

**15 JANUARY 2020**

**NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on Wednesday, 15 January 2020

- \* 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, Portfolio Holder for Housing Services

**Officers Attending:**

Tim Davis, Rebecca Drummond, Richard Fudge, Kevin Green, Richard Knott, Grainne O'Rourke, Ritchie Thomson, Karen Wardle and Tim Nathan

**Apologies**

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllrs J Davies, Rackham and Ward. Apologies had also been received from Paul Woodroof, Tenant Representative.

**28 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2019 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**29 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**30 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No issues were raised in the public participation period.

**31 CORPORATE PLAN**

The Panel considered the draft Corporate Plan 2020-2024 'Community Matters'. It was noted that the Plan detailed the overarching commitments and priorities of the

Administration over the next four years. The Action Plan detailed how these would be measured.

A draft was currently out for public consultation and the deadline for responses was 31 January 2020. The consultation had been publicised online, through social media, as well as to Town and Parish Councils, via the Council's Information Bulletin.

The feedback received to date in relation to housing centred around balanced communities, provision of council housing for families, listening to the local community and that the social housing policy should be equally applied in the National Park and the areas surrounding it.

The Panel made the following comments on the housing section of the Action Plan within the Corporate Plan (Page 22):

- To provide 600 new homes by 2026: This was partly outside of the time frame of the Corporate Plan and it was questioned whether a target should be set to 2024. It was noted that the Housing Strategy had set this target and officers reported that this was now a well established timeframe and it might cause unnecessary confusion to strictly align with this to the end period of the new Corporate Plan. It was therefore considered preferable to retain the 2026 timeframe even if it was just outside the Corporate Plan period (of up to 2024).

**RESOLVED:**

That the draft Corporate Plan 2020-2024, 'Community Matters' be endorsed and the consultation feedback be noted.

**32 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET AND THE HOUSING PUBLIC SECTOR CAPITAL EXPENDITURE PROGRAMME FOR 2020/21**

The Panel considered the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget and Housing Public Sector Capital Expenditure Programme for 2020/21.

It was highlighted to the Panel that there was a proposed social rent increase of 2.7%. This was the first rent increase for four years. The average increase per week was proposed to be £2.64.

A review of service charges had been carried out in 2019/20 and the impact of these changes would be assessed at year end when a full year of figures were available. It was therefore proposed to only increase the charges by an inflationary rate of 1.7%.

In terms of the Capital Programme, borrowing would be used for the first time, initially this would be funded internally rather than using external borrowing.

The Tenant Involvement Group had met to consider the report. The general view expressed at the meeting was that tenants were supportive of the proposals and that the proposed rent increase was reasonable. The views of the Tenant Involvement Group would be included in the report to Cabinet.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Panel noted the report and endorsed the recommendations to Cabinet and Council relating to the HRA budget and housing public sector capital expenditure programme for 2020/21.

**33 ELECTRICAL SAFETY POLICY FOR HOUSING (LANDLORD SERVICES)**

The Electrical Safety Policy for Housing (Landlord Services) was considered by the Panel. The proposed policy related to the electrical safety compliance and inspection regime for the Council's housing stock and communal areas. The policy addressed the 'landlord' duties and responsibilities and had been structured to ensure that the Council complied with its legislative requirements.

The Panel expressed the view that the draft policy was clear, concise and easy to read and understand.

**RESOLVED:**

That the proposed Electrical Safety Policy for Housing (Landlord Services) be endorsed by the Panel.

**34 VOID AND MUTUAL EXCHANGE POLICY FOR HOUSING (LANDLORD SERVICES)**

The Panel considered the proposed Void and Mutual Exchange Policy for Housing (Landlord Services).

A review had been carried out of the standards of work in relation to the Council's void and mutual exchange process. The draft policy set out the arrangements for statutory inspections and repairs as well as condition and safety standards of void properties. It also set out the new standards which would apply prior to a property being let. This was an improvement to the existing standards and would ensure, for example, that decoration was bright, fresh and welcoming, that properties met the needs of modern living, had improved cleaning standards, and that items left by the previous tenant, providing they were in a good serviceable condition, could be offered to tenants.

Each year there was in the region of 300 properties which would require void works. There was a cost to the Housing Revenue Account associated with the proposed additional works through introducing the new standards. These costs had been identified within the Housing Maintenance Review report in July 2019.

The Resident Involvement Group had been consulted on this policy and were very supportive of the proposed changes.

Members discussed the policy and noted that if properties were let to tenants in good condition, they were more likely to take better care in maintaining them. Members raised the issue about the reuse of stairlifts. They were reassured by officers that appropriate occupational assessments would be carried out, as well as the servicing of second hand stairlifts to ensure they were in good working order.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Void and Mutual Exchange Policy Housing (Landlord Services) be endorsed for approval by the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services.

**35 HOUSING MAINTENANCE SUPPLY CHAIN AND LOGISTICS MODEL**

The Panel considered the housing maintenance supply chain and logistics report.

A review had been carried out of the existing supply chain, which had been identified as part of the review of housing maintenance, carried out in the summer of 2019.

The housing maintenance service spent on average, £1 million per annum on goods and materials in order to respond to reactive repairs of Council stock. In 2018/19 this had been spent across 65 suppliers, many materials had been purchased over the counter, with no price management in place to ensure value for money. A need for more formal purchasing of goods and materials with detailed management information on the purchases, ensuring value for money was being progressed.

National Framework Agreements had been assessed and it was proposed that the Council use the Pretium Material Supply and Managed Services Framework to secure a master vendor to provide all goods and materials for housing repair activities. The awarded supplier (master vendor) in this framework was Travis Perkins. They had outlets in a number of locations throughout the District Council area, as well as just outside, which could be used to purchase supplies.

The proposal had a number of benefits which included detailed management reports, inventory reduction and a reduction in purchase to pay transactions. The number of invoices received would be reduced from 10,000+ to 12 consolidated invoices per year. This framework had also been successful in other local authorities. Officers were developing the model alongside the preferred supplier and it was hoped to implement a new model in early 2020/21.

It was noted that the report would also be considered by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel before any Portfolio Holder decision would be sought.

**RESOLVED:**

That the proposal to implement a new supply chain and logistics model for materials and services to support housing maintenance operations service delivery be endorsed.

**36 GREENER HOUSING**

The Panel received a presentation on Greener Housing.

It was noted that there was a commitment by Government to be carbon neutral by 2050. Housing stock in the UK was reported to be the least energy efficient in Europe. The standards and requirements were outlined to the Panel regarding energy efficiency, environmental sustainability, lifetime homes, etc.

Stocklands in Calmore was a new build NFDC scheme which had aimed to reduce CO2 emissions. The scheme had committed to be energy efficient with low

maintenance costs and was environmentally friendly, etc. The Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) for the scheme was presented to the Panel.

A range of various improvements to existing properties to make them more energy efficient was presented. It was noted that the SAP rating for NFDC stock was 70.65 in December 2019. It was the intention to improve this further by carrying out energy efficiency working which would be implemented as part of a proposed NFDC Standard over and above the expected decent homes standards. To put this into context, across England and Wales, the average SAP rating was 60 (Band D). Council owned properties were therefore performing better than the national average. It was suggested that one of the slides included in the presentation, "Change & Save your energy behaviour" be included in the tenant packs which identified ways to reduce energy usage.

The District Council had installed cavity wall and loft insulation into 161 properties and four properties had had air source heat pumps installed in 2019. It was also noted that four schemes had solar PV panels and previous insulation measures had grant funding receipts in the region of £189,000. Members asked whether Council tenants who had solar panels on their property could be contacted to see whether they would share their electricity bills with the Council. This would be on a purely voluntary basis. Members wanted to know whether residents with solar panels had less energy usage.

Private rented properties were required to meet a minimum energy efficiency level set by the Domestic Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES). Since April 2018, all properties let on a new tenancy must have a minimum EPC rating of E. This would apply to all tenancies after April 2020. If a property would require works costing in excess of £3,500 to improve it to an EPC rate of E, the property would need to be registered with the Government for an exemption. A districtwide Private Sector Stock condition survey was in the process of being carried out. The survey would help to inform the Private Sector Housing Strategy which the Task and Finish Group were currently involved with.

It was anticipated that more energy efficient standards would be imposed on new build homes. New homes could have more energy efficient measures included within the design and build which would be more cost effective.

It was proposed that a Task and Finish Group be set up to consider greener housing in more detail, in particular the measures which could be put in place to improve the energy efficiency of the Council's housing stock and whether the measures were likely to be cost effective. It would also consider the private rented sector and how the Council could establish initiatives regarding energy efficiency, providing education and advice, etc.

**RESOLVED:**

That a Task and Finish Group looking into Greener Housing be set up and that the Panel would consider the Terms of Reference at the next meeting.

**37 UPDATE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION AND "GO LIVE" OF THE ALLOCATION POLICY**

The Panel received an update on the implementation of the new Allocation Policy.

Applicants on the housing waiting list had been contacted in the Autumn and informed of the need to reapply between October and December 2019. A huge amount of work had been carried out answering queries, working with applicants and working through applications to make them 'live'. Housing staff, information officers, Citizen's Advice, the post room, libraries and the Crossings in Hythe had assisted with either providing advice, assisting in the submission of applications / scanning, etc.

Details were provided to the Panel on how applications would be processed. It was particularly noted that for applications without the required proof documents, they would be chased 3 times during a 35 day period from submitting their application. If they failed to send in the relevant proofs after 35 days, their application would be closed. The applicant, however, would have the application reinstated if they subsequently, submitted the relevant proof documents before 31 March 2020.

Applicants were expected to receive their banding confirmation between 17-27 January 2020. It was noted that there was a clear review procedure for any applicant who felt they had not been allocated the correct housing band. The new Allocation Policy however, had clearer housing bands which would make it easier to justify any decision made.

The next step was to ensure that all vulnerable people who had not applied, had been identified and contacted.

The new website was proposed to be launched on 20 January. Applicants would be able to view only the properties they were eligible to bid on, and therefore would meet their housing need. Properties would initially be advertised for a two week period to allow additional time for applicants to bid. This would then change to one week. Adverts would go live on 29 January and the deadline for applications was 9 February. Applicants could also request an automatic bid to be placed on properties they were eligible for.

It was noted that feedback on the new application process to date had been largely positive.

### **38 HOUSING STRATEGY / HRA PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT AND ACQUISITION UPDATE**

The regular update was provided to the Panel on the progress of the housing strategy and development programme. The following was noted:

- An investment housing company had been established by the Council to buy 'General Fund' properties that would subsequently be rented out to private tenants;
- Good progress had been made working with developers and landowners and working collaboratively with the National Park Authority and Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing (HARAH);
- Good progress had been made working closely with Registered Providers and Homes England;
- Work had begun, with a scoping meeting in November 2019 regarding Supplementary Planning Guidance on new housing delivery;
- Regarding the commitment for at least 600 new council homes by 2026, good progress had been made. In 2018/19, 57 had been completed and 90 were expected to be completed in 2019/20;

- The Council had purchased several properties for temporary accommodation and further units had been identified.

**39 HOMELESSNESS UPDATE**

The Panel received a presentation updating them on homelessness in 2019. It was noted that an average of 160 new cases for assistance had been opened each month, with 1,868 approaches for assistance in 2019.

16 new emergency accommodation placements had been made on average each month, with 189 placements into external Emergency Accommodation. Clients with complex needs, for example, severe mental health issues and entrenched addictions were increasingly common.

17 families had been accommodated in the Council owned emergency accommodation at Pentagon Court with an average stay of 10 weeks.

51 rough sleepers had been recorded since August 2019. The highest count was in November where 22 had been recorded, which was the highest in Hampshire. This had since been reduced to 14.

A bid had been submitted to MHCLG for funding to support homelessness and rough sleeping for the next financial year.

**40 PORTFOLIO HOLDER UPDATE**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing Services reported that in light of the agenda items the Panel had already discussed at the meeting, she had nothing further to add.

**41 WORK PROGRAMME**

**RESOLVED:**

That the work programme be noted with the addition of the following items:

**18 March 2020**

- Greener Housing Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference

**16 September 2020**

- Update on the supply chain process

The Panel were asked to forward any agenda item requests to democratic services or to the Chairman.

CHAIRMAN