

15 NOVEMBER 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, 15 November 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:

Mrs J L Cleary, Housing & Communities Portfolio Holder

Also In Attendance:

Anne Murphy, Tenants' Representative

Officers Attending:

Mrs R Drummond, C Elliott, C Read, Ms M Stephens, Mr R Stevens and R Topliss

21 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2016 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made by members in connection with an agenda item.

23 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

24 KEY ACTIONS & SERVICE REVIEW PROGRAMME - UPDATE

The Panel considered the latest position with regard to service reviews and the delivery of key actions under the remit of the Panel.

The Business Improvement & Customer Services Service Manager confirmed that the savings referenced in relation to Community Safety were predominately made up of staff savings and additional income for Troubled Families.

Members were pleased with the progress made against each of the actions.

RESOLVED:

That the information contained in the report be noted.

25 WELFARE REFORM

The Housing & Community Service Manager gave a brief update on welfare reform changes, including: -

Universal Credit

This complicated change to the benefits system included the merger of six working age benefits. Universal Credit roll out for working age claimants was expected to be implemented by 2022. However, it was unlikely that this target would be met.

Universal Credit had proved to be a difficult culture shift for claimants, as they had to claim on-line and were often finding this too complicated a process. Rent arrears was increasing with those claiming Universal Credit. The administration of the claims had experienced some issues surrounding data sharing between the Council and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

Officers had concerns regarding the delays in the first payment to claimants. There were roughly 155 Universal Credit claims in the New Forest, 32 of which were Council tenants. Officers were working closely with tenants, offering budgeting advice and setting up alternative payment plans were needed.

The roll out of full Universal Credit in the district was expected to start in December 2017.

Weekly Benefits Cap

The weekly benefit cap limited the amount of state benefit received by working age individuals. The amounts for couples had reduced from £500 to £384 per week and £350 to £257 per week for single claimants.

In the New Forest this had affected approximately 90 claimants, predominantly lone parents. The implementation for new claimants would start on 21 November and it was expected that this would affect 200 claimants in the New Forest, 80 of which were Council tenants.

The Council was experiencing an increase in Discretionary Housing Payments, causing an increase in customer contact.

The DWP had sent letters to all individuals affected. The Council would also contact all claimants and would offer advice and assistance where needed.

Bedroom Tax Appeal

Two cases had recently been discussed at the Supreme Court, with the Court ruling in favour of the claimants. The DWP were considering its response to this and would issue guidance to local authorities in due course.

The Panel thanked the Housing & Community Service Manager for the update and requested that further progress reports be submitted in the future when appropriate.

26 PRESENTATION ON THE 'SALE OF VACANT HIGHER VALUE COUNCIL HOMES' AND 'PAY TO STAY' HOUSING POLICIES

The Housing & Community and Housing, Property & Performance Service Managers gave an overview of the recent changes to social housing policies as a result of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 which received Royal Assent in May 2016.

The social housing elements of the Act included the following policies which were expected to come into force from April 2017: -

Higher Value Council Homes

The Act required councils to sell higher value housing as it became vacant. What constituted 'higher value' would be the subject of regulations made under the Act but essentially it would take into account different types of housing, local authorities and geographical areas. The rationale behind the duty was to raise money to support the extension of the Right to Buy scheme to Housing Associations tenants. The Act gave the Secretary of State the power to demand that any council sell a yet-to-be defined proportion of their vacant stock in their area that was relatively more expensive. Councils would also have to forward on receipts from the sale of the house to the Government.

An independent analysis undertaken by the charity Shelter had predicted that the New Forest could be asked to raise approximately £17 million through selling an average 67 homes per year. This was based on the need to raise £4.5bn per year as calculated by the Conservative Party in their April 2015 press release to fund the extension of Right to Buy.

A consultation exercise was currently underway to determine the level of funding formula for the New Forest. This matter would be brought back to the Panel once details had been received from central Government.

Pay to Stay

The Act made provision about the levels of rent that a local housing authority could charge a high income tenant. High income tenants were defined as households with incomes of £31,000 outside of London, for example a couple each earning £15,500 would be defined as higher income earners who would have to pay closer to market rents. Tenants on housing benefit and universal credit would be exempt. However tenants aged 65 and over would not.

For eligible tenants earning above the income thresholds, rent increases would be graduated. Every £1 earned above the threshold would mean a 15p increase. The

additional rent taken from tenants would go the Government, with Local Authorities retaining a proportion (yet to be determined) of this to administer the policy.

Analysis undertaken by Savills on behalf of the LGA calculated that rents could increase on average by £72 per month.

Officers anticipated that this new policy could be deferred, but more would be known in the next few weeks following the Government's budget statement.

As further guidance was awaited from the Government in relation to both policies, it was unclear how these would impact on the Council and ultimately Council tenants and New Forest residents. As such, the Panel requested that this item be discussed at a future meeting, when the situation became clearer.

RESOLVED:

That this item be brought to a future Panel meeting.

Subsequent to the meeting, the Government had confirmed that they would not make the Pay to Stay Policy compulsory. The Government have also delayed the Sale of High Value Assets by a year to 2018/19 while they gather additional information. No sales or payments would therefore be required during 2017/18.

27 COMMUNITY GRANTS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Panel considered a progress report from the Chairman of the Community Grants Task & Finish Group.

The Group had had their first meeting in October and had agreed a new community grants process and procedure. The Group would be meeting with capital and construction grant applicants shortly, and using the proposed criteria, would determine which of the grants should be recommended for approval.

Findings of the Group would be brought to the Panel in January 2017.

28 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel considered their future work programme as set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes.

RESOLVED:

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

29 PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' UPDATES

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Communities had no new issues to report.

CHAIRMAN

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PROGRAMME 2016/2017

ITEM	OBJECTIVE	METHOD	TIMING/LEAD OFFICER
HOUSING			
Welfare Reform	To receive an update.	Report to Panel	Ongoing- as and when appropriate Ryan Stevens
Pay to Stay	To consider the introduction of the policy.	Presentation to Panel	Ongoing- as and when appropriate Ryan Stevens/Richard Topliss
CRIME & DISORDER			
Statutory Nuisance Task & Finish Group	To consider findings of the Group	Report to Panel	TBC Joanne McClay
Safer New Forest Partnership Plan/Community Safety Update	To consider inputting into the Plan	Report to Panel	January 2017 Grainne O'Rourke
CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE			
Health & Wellbeing of Gypsy, Traveller, Romany Community	To consider the health & wellbeing of the GTR particularly young people/children in the New Forest	Presentation to Panel	March 2017 TBC
HEALTH/LEISURE			
Community Grants	To consider Task & Finish Group findings	Report to Panel	January 2017 Colin Read
Dibden Golf Centre – Mytime Active	To consider Task & Finish Group interim findings	Report to Panel	January 2017 Colin Read
Progress of the Health & Wellbeing Board Action Plan	To review the progress of the current action plan	Report to Panel	March 2017 Jamie Burton

Health and Leisure Centre Service Review	To consider the progress of the review	Report to Panel	March 2017 Joanne Bailey/Colin Read
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