

**20 JUNE 2018**

**NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel held in The Bradbury Room, Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Wednesday, 20 June 2018

\* Cllr S P Davies (Chairman)

\* Cllr D M S Poole (Vice-Chairman)

**Councillors:**

\* Mrs L D Cerasoli  
Ms K V Crisell  
\* Mrs P J Lovelace  
\* N S Penman

**Councillors:**

\* Miss A Sevier  
M A Steele  
\* Mrs C V Ward  
Mrs P A Wyeth

\*Present

**In attendance:**

Cllr Mrs J L Cleary, Portfolio Holder for Housing Services

**Also In Attendance:**

Mr P Woodroof, Tenant Representative

**Officers Attending:**

Miss G O'Rourke, B Byrne, Mrs R Drummond, K Green, R Knott, A Phipps,  
Ms D Tenner and Mrs K Wardle

**Apologies:**

Cllrs Steele and Mrs Wyeth.

**4 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the former Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 13 March 2018 and the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 14 May 2018 be signed by the Chairman as correct records.

**5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**6 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

**7 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE AND PROVISIONAL BUDGET OUTTURN**

The Panel received the annual performance and budget outturn for 2017/18.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be noted.

**8 HOUSING TEAM - ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Panel received a presentation on the new structure of the housing team, the challenges ahead and how these might be addressed. Homelessness was a significant problem in the District as well as nationally, with ever-increasing numbers.

The main issues highlighted were:

- Four service managers had been appointed covering the areas: Housing Maintenance, Estate Management, Housing Options and New Build / Housing Strategy.
- Over 400 families were in temporary accommodation, of which many had been in such accommodation for close to ten years. 46 households were currently in B&B accommodation. The total net cost of B&B accommodation was £500,000 per annum.
- The Housing Allocations Policy had last been updated in 2012 and needed review.
- There were 4 housing priority bands in the existing allocations policy. Homeless people were placed in Priority Band 3. This required a fresh look at the Allocations Policy in order to deal with an ever increasing homelessness situation.
- Joint working was necessary to tackle the homelessness problem. A multi-agency forum and a Task and Finish Group had been established to look at measures to address homelessness.
- Approximately 300 Council properties become available each year from the stock in excess of 5,000.
- Since the 1980s nearly 5,000 Council dwellings had been lost through right to buy, which had nearly halved the Council's stock.
- 172 units had been bought back since 2012. 84 units had been built or were in the process of being constructed on sites owned or acquired by the Council. These units were used to provide social rented housing.
- Officers were investigating ways to increase the stock and, together with a revised Housing Allocations Policy, increased stock would help to address homelessness. Affordable rent was also being investigated as well as social rent.

It was noted that work was being carried out to address cases where tenants under-occupied properties. Incentives would be put in place to encourage people to move to smaller properties in order to free up larger homes for families. It was queried whether modular housing could be used. This idea was being considered by officers.

**9 TENANT PARTICIPATION**

An update was provided on the aims and objectives of tenant participation and the work which had been carried out with local tenants. 20 tenants were members of

the Tenant Involvement Group (TIG). Training was provided to these members in order to assist them in their roles.

It was reported that the TIG discussed new policies, procedures and legislation, an example of which was consultation on a Housing Green Paper. Tenants' views would be taken into account in any response to the Government. Tenants also discussed improvement works, customer service and other issues of concern.

A quality assurance exercise had been carried out by the TIG where communal areas of 28 blocks across the District had been inspected and tenants were given questionnaires. The responses included concerns over cleaning of communal areas, grounds maintenance and uncertainty over the responsibility for reporting maintenance issues. The tenant management team had worked through issues raised and had tried to provide solutions. Notice boards and signage had been improved to provide information and communication to tenants.

The benefits of tenant participation were explained to the Panel. It was noted that tenant participation enabled a more proactive approach to matters.

## **10 HOMELESSNESS / TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION**

The Panel received a presentation outlining the Council's homelessness duties and use of temporary accommodation.

It was noted that the Housing Act 1996 had been amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The latter required local authorities to assist those who were or who were at risk of being homeless, regardless of priority need status, at an earlier stage. Authorities had three levels of duty: Prevention, Relief and Full. The responsibilities attaching to each were explained to the Panel.

A sheet detailing the Council's accommodation duties was circulated. The full Homeless Duty could only be positively discharged through the allocation of social housing or a 12 month private rented sector tenancy. Unfortunately, in practice it was often not possible to secure a private tenancy for 12 months and therefore social housing was the only option for many complex cases.

It was noted that in March 2018 there had been in excess of 80 households in B&B accommodation. This was partly a result of the snowfalls and cold weather when officers had been out to identify rough sleepers and place them in emergency temporary accommodation under the severe weather protocols. The Council had made a decision to continue to accommodate them at the end of the bad weather. Work had then begun with these vulnerable people to assess their needs, some of whom had alcohol / drug addiction/ mental health problems and were therefore difficult to engage.

Since 3 April 2018 there had been 443 new cases for assistance. 108 of these had been assessed as being owed a Prevention duty, 33 a relief duty and there were 260 open cases.

## **11 HOUSING STOCK UPDATE**

The Panel received a presentation on the housing stock types and the demand from the housing register. It was noted that there were 4,515 properties available for general need and 525 which were age-restricted.

It was further highlighted that the majority of those on the housing register were in Priority Band 3, which included those classified as homeless, living in temporary accommodation or B&Bs. Accommodation was in part allocated based on the length of time on the waiting list, rather than need. The Homelessness Task and Finish Group had looked at a number of scenarios which had demonstrated this.

Waiting times for social housing were likely to be in excess of 6 years, and possibly as much as 12 years in some areas of the District.

## **12 PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S UPDATE**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing Services reported that a new officer structure for housing services was in place. A dynamic approach was being used to tackle the challenges facing the housing section. It was anticipated that over the course of the year further Task and Finish Groups would be established to focus on specific areas of housing. This would enable interested members to get more involved.

## **13 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Panel noted the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

The Chairman suggested site visits to housing schemes could be worthwhile in order for Members to familiarise themselves with the various types of housing available.

### **RESOLVED:**

That a programme of site visits be organised for Members to view housing developments of interest.

CHAIRMAN