

16 JANUARY 2019

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, 16 January 2019

* 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:

Councillors:

Mrs J L Cleary, Portfolio Holder for Housing Services

Officers Attending:

A Bethune, B Byrne, R Fudge, Miss G O'Rourke, Ms D Tenner, R Thomson and Mrs K Wardle

Apologies:

Mrs P Lovelace

34 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2018 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

35 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

36 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

37 REVIEW OF SERVICE CHARGES

The Panel considered the review of service charges and proposals to change the charges to tenants of extra-care, hostels and age restricted accommodation.

The last service charge review had been carried out in 2004 and therefore it was considered timely to carry out a review. 640 tenanted properties paid some form of service charges.

Historically no service charges had been applied to five of the former warden accommodation at decommissioned sheltered schemes and this was proposed to change. The revised charges proposed would be applied to all tenants and were considered to be a fairer and more transparent charging structure. All new charges would apply from 1 April 2019.

Services charges would be applied on a site by site basis with the exception of extra care schemes and licenced hostels, where the charges would be applied equally across the establishment.

It was proposed that for extra care and age restricted accommodation 65% of households would receive a reduction in service charges. 1% would have a charge for the first time. 34% of households would receive an increase. The households with an increase of more than £2 a week, would have the increase implemented over a period of three years.

64 households had been identified in licenced hostels and general needs accommodation. 45% would see a reduction or no change to their charge. 11% of households would incur an increase of more than £2 per week, with a proposal that this would be phased over a three year period at a maximum of £2 per year.

It was noted that the Tenant Involvement Group would discuss the proposals on 18 January 2019 and that their comments would be included in the report to the Cabinet on 6 February.

The Panel were pleased to note that regular reviews of service charges would be carried out in the future.

RESOLVED:

That the proposed changes to service charges be supported.

38 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET AND HOUSING PUBLIC SECTOR CAPITAL EXPENDITURE PROGRAMME 2019/20

The Panel considered the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget and Housing Public Sector Capital Expenditure Programme for 2019/20.

Cabinet was required to recommend budgets for consideration at the Council meeting on 25 February 2019.

A number of financial issues were highlighted to members for 2019/20 which included a proposed weekly social rent reduction of 1%, service charges for hostels and older persons accommodation (this was discussed in detail under minute no 37), a proposed increase in garage rents of 4% and planned maintenance and improvement works.

The HRA budget proposed a contribution to the Capital Programme of £9.225m, a £191k reduction on the equivalent figure for 2018/19.

The proposed Housing Public Sector Capital Programme for 2019/20 was detailed. Nearly £12 million was proposed to be invested in additional homes. This was expected to increase in order to deliver the target set out in the Housing Strategy to deliver 600 new affordable homes from 2018-2026.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel supported the recommendations to the Cabinet and Council relating to the HRA budget and housing public sector capital expenditure programme for 2019/20.

39 HOUSING MAINTENANCE - SERVICE DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

The Panel received a presentation of Housing Maintenance – Service Design for the future. The presentation had been circulated with the agenda papers.

A brief overview was provided of the legislation and regulations relating to housing maintenance. A new Act, Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) had received Royal Assent in December 2018 and would come into force on 20 March 2019. This would impact all new tenancies, as well as existing tenancies of less than seven years in duration. It would place additional duties on the Council in relation to compliance.

The Housing Act 2004 identified 29 hazards, which included, for example damp / mould and excess cold / heat. The Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 required the landlord to keep the property in a good state of repair throughout the tenancy.

The Decent Homes Standard (DHS) had been introduced by the Government in 2001 as a minimum standard for housing owned by social landlords. The DHS had been achieved for 94% of NFDC properties, as at 1 April 2018. 2% had not been achieved due to tenant refusal and 4% of properties did not meet the standard. The HRA maintenance budget for 2018/19 was £10.5 million, of this 54% was budgeted to be spent on capital expenditure, 25% on reactive maintenance and 14% cyclical.

Customer demand for housing maintenance services varied throughout the year. There were six maintenance repair categories, they varied from an emergency (requiring a three hour response) to planned (within 90 working days). In 2017/18 close to 19,000 repair requests had been completed.

A number of changes to housing maintenance were proposed to the Panel. Greater emphasis would be placed on proactive maintenance rather than reactive. Regular block and estate inspections would be carried out. A clear understanding of the customers, their needs and expectations would need to be managed.

A new repair response category “E2” for a property to be visited in a target time of 24 hours to repair was proposed. The current system had a target of three hours or five working days. This proposal would therefore reduce the pressure on the three hour target (category E1).

Periodic condition surveys would be reintroduced for all dwellings, every five years. The last survey had been carried out in 2012. Detailed information would be recorded, including room sizes, modifications carried out and photos would be taken, etc. All information would be stored electronically.

Void periods would be managed more efficiently to ensure rent loss be minimised and properties awarded to tenants at an acceptable standard. Upfront charges for repairs which were the responsibility of tenants was also proposed, for example, lost keys. Tenants would decide whether or not they wanted the Council to carry out the work.

40 HOUSING STRATEGY / HRA PROPERTY ACQUISITION AND REMODELLING OF PROPERTIES

The Panel received a presentation providing an update on the Housing Strategy / HRA Property acquisition and remodelling of properties.

The Housing Strategy, approved at Council in December 2018 committed to deliver at least 600 new affordable homes (controlled by the Council) up to 2026. It was proposed that this would be delivered in a variety of ways, for example, through Council buy backs, land acquisition, Section 106, purchasing off the shelf properties and building on NFDC land. Garage sites would also be considered, where appropriate.

The Council had provided 136 additional properties in the period 2013/14-2017/18 through buy backs, new build and conversion of properties. In the financial year 2018/19 the Council would have an additional 92 properties, this included the 35 new properties built on the Compton and Sarum site. The Panel were pleased to note that these had been scheduled to be occupied from February 2019.

Officers had identified circa 240 affordable housing properties which could be provided over the next few years, although further work would need to be carried out in order to secure individual schemes. Homes England would be approached for funding towards the provision of more general need housing.

Officers would shortly be commencing work on developing a Shared Ownership Scheme and details would be presented to a future meeting of the Panel in the next financial year.

41 PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S UPDATE

The Portfolio Holder for Housing Services reported that following the success of the Homelessness Task and Finish Group in shaping the Council's draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and influencing of the Housing Strategy, a new Task and Finish Group be established.

An objective of the Housing Strategy related to the private sector; "to enable the best use of housing to meet local needs including support for a strong private rented sector". This objective encompassed the Council's statutory function which related to the fitness of standards in the private and public rented sector, and disabled facilities grants, which allowed people to remain in their own homes. These functions had been transferred to the Housing Services Portfolio from the Portfolio for Environment and Regulatory Services. An officer review would be carried out of the current housing team, its functions and resources with a view to discharging the Council's functions to a high standard.

The Portfolio Holder reported that a Task and Finish Group be established to consider Private Sector Housing and Disabled Facilities Grants, with a view to developing a new Private Sector Housing Strategy. Members would be invited to

take part in the Task and Finish Group. It was proposed that Members involved in the review would represent different geographical areas.

42 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel noted the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year and agreed to include additional items in the work programme for the next municipal year, 2019/20:

RESOLVED:

That the Panel's work programme be agreed with the inclusion of the following items for discussion in the next municipal year:

- Housing Asset Maintenance Strategy (June 2019)
- Maintenance Policy (June 2019)
- Shared Ownership Scheme (June 2019)
- Bespoke policies including; Gas Safety, Electrical Safety, Lifts and Lighting Equipment and Legionella (not earlier than September 2019)

CHAIRMAN