

**18 SEPTEMBER 2019**

**NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on  
Wednesday, 18 September 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:**

**Councillors:**

Jill Cleary

**Also In Attendance:**

Paul Woodroof, Tenants' Representative

**Officers Attending:**

Tim Davis, Richard Fudge, Richard Knott, Grainne O'Rourke, Adrian Phipps,  
Mary Quinlan, Dambu Tenner, Ritchie Thomson and Karen Wardle

**Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Gossage and Sevier.

**15 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2019 be signed by the Chairman  
as a correct record.

**16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**17 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No issues were raised in the public participation period.

**18 UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW HOUSING MAINTENANCE SERVICE STRUCTURE**

The Panel, at its last meeting in June, had received details of the fundamental review of the Housing Maintenance Service. Significant changes had been proposed in order to strengthen compliance responsibilities relating to the Council's housing stock and to ensure the Service was fit for purpose moving into the future. Cabinet and Council in July 2019 approved changes to the Service to ensure that sufficient resources were in place to deal with the significant maintenance responsibilities for over 5,000 Council properties, which included 17 new posts.

In the summer months, officers had started to implement the restructure of the Service, including recruiting to the new posts. Richard Fudge was introduced to the Panel as the new Service Manager for Housing Compliance and Asset Management. An update was provided on recruitment to the new positions. It was anticipated that these positions, including any existing vacancies would be filled in the forthcoming months. Some positions had been filled internally and the Panel expressed their support for this.

Members questioned whether apprenticeships had been considered in the Housing Maintenance Service. It was noted that once the restructuring had bedded down, it was envisaged that there would be apprenticeships in the future.

**19 UPDATE ON HOMELESSNESS**

An update was provided to the Panel on staffing which supported the Council's homeless services:

A new Private Sector Liaison officer, Emilie Dyke had just started. Her role was to develop relationships with the private sector, in particular with estate agents and landlords, establish a new Landlord's Forum, and to identify any HMOs which would require a licence. It was considered that any improvement in the Council's relationship with the private sector would encourage landlords to rent their properties to homeless households. This work was in alignment with the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and the Housing Strategy.

A new Tenancy Support Worker, Jaimie Otterwell was due to take up his position in October. Jamie would provide support to Council Tenants to resolve rent arrears, assist with debt management, benefit matters and ensure that people had access to other services.

The work of the business support team and rent income team was outlined. It was anticipated that there would be more multiskilling for members of staff. Improvements would be made to the housing software, which would allow officers to offer more support to prevent rent arrears. It was also reported that all new tenants would receive a visit within the first 14 days of the tenancy to carry out a full financial assessment, and that any notice of intention to seek possession would be served in person with an offer of support.

Three new support officers had been appointed with £55,000 grant funding from the Government and by utilising other resources arising from efficiencies focusing on rough sleepers.

- Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker;
- Supported Letting Worker;
- Homelessness Prevention Support Officer.

The supported Lettings Worker presented three case studies to the Panel which showed the very real and tangible benefits that were being demonstrated by assessing the most vulnerable in our communities.

The first client had been placed in temporary accommodation with serious alcohol addiction and debts. The debt issue was addressed, for example, a fine had been received from another local authority for littering. The local authority had been contacted, the client's situation was explained and the fine was waived. Other assistance was given which enabled him to be involved in the community, become more independent and therefore increase his confidence and feeling of self-worth.

The second client had learning difficulties and was supported in Temporary Accommodation. Fraudulent activity had been identified with her bank account due to a family member setting up direct debits. Officers worked with the client and family member and the direct debits were stopped. The client has since been educated on the importance of regularly checking her bank account.

The third client was a vulnerable lady where a direct debit had been set up with a phone provider which included broadband, however the client did not have a phone line and therefore had been mis-sold the product. Contact was made with the provider who agreed the product had been mis-sold and cancelled the service and waived the cancellation fee.

The Panel were impressed with the support provided to these clients and recognised how this level of service, which had never been provided before, had changed the lives of these people.

Pentagon Court, 6 units of temporary accommodation was on its 14<sup>th</sup> resident since opening in May, showing that accommodation pathways were now in place.

Members asked about the lone working and safeguarding policy for staff, particularly in relation to the new Rough Sleeper Support Worker. It was reported that the risks were thoroughly assessed and that the officer was aware of these. In her previous employment she had worked on her own for four years. The Council's lone working policy system would make contact if she had not rung in after a certain period of time. Appointments with clients would be held in public places. The Panel were assured that sufficient measures were in place to safeguard lone working members of staff.

## **20 NEW ALLOCATIONS POLICY IMPLEMENTATION**

The Panel received an update on the implementation of the new allocation policy. It was noted that the housing register currently had 3,150 applicants. The new Allocation Policy had received approval in April 2019 and it sought to address housing need. A new computer system was in the process of being implemented which would eradicate the lengthy manual processing currently undertaken. Any supporting information for an application would need to be submitted at the time of application, rather than at the end of the process with verification taking place earlier in the process. This would enable empty properties to be let sooner and therefore increase rental income.

A letter would be sent to all current applicants at the end of September informing them of the need to apply on the new system by December 2019. The existing register had temporarily been closed to all new applicants. The new online form

was shown to the Panel. Anyone without access to IT would be supported to use the online application process, this could be via friends and family, libraries, Citizens Advice, The Crossings or alternatively, housing officers. The new Homesearch website would be launched in January 2020.

## 21 HOUSING STRATEGY / HRA PROPERTY ACQUISITION UPDATE

An update was provided to the Panel on housing sites in the District, detailed below:

- Stocklands Scheme, Totton: 10 houses were due to be completed in the next few days.
- Jones Lane, Hythe: Three empty and unfit cottages were proposed to be returned to use. A building contract was out to tender and it was anticipated that work would start in December 2019. The work included resolving issues with penetrating and rising damp, improving the ground floor arrangements and raising the ceiling on the first floor.
- Blease Court, Gosport Street, Lymington: A decision had been made to purchase the site. This would provide seven homes for temporary accommodation.
- Moore Close, New Milton: An architect had been appointed. 17 homes were currently proposed to be built on this site, which would provide 1 and 2 bedroom flats, and 3 /4 bed houses. The scheme would require planning approval.
- Ladycross Road, Hythe (Garage Site): An architect had been appointed and a scheme would be developed before submitting a planning application.
- 129 Ashley Road, New Milton: This would provide four homes for temporary accommodation. A building contract would be advertised for tender in October 2019.
- Arising Opportunities: It was reported that officers were investigating potential schemes in Lyndhurst, Ashurst, Ringwood and New Milton.

Details of the development programme were presented to the Panel. 340 affordable homes had been proposed in the period 2018-2022, against a target set in the Housing Strategy of at least 600 affordable homes by 2026. Further work was continuing to identify more opportunities and members were invited to submit any suggestions of sites they felt might be suitable for housing to officers.

## 22 HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Panel received a presentation on the Council's approach to managing its housing assets. A new Housing Asset Management Strategy would be prepared. Members were asked to endorse the favoured approach. The Strategy would be a strategic framework to provide high standard Housing and support services, with a commitment to invest in homes and continuously improve the Council's housing finances. Benefits included, lower "whole life" running costs, a clear understanding of maintenance needs, and long terms capital investment needs being identified.

The Council had over 5,000 general needs dwellings which included flats, maisonettes, houses and bungalows, 3 extra care schemes and 5 hostels. There were also communal areas, land and amenity space and 1,800 garages which needed to be managed and maintained.

National policy had an impact on asset management. 4 draft Strategic Priorities were presented to the Panel which would be included in the forthcoming Strategy. The priorities were centred around implementing the decent homes standard and developing a new NFDC standard, providing secure, economically heated homes, value for money across capital investment with responsive repairs. Digital technology would be maximised enabling customer self-service and therefore empowering tenants. The draft Strategy would be presented at the next meeting of the Panel.

Members questioned how the Council's 1,800 garages were being used. It was noted that a review was proposed to be undertaken to establish the current occupancy rate, the condition of the garages and whether any sites might be suitable for housing.

### **23 DRAFT MAINTENANCE AND REPAIRS POLICY FOR HOUSING (LANDLORD SERVICES)**

The draft Policy for Maintenance and Repairs (Landlord Services) was presented to the Panel. It was noted that further policies on voids, mutual exchanges, empty homes and adaptations had not been included in the draft Maintenance and Repairs Policy but that separate policies covering these areas would be presented to the Panel at a future meeting.

A review had been undertaken of the maintenance and repair services. The new Policy followed this review and sought to address the landlord duties and responsibilities. It was structured to ensure that the Council would be compliant with its responsibilities, as set out in the Tenancy Agreement. It also set out the Council's approach to maintaining its properties, ensuring statutory legislative requirements were met and roles and responsibilities had been clearly defined. The draft Policy would be presented to the Tenant Involvement Group, prior to Portfolio Holder approval. The new Policy was proposed to be implemented on 1 November 2019.

The Panel asked questions regarding section 13.1 of the draft policy, "Rights to Home Improvements". It was noted that tenants could carry out improvement works to their Council property, with consent from the Council. If a tenant requested consent for improvement works, they would be requested to provide details of the proposed work, prior to consent being authorised. Following completion of the work, an inspection would be carried out to ensure that the any work had been completed to the required standard. Section 13.3 detailed what the Council would do if work had been carried out to a property without consent. It was possible that any damage arising from any work would be charged to the tenant.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the proposed Maintenance and Repairs Policy (Landlord Services) be supported for approval by the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services.

### **24 POLICIES - GAS SAFETY, LIFTS AND LIFTING EQUIPMENT, LEGIONELLA AND PLAY PARKS AND PLAY EQUIPMENT**

Four draft Landlord Services Policies were presented to the Panel. It was noted that the policies for Gas Safety, Lifts and Lifting Equipment and Play Parks and Play Equipment were new policies and that the Policy on Legionella had been reviewed since the last policy was adopted in 2014.

It was noted that the Lift Policy included all types of lifting equipment installed (for example stair lifts and ceiling track hoists) through the Disabled Facilities Grants, as well as the lifts in housing stock. The Council would take responsibility for these ensuring this equipment was appropriately inspected and safe to use.

The Panel expressed their support for the draft policies noting they were a thorough and comprehensive set of documents.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Policies on Gas Safety, Lifts and Lifting Equipment, Legionella and Play Parks and Play Equipment be supported for approval by the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services.

**25 PORTFOLIO HOLDER UPDATE**

The Portfolio Holder reported that a great deal of the work of Housing Services had been reported at the meeting and therefore had nothing to add. She thanked officers for their time and effort and for keeping her regularly informed.

**26 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman invited members to contact him with any suggestions of future agenda items.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Work Programme for the remainder of the municipal year be agreed.

**27 DATES OF MEETINGS 2020/21**

**RESOLVED:**

That the following meeting dates for 2020/21 be approved:

- 17 June 2020
- 16 September 2020
- 20 January 2021
- 17 March 2021

CHAIRMAN