

17 JUNE 2020

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on
Wednesday, 17 June 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:

Jacqui England
Jill Cleary
David Hawkins
Christine Hopkins
Joe Reilly

Officers Attending:

Catherine Bonnett, Brian Byrne, Tim Davis, Rebecca Drummond, Richard Fudge,
Kevin Green, Richard Knott, Daniel Reynafarje, Grainne O'Rourke,
Ritchie Thomson and Karen Wardle

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J Davies and Sevier. Apologies
were also received from Paul Woodroof, Tenant Representative.

42 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2020 be signed by the
Chairman as a correct record.

43 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

44 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No issues were raised in the public participation period.

45 PORTFOLIO HOLDER UPDATE

It was reported that the Housing Service Managers would be going through a significant number of matters during the course of the agenda and the Portfolio Holder did not wish to replicate all that they would be covering, however any remaining questions could be asked at the end of the agenda.

46 UPDATE FROM HOUSING SERVICE MANAGERS

A presentation was given to the Panel providing them with an operational update in relation to COVID-19, which covered the following areas (The slides from the presentation are attached to these minutes for reference):

- Housing Maintenance – Operations
- Housing Maintenance – Compliance and Asset Management
- Housing Options, Rent, Support and Private Sector Housing
- Housing Estates
- Housing Strategy and Development

Members questioned whether members of staff wore PPE when entering Council properties, particularly for those who were shielding. It was noted that Government guidance was followed. Staff wore gloves and followed regular handwashing and washed down surfaces, however there was no requirement to wear a face covering. Prior to any visit, residents would be asked whether they were shielding and staff would only enter a property with consent from the tenant.

Members questioned whether there had been any cases of COVID-19 in Council properties. It was noted that there had been some cases, in the Council's Extra Care facilities. Officers had worked closely with Hampshire County Council and the care providers of these facilities in respect of this issue. Additionally, work had been carried out with the residents and their families and measures had been put in place to ensure the safety of those who live and work there. Contact had been made with family members, advising them to stay away in order to protect them and those in the care homes. A high level of compliance was noted.

47 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE AND PROVISIONAL BUDGET OUTTURN

The Panel considered the Annual Performance and Provisional Budget Outturn report in respect of 2019/20. The new Corporate Plan had been agreed in February 2020, therefore the report was in the transition period between the old and the new Corporate Plan. The achievements for 2019-20 were detailed per portfolio, information was provided against key performance measures as well as the financial outturn for the general fund and the Housing Revenue Account.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the updated position statement, including the highlights from 2019/20 be noted;
- (b) That the development of the new performance management framework be noted;
- (c) That the provisional outturn of the General Fund revenue and capital budgets for 2019/20 be noted; and

- (d) That the provisional outturn of the Housing Revenue Account for 2019/20 be noted.

48 DEVELOPMENT OF THE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The Panel considered the proposed Performance Management Framework, which was presented in the form of a performance dashboard detailing actions identified within the Corporate Plan and their progress.

The Panel had been due to consider the item at the previous meeting which had been cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Members views were sought on whether they found the dashboard approach to be useful, whether additional information should be included and how often they would like to review the performance against the Corporate Plan.

The approach was supported by the Panel.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the performance dashboard approach be supported; and
- (b) That an update on performance management of the Corporate Plan be presented at each meeting of the Panel.

49 ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR HOUSING (LANDLORD SERVICES)

The draft Asset Management Strategy had been scheduled to be considered by the Panel in March, however due to the coronavirus pandemic, the meeting had been cancelled. In order to avoid delay in the implementation of the Strategy, the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services had approved the Asset Management Strategy for Housing in April.

The Strategy set out the District Council's four strategic priorities; to achieve high standards in the maintenance and repair of Council stock, to achieve high levels of energy efficiency, to deliver value for money and to provide a self service facility for tenants. It was noted within the Strategy that a Decent Homes PLUS Standard would be implemented, in order to continue to drive up the quality of all Council owned homes to take account of new technologies, improved material and changing lifestyles.

Members welcomed the Decent Homes PLUS Standard and reported they would like to receive an update on the Asset Management Strategy at each Panel meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Asset Management Housing Strategy (Appendix 1) be noted.

50 RURAL AND COMMUNITY HOUSING (INCLUDING COMMUNITY HOUSING FUND UPDATE)

The Panel received a presentation on rural and community housing. The differences between rural affordable and community-led housing were detailed. It was noted, for example that rural affordable housing was to provide housing in rural parishes, they were typically developed on rural exceptions sites and were developed strictly to meet a defined local affordable housing need. Community-led

housing however, was developed by the community for the benefit of the community, the community would play a central role in the development, management and ownership and there had been increased interest in this form of development in the last five years. There was often crossover between the two forms of housing.

In recent years there had been a decline in the development of new rural affordable housing and community-led housing in the District, reasons for this could be due to there being availability and affordability of land, limited funding investment, complexities of the planning system and local opposition.

Four Strategic Objectives were presented to the Panel:

1. Expand and enhance community-led and rural affordable housing enabling
2. Develop and enrich evidence and understanding of rural and community based housing need.
3. Expand delivery options for community-led and rural affordable housing
4. Raise the profile of rural and community-led housing

Each of the strategic objectives detailed a number of actions in order encourage both forms of housing provision and this work was welcomed by the Panel.

A report on the revisions to the New Forest Community Housing Fund, had been circulated with the agenda and was noted by the Panel. This reviewed the plans for the spending of the Community Housing Fund, refreshing the procedure and thresholds for award of grants under the Council's scheme and to increase to scope of the scheme to enable both capital and revenue contributions.

RESOLVED:

That the proposed revisions to the New Forest Community Housing Fund as set out within sections 4 and 5 of the report be noted.

51 GREENER HOUSING TASK AND FINISH GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Panel were presented with draft Terms of Reference for a Greener Housing Task and Finish Group.

A question was read out on behalf of Cllr Philip Dowd regarding the Terms of Reference of the Group, requesting consideration be given to all types of sustainable housing, including 'off grid' projects. The question also referred to the provision of sustainable and affordable housing to add to the Shared Ownership Portfolio to ensure that local people were not priced out of the housing market.

The Panel supported the points raised by Cllr Dowd and welcomed the opportunity to consider more sustainable options for housing provision.

RESOLVED:

That the following Terms of Reference be supported:

1. To explore and evaluate all forms of green housing initiatives in respect of the Council's own housing stock, including new builds, and implement where appropriate.

(The evaluation will include a cost/benefit analysis and will consider sustainability and viability issues, including options around retrofitting. The review will also consider how new initiatives will minimise energy consumption

to reduce costs to tenants and ensure that they are not penalised through inefficient metering or usage).

2. To disseminate information to the wider community (including the private rented sector) about green housing generally and any initiatives that are implemented by the Council.

Note: A new development being undertaken by the Council could be used as a test case.

It was proposed that the Task and Finish Group would consist of 10 members to include representation from the Planning Committee and the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Panel.

52 HOUSING STRATEGY / HRA PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT AND ACQUISITION UPDATE

An update was provided on progress of building and acquiring houses in support of the adopted Housing Strategy.

During the financial year 2019/20, the Council completed 90 new affordable housing properties. This included, 15 Council housing buy backs, 70 new council builds, 1 acquisition / lease reversion (to provide 3 properties) and one conversion (to provide 2 properties).

It was predicted that 55 council completions would take place in 2020/21. Work on the Jones Lane property in Hythe was anticipated to be completed for occupation in July. It was also noted that 15 properties at Crow Arch Lane had been completed and that a further 8 would be completed in June. There was the potential for over 100 new properties to be provided in the next financial year.

In relation to the provision of Temporary Accommodation, 33 units were either in use or anticipated to be provided in the medium term. These were located in Lymington, New Milton, Fawley and Ringwood.

Officers were continuing to work to identify suitable opportunities for housing, working with private developers, building contractors, as well as schemes currently being built.

53 HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

The Panel received an update on homelessness. The housing team had a proactive approach before lockdown to assess all medical conditions and ensure that those vulnerable to COVID-19 were moved to locations where they could self isolate. Officers had responded to the 'Everyone in' guidance and accommodated all but two rough sleepers (who had refused accommodation) as well as sofa surfers, prison and hospital discharges, etc. Additional accommodation had been utilised at some hotels, including South Lawn Hotel, Milford-on-Sea.

The homelessness team had been split into three groups;

1. Duty – new contact and response to urgent situations
2. Prevention of homelessness
3. Homelessness and move on: to move those out of temporary accommodation

New support workers had been appointed which increased the Housing Support Team to six, with funding from MHCLG.

The team were now focussing on moving people out of temporary accommodation into more appropriate longer term accommodation.

It was noted that 21 rough sleepers had been accommodated in a two week period (in total 31 rough sleepers had been accommodated last year). 97 households had been accommodated in three months and 57 households were still in temporary accommodation, which was the highest in two years. The team were also supporting 113 complex needs cases. The statistics demonstrated the additional demand that the coronavirus had placed on the housing support team.

The hard work of the Housing support team in accommodating rough sleepers was acknowledged.

54 WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be noted.

CHAIRMAN

Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel

17 JUNE 2020

Update from Housing Service
Managers

Housing Maintenance (Operations)

Service delivery

- Essential maintenance and repairs continue to be delivered, whilst observing social distancing, hand-washing and hygiene measures in accordance with PHE guidance
- The majority of office based staff continue to work remotely with O365 and Skype playing a major part in connecting staff across the business to support front line delivery
- Housing Customer Service Hub continue to support tenant contact remotely via telephone, webchat and email – repair requests, Covid-19 screening, estate management enquiries and taking rent payments
- Hub maintained at Marsh Lane depot to support supply chain and operational trade staff

Recovery

- Whilst at the start of the Covid-19 crisis we had to cease reletting empty council properties (due to difficulties in getting materials to bring them up to standard), in late April we begun turning our empty properties around again so they are available for reletting
- As at 15 May, following the Government's easing of restrictions, the back log of routine maintenance and repair requests stood at around 220
- Alongside dealing with new enquiries, the backlog currently stands at 96 requests, of which 52 have been appointed and the remaining 44 are being re-prioritised and risk assessed to enable safe delivery, whilst maintaining social distancing requirements and in consultation with our tenants
- All repair visits undergo 2-stage Covid-19 household screening at appointment and door-step prior to entry

Housing Maintenance (Compliance and Asset Management)

Compliance

- Gas and Electrical – Returned to work as normal. Working through the backlog of outstanding inspections whilst maintaining social distancing requirements and in consultation with our tenants
- Gas currently has 120 outstanding inspections, however 111 have been rebooked with over half of these due to be completed this week
- Electrical has 260 outstanding inspections with 60 rebooked.
- Legislative servicing –
 1. Lifts ongoing
 2. Fire alarms (additional measures introduced for extra care schemes)
 3. Playgrounds still closed, but weekly checks are continuing

Asset Management

- Planned Maintenance Surveyors - Programmes ready and validated. Risk assessments have been received from all contractors. Tenants have been contacted to formulate a return to carrying out the work
- Stock condition surveyors – Undertaking Stock condition surveys (where tenant permits), EPCs on void properties and playground inspections
- Keystone Servicing and inspection module has now gone live, giving a more robust system of accurate information and reporting

Housing Options, Rents, Support & PSH

Service delivery during Covid-19 restrictions

- All office based staff and field workers worked remotely using phones, email, online forms and accounts and video conferencing
- Homelessness interviews continued over the phone
- All homeless households and rough sleepers offered accommodation.
 - Additional accommodation sourced in partnership with hoteliers
 - Our Housing Support team continued to deliver face to face support
- Disabled facilities grant work to install adaptations ceased due to both the care for vulnerable people and shutdown of external contractors
- Rent recovery contact emphasised the support we could offer to help tenants in financial difficulty
 - Spike in Universal Credit Claims – 527 from March to 16/06/20. Normal average 40 per month.
- Housing register applications continued to be received and processed. Vacant properties continued to be advertised and nominated to.

Recovery Plans

- Focus on move on from external temporary accommodation to medium and long term accommodation
- Housing Support provided to households moving on to help sustain accommodation
- Housing Associations in the district are now letting their properties and an increase in void works means social housing supply increasing
- Disabled facilities grant work to install adaptations recommenced on 26th May
- Housing Standards Inspections commenced on 26th May
- Home visits to discuss rent arrears will commence w/c 22nd June
- Cash payments now being made

Housing Estates

Management

- Screening of all clients and households prior to essential home visits
- Completion of task based and person centric risk assessments to facilitate safe delivery of services for staff and vulnerable client groups

Delivery

- The majority of staff continue to work remotely with O365 and Skype facilitating communication between staff and customers in all areas of operational delivery; In addition to this, clients can now use web cam to speak with housing staff
- Intensive support for Extra Care clients and care providers
- Resumed tenancy sign up of properties including Mutual Exchanges. Revised remote support approach to the completion of the process
- Commenced allocation and sign up of additional new properties at Narrowleaf (23). Staggered approach to facilitate and manage social distancing
- Undertaking weekly testing of fire alarms across stock
- Health & Safety inspections across all sites resumed
- Maintained delivery of cleaning services across housing stock
- Reinstated 3 and 9 monthly IT inspections

Housing Strategy and Development

Strategic, Enabling and pre-contract/construction activities

- Fully operational whilst working from home
- Responding to Planning Application consultation requests and enabling opportunities as normal
- Undertaking future site visits
- Building Contractor Framework has generated significant interest from the sector
- Advancing second stage Framework (Professional construction consultants)
- Holding all routine internal and external meetings via Skype
- New business dialogues continuing with developers and agents
- Uncertainty remains over the wider housing market

Site specific

- All sites and building contractors operational, but still some supply issues
- Final 8 homes at Crow Arch Lane handing-over this week
- Jones Lane and 129 Ashley Road due to complete during July
- Making and concluding offers