

21 NOVEMBER 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, 21 November 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:

Councillors:

Mrs S M Bennison
Mrs J L Cleary, Housing Services Portfolio Holder
W S Rippon-Swaine, Member of the Homelessness Task and Finish Group

Also In Attendance:

Mr P Woodroof, Tenants' Representative

Officers Attending:

T Davis, R Knott, Mrs J McClay, Miss G O'Rourke, Ms D Tenner, Mrs K Wardle,
Mrs K Williams and A Phipps

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Clarke and Harrison as Members of the Homelessness Task and Finish Group.

25 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2018 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

27 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

28 HOMELESSNESS TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT

The Panel considered the report from the Chairman of the Homelessness Task and Finish Group, Cllr Jill Cleary. The Panel noted that the Task and Finish Group had met between March and September 2018 and had looked at the facts and figures of homeless households in the District, the duty of local authorities, including the new Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the processes and procedures when dealing with homelessness and use of bed and breakfast and other temporary accommodation. A number of recommendations had been proposed, which included, for example, that the Council would seek to provide its own emergency temporary accommodation.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Homelessness Task and Finish Group report be noted; and
- (b) That the seven recommendations in the report be supported.

29 HOUSING STRATEGY

The Panel considered the draft Housing Strategy proposed to be approved by the Cabinet and Council in December 2018.

The Panel noted that the Housing Strategy covered all aspects of housing in the District including facilitating the delivery of over 10,000 new homes to 2036, which had been identified in the draft Local Plan. The Panel welcomed, in particular the Council's ambitions to accelerate its own build and acquisitions programme to create at least 600 affordable homes by 2026. It was noted that different types and tenures of housing would be provided which would include the Council's own shared ownership scheme, as well as affordable rent in addition to social rented tenures.

The draft Housing Strategy had been consulted on in late 2017. The revised new Housing Strategy had taken into account the results of the consultation and reflected changes in national guidance and housing legislation.

Four key priorities had been identified in the Housing Strategy. These were:

- To accelerate and maximise future housing development that meets local need and leads to sustainable growth;
- To increase the supply of high quality affordable homes through an ambitious council house building and acquisitions programme;
- To improve the housing circumstances of those within our communities most in housing need; and
- To make the best use of housing to meet the housing needs of local people, including supporting a strong and quality private rented sector.

In order to assist in the delivery of the ambitious Housing Strategy, it was noted that three additional housing posts had been proposed.

Members questioned the potential demand for a shared ownership scheme. Research had indicated there was a market for shared ownership. It was expected to appeal to those who could not afford to purchase a property on the open market but could afford to rent privately. It was also questioned whether such a scheme would give some priority to key workers and noted that this could be considered.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the proposed Housing Strategy be supported; and
- (b) That an update on the progress of the Housing Strategy be provided at each meeting of the Panel.

30 HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2019 - 2023

The Panel considered the proposed draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. They noted that the draft strategy was proposed to be approved by the Cabinet and Council in December and that a public consultation exercise would be carried out in the new year.

The Panel welcomed the Strategy which set out the local and national context, the Council's new direction of travel as well as four strategic priorities, set out below:

- Invest in and improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of front line services to prevent homelessness;
- Work with partners and stakeholders to identify issues early on and prevent homelessness by working together;
- Ending the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation through investing in and facilitating the development and use of good quality affordable housing and temporary accommodation; and
- Bring rough sleeping to an end.

The Panel considered that these priorities would make a real difference to homeless households in the District. They felt the document had been presented in a clear and concise manner. The Panel supported the Strategy including the commitment to intervene at an early stage in order to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place, the desire to end the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation and bringing an end to rough sleeping.

The Panel discussed the annual figures detailing homelessness applications and acceptances. It was noted that prior to April 2018 recorded homelessness applications reflected only those households for whom the Council determined that they had the full homeless duties. It was therefore not an accurate reflection on the actual total number of people who had approached the Council for assistance. Under the new legislation where there was a greater focus on preventing homelessness, all new approaches for assistance had been recorded since April 2018.

RESOLVED:

That the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2023 be supported.

31 HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY

The Panel considered the draft proposed Housing Allocation Policy. The Panel had previously discussed the principles of the Housing Allocation Policy and the need for review.

The Panel endorsed the revised Allocation Policy and were fully supportive of the proposed four new housing bands, which they felt would enable the scarce housing resources to be allocated to those most in housing need. It was considered that the proposed policy was both fairer and clearer and recognised that the allocation of housing should be based on need rather than the length of time spent on the housing register. The Panel praised the hard work of officers for the production of a comprehensive document.

The Panel noted that a new case management system had been proposed to assist in the management of allocation of social housing. This would lead to more efficient working and quicker allocation of properties and therefore a reduction in rent loss due to properties being let more quickly. Applicants would be asked to apply online for housing and the verification of an application would take place at the beginning of the process.

It was noted that Cabinet and Council approval would be sought on the draft Allocation Policy in December 2018. A public consultation exercise was proposed to commence in January. Consultation responses and any revised Policy was proposed to be reported back to the Scrutiny Panel in March, followed by Cabinet and Council final approval being sought in April 2019.

A three month transition period was proposed in order to implement the new Allocation policy. The housing register would close for new applications on a temporary basis. All those on the housing register (over 3,300) would be contacted and requested to re-apply online. Sufficient resources would be allocated in order to manage the volume of applications, as well as assisting those who did not have access to the online portal. It was noted that those already on the waiting list would retain the date of when they had first applied.

RESOLVED:

That the draft Housing Allocation Policy be supported.

32 PORTFOLIO HOLDER UPDATE

In light of the other items on the agenda the Portfolio Holder did not have anything else to report.

33 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel noted the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year and requested that an update be provided at each meeting on the progress and delivery of the Housing Strategy.

CHAIRMAN