review arrangements for scrutinising relevant subjects in future years.

**19. COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

During the course of the walkabout two residents engaged in conversation with the Members and raised a number of concerns about Wishaw Close. The views expressed by these residents were taken into consideration by the Councillors and helped to inform their final recommendations.

**20. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT**

Portfolio Holder	No.
Chief Executive	No.

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Executive Director (S151 Officer)	No.
Executive Director – Leisure, Cultural, Environmental and Community Services	No.
Executive Director – Planning & Regeneration, Regulatory and Housing Services	No.
Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships	No.
Head of Service	The Head of Community Services and the Head of Housing both participated in the walkabout in Woodrow and have been consulted over the Group's recommendations.
Head of Resources	No.
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	No.
Corporate Procurement Team	No.

**21. WARDS AFFECTED**

Greenlands ward is directly affected by the recommendations detailed within this report. However, many of the Group's recommendations could also be implemented in other wards in the Borough.

**22. APPENDICES**

Appendix 1- Repair and Maintenance Costs.

Appendix 2 – Art Projects – Financial Costs.

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### **23. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Comprehensive Area Assessment 2009, Audit Commission.

Neighbourhood Groups Task and Finish Group, Final Report, 2009.

Notes from the walkabout in Woodrow which took place on Wednesday 6th October 2010.

Notes from the meeting of the External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short, Sharp Review Group which took place on Monday 1st November 2010.

Photographic evidence taken during the walkabout on 6th October 2010.

### **24. KEY**

CAA – Comprehensive Area Assessment.

### **25. EXPRESSIONS OF THANKS**

The External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short sharp Review Group would like to thank the following individuals for the help they provided during the course of the review. As this was a short sharp review the process had to be completed quickly and a number of people provided information when requested in a very short space of time.

The Group would particularly like to thank the residents from Wishaw Close who engaged with the Councillors during the walkabout.

Members also wish to thank the following Officers for the contributions they have made to this review:

Jayne Bough, Housing Services Manager  
Angie Heighway, Head of Community Services  
Peter Hill, Community Safety Project Officer  
Amar Hussain, Assistant Solicitor  
Ian Ranford, Capital Operations Manager  
Liz Tompkin, Head of Housing  
Carl Walker, Landscape and Countryside Manager  
Mark White, Capital Projects Officer

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