

**21 JUNE 2023**

**NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on Wednesday, 21 June 2023

- \* Cllr Steve Clarke (Chairman)
- \* Cllr Ian Murray (Vice-Chairman)

**Councillors:**

- Kate Crisell
- \* Sean Cullen
- Patrick Mballa
- \* Neville Penman

**Councillors:**

- \* Caroline Rackham
- \* Janet Richards
- \* Neil Tungate

\*Present

**In attendance:**

**Councillors:**

Steve Davies  
Dan Poole

**Councillors:**

John Sleep  
Alex Wade

**Officers Attending:**

Rebecca Drummond, Kirsty Farmer, Kevin Green, Rachel Higgins, Richard Knott, Joanne McClay, Grainne O'Rourke, Karen Wardle and Saqib Yasin

**Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Crisell and Mballa.

**4 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:**

The minutes of the following meetings were confirmed as correct records:

- 14 March 2023 (Communities, Partnerships and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Panel)
- 15 March 2023 (Housing and Homelessness Overview and Scrutiny Panel)
- 22 May 2023

**5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr Rackham, for transparency purposes, declared a non-pecuniary interest due to her involvement in arts and cultural organisations which was under the remit of the Panel.

**6 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

**7 TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE PANEL**

The Panel noted it was responsible for the overview and scrutiny of the following Council services:

- (a) Housing Estate Management and Support
- (b) Housing Maintenance and Compliance
- (c) Housing Options, Rents, Support and Private Sector Housing
- (d) Housing Strategy and Development
- (e) Environmental and Regulation (including licensing, health and wellbeing and Arts and Culture)
- (f) This Panel will also be the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee under Section 19 of the Police and Justice Act 2006, with power to co-opt representatives of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership onto the Panel when it reviews Partnership matters, and to agree terms of such co-option.

**8 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE AND PROVISIONAL BUDGET OUTTURN 2022/23**

The Panel considered the Annual Performance and Budget Outturn report for 2022/23.

The Assistant Director of Transformation reported that the report was backwards looking at the last financial year on performance against the Corporate Plan as well as the outturn position in relation to the general fund, HRA and capital programme. The report would usually have a forward looking element with targets for the next financial year, however, this would be included in the new Corporate Plan 2024-2028 which would be developed later in the year. The Panel considered the Annual Performance and Budget Outturn report for 2022/23. This provided an overview of performance and delivery of the Corporate Plan for 2022/23 and set out provisional budget outturn results for the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Capital Programme.

Some statistics relevant to the Panel were highlighted including; more than 70% of rough sleepers had entered the housing pathway, an increase of 19% from the previous year; 100% of high risk food inspections had been carried out and a total of 683 food premises had received an inspection; and over £68,000 had been awarded in Councillor Community Engagement Grants.

**RESOLVED:**

That the following be noted:

- a) the Annual Performance Report for 2022/23;
- b) the provisional outturn of the General Fund revenue and capital budgets for 2022/23;
- c) the provisional outturn of the Housing Revenue Account and capital budgets for 2022/23; and

d) the yearend rephasings as included within the provisional outturn figures.

## **9 DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT (DFG) FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY**

The Panel considered the revised Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Financial Assistance Policy, which took into account the latest guidance and best practice. The policy proposed to make changes to the discretionary grant funding in order to further support residents to remain independent in their homes. It was explained that this would allow officers more flexibility as more complex cases had been arising.

Members at the meeting spoke in full support of the revised policy recognising that the proposed increases to the financial limits would help those in great need and support independent living.

In response to a member question about awareness and signposting to the funding, it was noted that referrals came through Hampshire County Council's Occupational Therapists. The District Council also worked closely with the New Forest Disability Information Service as part of the Just Got Home Scheme which supported hospital discharges from Lymington and Fordingbridge hospitals. It was therefore felt people were being targeted, if they were eligible.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the revised Disabled Facilities Grant – Financial Assistance Policy be supported for approval by the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness.

## **10 CALL-IN REQUEST: SALE OF COUNCIL GARAGES AT BURNETT CLOSE, HYTHE**

The Panel considered the call-in request from Cllr Alex Wade in relation to the Portfolio Holder decision to approve the sale of garages at Burnett Close in Hythe.

The Assistant Director of Housing introduced the report and explained that the land around the four garages had been sold to Collingwood Investments Limited in 2000 and that, in hindsight, the garages should have been included as part of this sale. This land had been sold with no access rights to the garages. The Council over a number of years had received an income from the rental of these garages. Officers had discussed with the landowner payment to access the garages but could not agree on a mutually convenient arrangement.

Tenants had been issued with a notice to terminate their contract and offered alternative garages to rent in the vicinity. Further discussions over access to the garages with the landowner had been unsuccessful, and therefore a decision had been made to sell the garages to Collingwood Investments for just under the market value. This decision had been taken by the previous Portfolio Holder.

The Panel were shown a presentation with photos of the garages and the access arrangements, which has been attached to the minutes as an Appendix.

Cllr Alex Wade was invited to address the Panel. He explained he had been made aware of the issue, as the local ward member in September 2021 by local residents in Knightswood Road and Burnett Close who rented the garages. The tenants had been contacted by the District Council and advised that their garage rental contract would be terminated due to the access rights issue. He stated these tenants had

used the garages to store valuable items securely, they were visible from where they lived and were a valued facility. The former tenants had felt frustrated and upset over this access dispute and that there had been a lack of communication with them. Cllr Wade had been in contact with officers, who had been responsive, however they had been unable to give any reassurance on the future of the garages. This dispute had continued for a long period of time and there had been no engagement with the previous tenants or local ward members prior to a decision being taken to sell the garages. Cllr Wade had therefore requested the decision to be considered by the scrutiny panel. He questioned whether the garages could have been offered to the leaseholders of Burnett Close to purchase as they would have access rights and also whether they could have been sold for the full market value.

Officers responded to the points raised. It was felt that the only viable sale was to the freeholder with the access rights. If the garages were sold to the leaseholders of Burnett Close, they would still have to make arrangements with the freeholder of the land, and therefore the least complicated arrangement was to sell directly to Collingwood Investments. Whilst the sale of the garages was not at the full market value, it was felt that offer of £7,500 was reasonable in the circumstances and offered value for money.

It was hoped that the garages would be made available to rent by the new owner and therefore be put back into use for local residents, however, it was confirmed that it would not be possible to require the owner to rent them out as part of the sale.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness expressed his support to the decision taken by his predecessor.

A concern was raised at the meeting by a member regarding whether a precedent would be set, however, officers stated this was a very unique and historical case. The view was also expressed that it made economic sense to sell the garages.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Portfolio Holder decision taken on 27 April 2023 be supported.

**11 AIR QUALITY UPDATE**

The Panel considered the Air Quality update which detailed the decision to revoke the Lyndhurst Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and to develop an Air Quality Strategy.

The Panel noted that the revocation of the Lyndhurst AQMA was positive news as the pollution of Nitrogen Dioxide had halved since the designation of the area in 2005. The main reason for this reduction was as a result of the long vehicle detection and use of the green filter which had been installed in the High Street in 2010, designed to keep traffic flowing quicker. It was also acknowledged that vehicle technology had improved which had further reduced the pollution level.

The Environment Act 2021, required all local authorities from 2023, with no AQMA to develop an Air Quality Strategy. It was proposed that a strategy be developed over the next 18 months. This would include preventative actions to improve air quality. Baseline assessment would be used to inform the strategy and an annual report would be produced.



Following a question from a member of the Panel it was confirmed that the air quality in Lyndhurst would continue to be monitored.

**RESOLVED:**

That the revocation of the Lyndhurst Air Quality Management Plan and the development of an Air Quality Strategy be supported.

**12 PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' UPDATES**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness addressed the Panel and spoke about the importance of team working with officers, members and tenants. The Social Housing Regulation Bill was expected to receive Royal Assent later in 2023 which had implications for all social housing landlords. Members would receive information on Tenant Satisfaction Measures at a future meeting.

The Portfolio Holder referred to forthcoming work within the housing services, which included; the installation of low carbon heating into Council owned properties using Government grants; a pilot scheme in Lymington for 17 residents to have reduced energy bills; a revision to the Homelessness Strategy, as well as continuing to provide more temporary accommodation and the delivery of disabled adaptations.

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing gave an update on the following:

- Cabinet had agreed the development of a new Cultural Strategy for the New Forest. This had received unanimous cross party support.
- On 12 June he had Chaired the quarterly Safer New Forest Strategy and Delivery Group meeting which reviewed the progress and updates on actions within the Annual Partnership Plan.
- The two Public Space Protection Orders were due come into force on 1 July 2023. Training had been given to partners, namely the National Park Authority, Forestry England and Verderers and they had delegated authority to raise awareness and ensure compliance with the new orders.
- He would be joining representatives from the Community Safety Team and Hampshire Constabulary in their summer community engagement campaign. Recent events had taken place at Forestry England car parks in order to raise awareness of opportunistic crime such as vehicular and bike thefts in rural areas.
- The upgrade to the Appletree Care Line was nearing completion with a target date of mid July for the transfer to a new digital platform. This future proofed the system and would provide an enhanced service to customers. This service was provided 24/7 all year round and there were 4,000 requests for help annually with 1,800 ambulances being deployed for clients to receive medical attention.
- £300k had been invested to expand the CCTV system and work would be carried out with key stakeholders and towns / parishes to enhance crime prevention measures to ensure the new forest was a safer place to live, work and visit.
- The Food and Safety Team had completed its recovery plan post the covid pandemic to inspect all high and medium risk food based businesses. New programme of inspections began in April and over next few months priority to businesses with higher food safety risk and those which were poorly performing. Support was also being provided to new food business starting up.

- An increase in applications had been received for events relating to the Kings Coronation in May and events over the summer. Officers across the teams would provide advice on licensing as well as food and safety to ensure events run smoothly. Officers would also visit sites and investigate any noise complaints. A guidance document had been developed to help businesses to manage noise from licenced premises, following the receipt of a number of noise complaints last year. This document provided advice to business in order to limit any negative impact on neighbouring properties.
- Support was being provided to the arts and cultural sector. A number of training and networking events for Folio Partners had been held as well as further developing the website and social media presence. Support and advice had been provided by a number of projects across the District, including the artists Fairy Doors at Furzey Gardens, Rock the Pier in Hythe and the New Forest Outdoor Theatre project. Officers had also been working in partnership with Culture in Common and Folio partners to develop an arts and culture area for the New Forest Show.

### 13 WORK PROGRAMME

A member recognised that the work programme did not include the Cultural Strategy. Officers confirmed this had would be presented to the Panel at the appropriate time.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Work Programme be approved.

CHAIRMAN



**New Forest**  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

# Housing & Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel

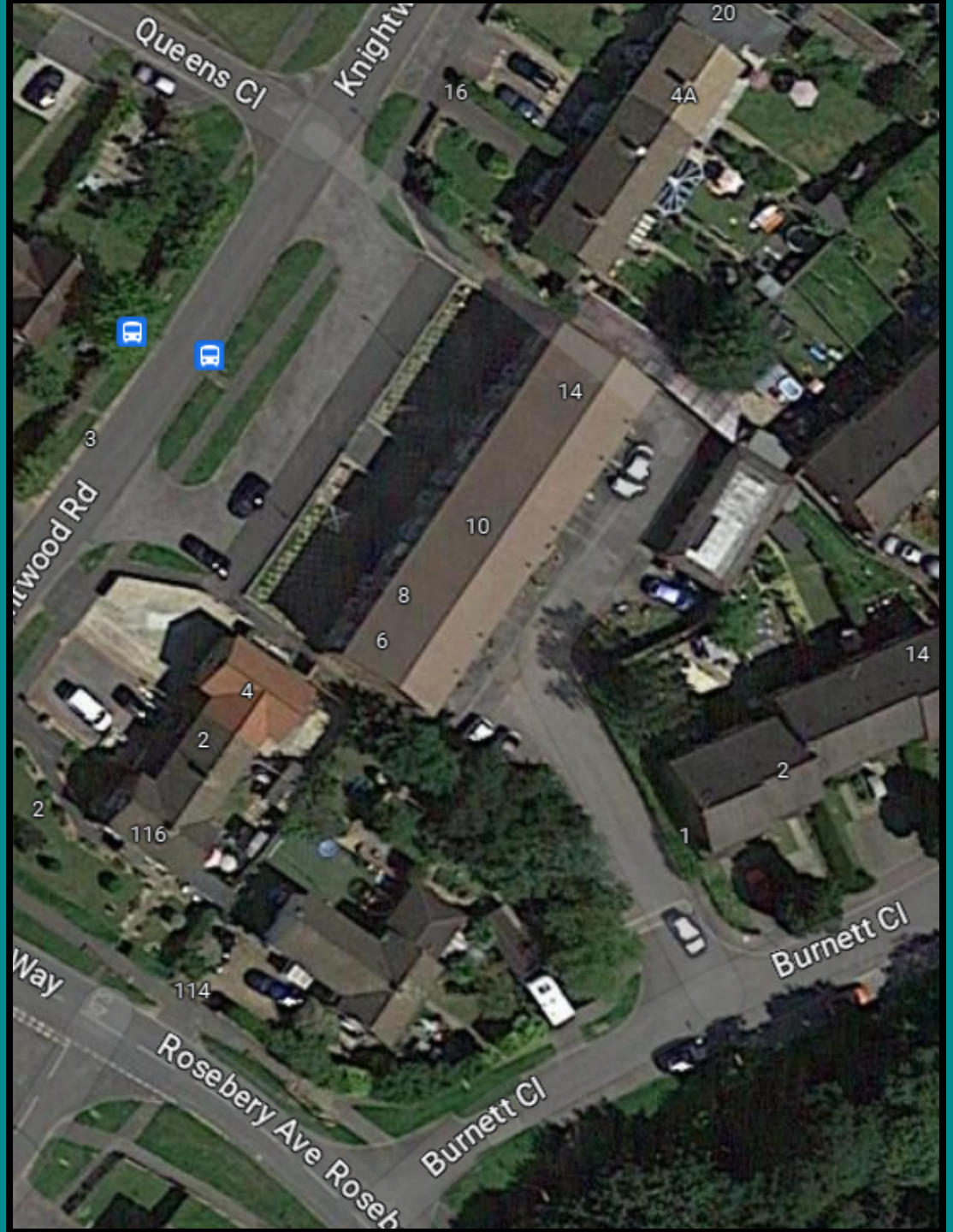
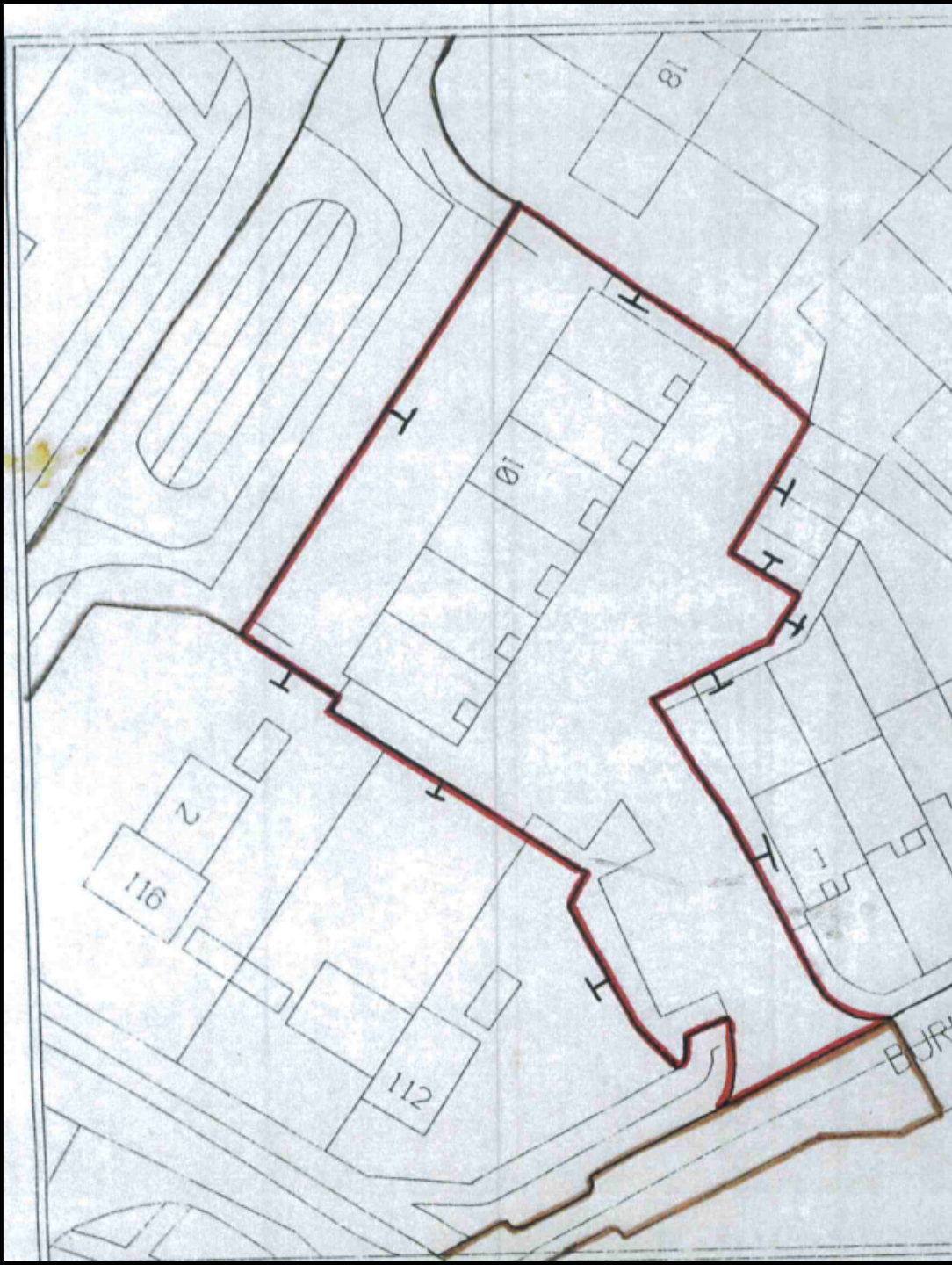
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# **Burnett Close Garage Site Sale**

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