

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meeting held on 7 November 2012)

1. TENANCY STRATEGY (REPORT B) (MINUTE NO 35)

The Cabinet has adopted a Housing Strategy, which sets the context within which the tenancy policies of this Council and the other social housing providers in the District must be developed. The Strategy, which is now a regulatory requirement, takes advantage of new freedoms introduced under the Localism Act 2011. In particular, the Council will now be able to use fixed term tenancies, alongside the normal periodic tenancies which have been used in the public sector since 1980. The normal fixed term period offered will be 5 years, which will give sufficient stability to the tenancy, while retaining flexibility to reassess housing need after that time. Shorter periods will be offered, in exceptional circumstances, such as where there is doubt about longer term housing need, or the tenant has a history of problematic behaviour as a tenant. Longer term tenancies will continue to be offered to older and vulnerable people as they need stability in their home life; and existing tenants will not be affected while they remain tenants.

A further change is the introduction of “affordable” rents, which are set at a higher level than social rents. The Strategy sets out the Council’s aspirations that, while a proportion of re-let properties will be converted to affordable rents, care must be taken to ensure that this does not reinforce benefit dependency, or rents that would be above local housing allowance levels.

2. NEW HOMESearch ALLOCATIONS SCHEME (REPORT C) (MINUTE NO 36)

The Council’s successful Homesearch Scheme has also been updated in the light of new freedoms introduced by the Localism Act 2012 and, following consultations, in particular with the partner landlords, a revised scheme has been adopted.

The Council now has greater control over who is eligible for inclusion on the housing waiting list and can remove or exclude those who do not have a realistic prospect of being housed because they have insufficient housing need or they do not have a local connection. People who have demonstrated that they are unsuitable to be a tenant, for example through a history of anti-social behaviour, can also be excluded, which will strengthen this Council’s ability to deal with problem tenants. The required residential connection with the District has also been increased from 1 year to 2 years. Members also welcomed the introduction of a quota of housing being reserved for working households.

It is expected that the effect of these changes will be to allow the Council to focus on housing local people who are in need of accommodation.

3. LOCAL PLAN PART 2: SITES AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT – EXAMINATION (REPORT D) (MINUTE 37).

The Cabinet has considered the outcome of consultations requested by the Inspector for the Examination of the Sites and Development Plan Document, and was advised of the recommendations of the special joint meeting of the Planning Development

Control Committee and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel, which had considered this issue at a special meeting on 24 October 2012. The main issues under consideration were:

- Conservation and Enhancement of Historic and Natural Environment – Policies have been agreed with English Heritage and Natural England to be included to cover the conservation and enhancement of the historic and natural environment. Following the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework which, unlike predecessor national planning policy documents, does not include such policies, there had been a gap in protection
- RING3: Land south of Ringwood, west of Crow Lane and adjacent to Crow Arch Lane - this land has been allocated for residential and employment use and some changes in detail had been proposed in the latest consultation. Although a large number of responses had been received, these related mainly to the principle of the proposed development, and no further changes were proposed as a result.
- MoS1: Land north of School Lane, Milford on Sea – The proposed change that reduced the allocation of housing and public open space on this site had failed to achieve the compromise that had been sought, and did not meet the aspirations of any of the parties. The Cabinet has concurred with the recommendation of the special meeting of the Planning Development Control Committee and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel which, after a lengthy debate, concluded that the proposed change should be withdrawn, restoring the original policy allocation of 30 dwellings and a larger area of open space. It is recognised that the Parish Council and local ward councillors would prefer to explore this issue further through a Neighbourhood Plan, having just initiated the formal processes. The Cabinet have concluded that it is important to pursue the overall policy objectives for the District, as set out in the Sites and Development Document, which was produced following significant work and consultation over a period of 2 years. This did not prevent the Parish Council from actively pursuing their Neighbourhood Plan and, if well-developed alternative proposals could be brought forwards before this Council considered adopting the Sites and Development Document, likely to be in the autumn of 2013, Policy MoS1 could be superseded.
- Landscape matters - Policy DM8 and proposed landscape feature designations have been withdrawn as it has been accepted that there is insufficient evidence base to the proposals. By withdrawing this element it avoids delaying the consideration of the rest of the plan, with an early review of these designations being carried out as soon as possible.
- Dibden Bay – The Council remains of the view that Dibden Bay is properly dealt with as a strategic site under the Core Strategy and there is no merit in the representations seeking a safeguarding for port use in the Sites and Development Document.

4. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2012 (REPORT E) (MINUTE NO 38)

The Cabinet welcomed the Council's continuing strong performance against key targets and key performance indicators over the last year. Of particular note is that the Council has maintained a balanced budget within the context of continuing cuts in grant support from central government, and Council tax levels having been frozen since 2010. Savings of over £3.5 million have been achieved through the reviews conducted under the Medium Term Financial Plan, and latest projections suggest

that the outturn figure for 2012/13 is likely to come in £500,000 under budget, which will support budgets in coming years.

Careful management of the Council's resources has also allowed investment to improve the efficiency of their use, while Ringwood Gateway operates in partnership with Ringwood Town Council and the County Council, and the shared use of the Town Hall at Lymington has opened up opportunities for greater partnership working with the Park Authority. Investment in the Health and Leisure centres has increased usage and consequently income, while the opportunity has been taken to transfer the Dibden Golf Centre to a specialist operation, generating savings to this Council of £100,000 per annum. The Cabinet was pleased at reports that the playing experience at the golf course had been maintained while other facilities were being improved. There were 3-monthly meetings between this Council and Mytime Active to monitor progress. It was agreed that consideration would be given to including a local ward councillor in those meetings.

The Audit Commission has issued an unqualified opinion on the Council's 2011/12 financial statement and has concluded that proper arrangements are in place to secure value for money.

The Cabinet was also very pleased with the Council's engagement with the local community, particularly for the Jubilee Royal visit, and the Olympic and Paralympic events, including the torch relay which was attended by over 46,000 people. This Council had been heavily involved with the arrangements, and all those staff who had helped, including as stewards, were thanked for their contribution to the success of the events, which had been achieved with minimal expenditure.

**Cllr B Rickman
CHAIRMAN**