

19 JANUARY 2016

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel held in The Bradbury Room, Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Tuesday, 19 January 2016

- * Cllr S P Davies (Chairman)
- * Cllr D J Russell (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

- * D A Britton
- * Mrs L D Cerasoli
- * I C Coombes
- * Ms K V Crisell

Councillors:

- * A H G Davis
- * Mrs P J Lovelace
- * N S Penman
- * M L White

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

P J Armstrong
J E Binns

Councillors:

Mrs J L Cleary
A D O'Sullivan

Also In Attendance

Mr R Drummond, Solent Credit Union, for Minute No 37
Mr J Merritt, Solent Credit Union, for Minute No 37
G Waters, Tenant Representative

Officers Attending:

Ms J Bailey, J Burton, M Devine, C Elliott, Mrs P Lewis, G Miles, C Read,
Ms A Righton and Ms M Stephens

34 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2015 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

35 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs Britton, Cerasoli, Coombes, Davis, Penman, Russell and White declared interests in Minute No 38.

36 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

37 CREDIT UNION PRESENTATION

The Panel received a presentation from Mr Drummond and Mr Merritt, of the Solent Credit Union.

A credit union was a financial cooperative, which was jointly owned and democratically controlled by its members.

Solent Credit Union had been created from a merger of Co-operators Credit Union, Sanctuary Credit Union, and Eastleigh Credit Union and offered co-operative financial services to people and organisations who lived, worked or were based in the SO postcode area. The Union was managed and controlled by its members, through a volunteer Board of Directors and the Supervisory Committees, elected by its members. Solent Credit Union was regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority.

The Union had various member service points in towns across the SO postcode area. These were one stop shops, usually within a council or community building, for members and non-members, to seek basic monetary advice. A service point had recently been set up in Hythe village and it was hoped that this facility would be extended further throughout the District.

Solent Credit Union provided loans to its members, offering individual rates depending on credit history and other personal circumstances. Borrowers were often asked to save as they repaid, improving their financial position.

The Union also provided a 'rent direct' scheme which was available for landlords and tenants. The Union, on behalf of the tenant, would transfer all of the tenant's Housing Benefit directly to the landlord.

In addition the Union offered its members competitive savings schemes, through individual savings accounts (ISAs) and payroll deductions. The payroll deduction service had been developed with local employers. Employees made a payment into their Credit Union accounts directly when they were paid and could build up savings at a competitive rate. Current employers offering payroll deduction included Southampton City Council and Eastleigh Borough Council, and the Union hoped to roll out this service to NFDC staff. The Head of Customer Services and Housing would shortly hold discussions with Executive Heads regarding the possibility of the Council pursuing this possibility.

Members asked a number of questions to which answers were given.

The Panel thanked Mr Drummond and Mr Merritt for an informative presentation.

The Panel would consider the issues raised, including the benefits the credit union could offer to tenants, at their work programme session in March.

Action: Glynne Miles

38 COMMUNITY GRANTS

Cllrs Britton, Cerasoli, Coombes, Davis, Penman and Russell disclosed non-pecuniary interests in Appendix 2 of the report (Totton & Eling Town Council application) as members of Totton & Eling Town Council. They concluded that there were no issues under common law that prevented them from remaining in the meeting to speak. There was no discussion on this item.

Cllr White disclosed a non-pecuniary interest in Appendix 2 of the report (Lymington Museum Trust) as a member of Lymington & Penning Town Council. He concluded that there were no issue under common law that prevented him from remaining in the meeting to speak. There was no discussion on this item.

The Panel considered the community grant applications received by the Health and Leisure Portfolio Holder and his initial assessment on each application.

The Panel expressed the view that the process for allocating community grants should continue to include robust scrutiny and examination of individual applications and were pleased that the Portfolio Holder continued to involve the Panel in this. It was also felt that the process helped to remind members of their own community grant monies.

The Panel supported the proposed grants as set out in appendices 1 & 2 of the report, which would be provided for in the 2016/17 budget, and which would be considered by the Cabinet in February.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the content of the report be supported and that the Panel's comments be passed to the Portfolio Holder for consideration; and
- (b) That the grant applications as set out in appendices 1 & 2 of the report be recommended for inclusion in the Medium Term Financial Plan report to the Cabinet.

39 INTRODUCTORY TENANCIES

The Panel received an update on the progress of the implementation of introductory tenancies since they were introduced in April 2014.

Introductory tenancy was a 'probationary' tenancy put in place for 1 year, with the possibility of a 6 month extension where officers felt further monitoring would be required, for example in terms of behaviour or rent arrears. They enabled the robust management of tenancies through officers assisting, supporting and educating new tenants. On successful completion of an introductory tenancy, tenants were given a fixed-term tenancy.

Introductory tenancies were managed by the Council's Neighbourhood and Tenancy Management Officers and Rent & Arrears Recovery Officers, through visits, contact with tenants, and if necessary, enforcement action. There were currently 141 introductory tenancies in place.

Members recognised that this was a robust tenancy process which required significant officer support. The Head of Customer Services and Housing commented that whilst the management of introductory tenancies was labour intensive, it benefited the Council in the long term, in producing 'good' tenants.

Members briefly discussed the overall rent arrears of introductory tenants. Officers regularly monitored rent arrears to ensure they remained at a reasonable level.

Members were pleased to note that introductory tenancies were working well, particularly as they promoted the need to be a responsible tenant.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel note the progress of introductory tenancies and receive an update in 12 months' time.

Action: Pauline Lewis

40 SAFER NEW FOREST STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

The Panel considered the Safer New Forest's Strategic Assessment for 2015.

Safer New Forest was the statutory Community Safety Partnership for the New Forest District. The Partnership consisted of a number of key agencies, including Police, Fire, and Hampshire County Council and was focused on reducing crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour in the New Forest.

Members considered the key performance statistics from the previous year's strategic assessment and the priorities and work streams for the 2016-17 Partnership Plan.

Members were reminded of the recent changes to Police crime recording. The new practices meant that a single incident might be categorised under multiple headings which might result in a slight increase in crime figures, and this did not necessarily provide a true picture of the levels of crime in the District. Some Panel members expressed the view that whilst accepting that the assessment had data integrity, the changes in the crime recording, and the impact this had on key indicators, should be made clear against targets. They felt that an explanatory narrative should be made against any measures showing a significant increase.

The Panel would discuss the 2016-17 Partnership Plan at their next meeting in March, when it was hoped that the Chief Inspector would be present to give a clearer picture of the crime levels in the District and the work being undertaken to tackle crime.

The Panel, at their work programme session in March, would look to include reviews on drug and alcohol abuse and domestic abuse in the District.

RESOLVED:

That members' views regarding the draft Strategic Assessment, as set out above, be passed to the Safer New Forest Strategy Group for consideration.

Action: Grainne O'Rourke

41 SEDENTARY LIFESTYLES TASK & FINISH GROUP

The Panel considered the findings of the Sedentary Lifestyles Task & Finish Group.

The Group had been established in September 2015 to gain a better understanding of the benefits of a more active lifestyle and to determine how members could encourage sedentary individuals to become more active.

The Group, in recognising the fundamental benefits that active lifestyles could have on communities, agreed that members had a role to play in encouraging individuals to make small changes to their lifestyles. The Group also identified ways in which Leisure Services could regularly keep members informed of work taking place in engaging sedentary individuals and further aid understanding of healthy/active lifestyles.

Members discussed the importance of educating communities, particularly children and young people, on the importance of healthy diets alongside active lifestyles. The Sports and Development Officer informed members of the various ways in which the Council had been working with key partners to educate children and young people in the District on healthy eating habits. The Panel agreed that this issue be discussed further at the March Panel meeting, where the future work programme would be developed.

The Panel supported the findings of the Task & Finish Group and endorsed the actions set out in paragraphs 4, 5 & 6 of the report.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the findings of the Task & Finish Group set out in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the report for consideration by the Portfolio Holder, be endorsed; and
- (b) That the findings of the Task & Finish Group set out in paragraph 6 of the report for consideration by the Leisure Development Manager be endorsed.

Action: Joanne Bailey

42 STATUTORY NUISANCE TASK & FINISH GROUP

The Panel received a verbal update on the progress of the Statutory Nuisance Task & Finish Group.

The Group had been established to examine the development of a policy for investigating statutory nuisances and the new legislative powers relating to antisocial behaviour, to ensure consistency in approach.

The Group highlighted the implications of key changes to antisocial behaviour legislation which gave local authorities greater powers to target antisocial behaviour. A training session for key staff had been organised for February covering the changes in the law. The Group would continue its work once the training session had taken place and more was known about the powers open to the Council.

43 CCTV TASK & FINISH GROUP - BRIEFING NOTE (DEFERRED)

With the agreement of the Chairman, this item was deferred to the next meeting.

44 WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED:

That the Panel's work programme set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes be agreed.

45 PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' UPDATES

The Portfolio Holder for Health & Leisure advised that the Eling Tide Mill project would be completed in December 2016.

He informed the Panel that the Health and Leisure Centres had out-performed all their targets last year and congratulated all staff at the Health and Leisure Centres for their hard work and dedication.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Communities reported on the progress with land acquisition and housing development.

46 MARTIN DEVINE AND ANNIE RIGHTON

The Panel noted that Martin Devine and Annie Righton were shortly leaving the Council and that this would be their last meeting of the Panel.

Members paid tribute to the excellent contribution they had made to the Council and the valuable support they had given the Panel. Members wished them both well in their future endeavours.

CHAIRMAN

Work Programme 2016/2017

ITEM	OBJECTIVE	METHOD	TIMING/UPDATE ON PROGRESS
HOUSING			
Armed Forces Community Covenant	To review the progress of the Community Covenant.	Task & Finish Group Report to Panel	As and when appropriate
Supporting People	To review the impact of the Supporting People regime.	Report to Panel	As and when appropriate
Welfare Reform	To review the transition to Universal Credit and impact on residents/tenants.	Report to Panel	As and when appropriate
CRIME & DISORDER			
CCTV Task & Finish Group	To consider the findings of the group.	Report to Panel	March 2016
Statutory Nuisance Task & Finish Group	To consider findings of the Group	Report to Panel	June 2016
Safer New Forest Partnership Plan	To review the priorities in the plan	Report to Panel	September 2016
Safer New Forest Strategic Assessment	To consider the performance and priorities within the assessment for comment back to the Strategy Group.	Report to Panel	January 2017
Safer New Forest Partnership Plan	To review the priorities in the plan	Report to Panel	September 2017
Domestic Homicide	To receive a report on the domestic homicide panel	Report/Presentation to Panel	When appropriate

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE			
Child Poverty in the New Forest	Task & Finish Group	Findings and final recommendations	March 2016
HEALTH			
Progress of the Health & Wellbeing Board Action Plan	To review the progress of the current action plan	Report to Panel	June 2016
LEISURE			
Community Grants	To review the Community Grant applications and make recommendations to the Portfolio Holder	Report to Panel	January 2017

Current Task & Finish Groups

- Armed Forces Community Covenant (annual review)
- Child Poverty
- Dibden Golf Centre
- Statutory Nuisance
- CCTV