

19 JUNE 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, 19 June 2019

- \* Cllr Steve Davies (Chairman)
- \* Cllr Ann Sevier (Vice-Chairman)

**Councillors:**

- \* Anne Corbridge
- \* Kate Crisell
- \* Jack Davies
- \* Andrew Gossage

**Councillors:**

- \* Joshua Kidd
- \* Ian Murray
- \* Caroline Rackham
- Christine Ward

\*Present

**In attendance:**

**Councillor:**

Jacqui England

**Officers Attending:**

Brian Byrne, Tim Davis, Richard Fudge, Kevin Green, Richard Knott, Grainne O'Rourke, Sheryl Parry, Ritchie Thomson and Karen Wardle

**Apologies:**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr C Ward.

**4 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meetings held on 20 March and 20 May 2019 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 in the public participation period.

**7 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE AND PROVISIONAL BUDGET OUTTURN**

The Panel considered the Annual Performance and Provisional Budget Outturn report for 2018/19. It was noted that this would be the last report aligned to the current Corporate Plan. A new Corporate Plan would be developed during the next year for 2020-2024.

It was noted that 2,000 approaches for housing assistance had been received by the Housing Options Team in the last year and that 321 households had either been rehomed or prevented from homelessness. Around 320 additional homes had been built District wide in 2018/19, of which 75 were affordable.

The Panel acknowledged the hard work of officers in order to produce an informative and comprehensive report.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) to note the performance and achievements as set out in Appendix 1;
- (b) to note the key strategies in progress for 2019/20 set out in Appendix 2;
- (c) to note the provisional General Fund outturn position set out in Appendix 3;
- (d) to note the provisional outturn position of the Housing Revenue Account set out in Appendix 3;
- (e) to note the provisional outturn position of the Housing Revenue Account set out in Appendix 3; and
- (f) that the Annual Performance and Provisional Budget Outturn report 2018/19 be supported.

**8 REVIEW OF HOUSING MAINTENANCE SERVICE**

The Panel considered the review of the Housing Maintenance Service.

A review had been carried out of the Housing Maintenance Service as part of a fundamental review of all aspects of housing delivery. A number of changes had been identified in order to improve the service, this included the creation of 17 new posts. These posts would be offset by the deletion of 7 vacant posts.

The review identified that more resources were required to manage the scale of work in the service, including enhanced compliance standards, better interaction and co-ordination between Marsh Lane and Appletree Court was needed and the pay structure required review in order to attract and retain good staff. This would ensure a better service for the tenants, repairs would be done properly and the service would be fit for purpose moving into the future.

Members questioned how the vacancies would be filled. It was noted that there would be opportunities for existing staff for a number of the new posts, however it was anticipated there may be some areas where there was not the expertise internally and the positions would be advertised externally.

It was acknowledged that the changes to the service would increase the costs to the Housing Revenue Account, but it was considered the proposed changes were necessary to ensure that the Housing Maintenance service was delivered to a high standard. It was noted that if the right resources were in place, void properties, for example could be turned around more quickly and therefore these properties would be bring in an income sooner.

**RESOLVED:**

That the proposals arising from the review of the Housing Maintenance Service be endorsed.

**9 HOUSING STRATEGY / HRA AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AND ACQUISITION PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Panel received a presentation updating them on the Council's own development programme for the provision of housing in the District Council area. In 2018/19 59 new Council affordable homes had been completed. It was anticipated that 55 new Council affordable homes would be completed in the financial year 2019/20.

Officers tabled a number of sites which had been identified for Council homes at various stages of development and potential futures sites, for example a brownfield Totton and green field site in New Milton. A range of options of housing was being considered from purchasing sites on the open market to converting existing Council stock and buying back ex Council housing.

It was anticipated that nearly 340 Council homes could be completed from 2018 to 2022.

Members asked whether new Council homes were designed to provide security against crime and whether the new build homes were built according to the lifetime homes standard. Officers agreed to provide clarification to members of the Panel on these issues.

**10 SHARED OWNERSHIP**

The Panel received a presentation on shared ownership. The scheme was for newly built properties. A buyer would purchase a share of the property and pay rent on the remainder. The purpose of the scheme was to assist people with small deposits and lower incomes to become property owners. This would be a new scheme for New Forest District Council and it was being developed to increase the offer for those in the private rented sector who might not be able to afford to buy a property on the open market. A worked example of shared ownership was presented to the Panel to demonstrate, the kind of deposit required, mortgage repayments, rent and leasehold charge to show the affordability of the scheme.

It was proposed that the standard Homes England lease would be used for the shared ownership scheme. Members questioned the affordability of future rent increases, and this would be considered in more detail as the scheme developed.

The limitations of shared ownership were tabled. These included; the fact that the scheme was exclusively for leasehold homes (an occupier could staircase to 100% ownership), the homes could not be sublet and the leaseholder would need to seek permission before conducting major work to the property.

The scheme was viewed positively amongst the Panel and it was noted that the Panel would have a further opportunity to scrutinise shared ownership as the scheme developed.

## 11 HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

The Panel received an update on homelessness. Joint working initiatives were being developed to address homelessness. This included for example, management changes with the Council's Rent Income, Housing Support and Private Sector Housing Teams being transferred to the Service Manager for Housing Options, building relationships with organisations such as the job centres, housing associations and Waterside Churches. The aim was to identify those at risk of becoming homeless at an earlier stage.

Hampshire County Council would reduce funding for floating support to vulnerable people at risk of homelessness from August 2019. The number of community support workers would reduce from 4/5 down to 1. This would be a huge gap to fill, particularly with an increase in complex clients in temporary accommodation. The Council had however, been awarded £55,000 from the Ministry of Housing Community and Local Government, following a successful bid. This funding and the budget from a current vacancy had been used to create three new support workers starting over July; the positions were for:

- Floating Support Worker: dedicated to support those threatened with homelessness with issues such as rent arrears, financial problems and other tenancy problems;
- Outreach Worker: responding to reports of rough sleepers, building trust in the hope that any offer of accommodation would be accepted;
- Supported Lettings Worker: to assist complex clients in temporary accommodation sustain this accommodation and move on to independent living.

The Service also had a new position for a Private Sector Landlord Liaison Officer. This officer would be responsible for developing relationships with agents and landlords and for setting up a Landlord Forum to promote safer high standard properties.

Statistics for 2018/19 were presented to the Panel. There had been almost 2,000 new approaches for housing assistance recorded, 568 Prevention duties had been awarded and 289 Relief Duties. 109 new 'main' duties to provide social housing had been awarded. 73 main duties had been discharged during the year, moving them to permanent social accommodation.

The new housing allocation policy had been approved in April 2019. A new IT system had been procured and in the autumn it was anticipated that those on the housing waiting list would need to re-register. Communication regarding the new allocation policy would begin soon.

## 12 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATE

The Private Sector Housing Task and Finish Group had met for the third time. The work programme for each meeting was presented to the Panel. The aim of the Group was to develop a new Private Sector Housing Strategy.

**13 PORTFOLIO HOLDER UPDATE**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing Services reported that housing services was very busy and that further changes would take place over the next 12 months. The Portfolio Holder thanked officers for all their hard work.

**14 WORK PROGRAMME**

Members were invited by the Chairman to propose future items for the agenda. It was proposed that Council buy-backs be added to the work programme in September.

**RESOLVED:**

That the work programme be agreed with the addition of Council buy-backs for the meeting on 18 September 2019.

CHAIRMAN