

22 JANUARY 2025

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, 22 January 2025

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

Councillors:

* Hilary Brand
* Kate Crisell
Sean Cullen
* Patrick Mballa

Councillors:

Neville Penman
* Janet Richards
* Neil Tungate

*Present

In attendance:

Substitutes:

Allan Glass (Substitute for Neville Penman)

Substitutes:

Colm McCarthy (Substitute for Sean Cullen)

Councillors:

Steve Davies
Alan O'Sullivan

Councillors:

Dan Poole
Steve Rippon-Swaine

Officers Attending:

Kirsty Farmer, Kevin Green, Rachel Higgins, Joanne McClay, Richard Knott, Chris Pike, Ryan Stevens, Paul Thomas, Ritchie Thomson, Sophie Tuffin, Karen Wardle, Amy Weavis and Saqib Yasin

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Cullen and Penman. Cllrs McCarthy and Glass, respectively were in attendance as nominated substitutes.

26 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

27 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

28 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

29 CORPORATE PLAN: KEY PERFORMANCE DATA FOR QUARTER 1 AND 2

The Panel considered the performance of the Corporate Plan against the key performance indicators (KPIs) for Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 in the 2024/25 financial year.

The Performance and Insight Manager highlighted that the KPIs were integral to the Corporate Plan and that they form part of the accountability set out in the plan. The performance dashboards were presented as Appendix 1 and these had 48 KPIs, organised by the themes in the Corporate Plan. The KPIs and performance data relevant to the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel was detailed within the people theme. A number of KPIs were highlighted to the Panel as not meeting the target, this included the percentage of homelessness cases prevented, number of households in emergency accommodation and the number of Appletree Careline services provided to customers. It was noted that the figures continue to fluctuate against a revised set of challenging targets.

A question was asked in relation to the average number of sickness absences per employee (NFDC ID 39) recognising that this had a red RAG status. It was confirmed that this was a higher figure than the target. It was explained that there had been a small number of employees on long term sick leave and combined with some short term sickness the figure was above the target. HR in response had been working with managers to provide support and ensure that sickness and absence was followed up appropriately.

The Panel recognised that the Council's performance against the KPIs within its remit overall was positive.

RESOLVED:

That the Q1 and Q2 dashboards be noted.

30 COMMUNITY GRANTS 2025/26

The Panel considered the proposed community grant funding for the 2025/26.

The Service Manager Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services reported that this was an annual report. A full review of the community grant process had been undertaken in 2024 to streamline the process, given the volume of applications received in the previous year. A task and finish group had been set up to consider the member community engagement grants, revenue and capital applications, community transport schemes and a community lottery scheme. The group considered how to distribute an additional £40,000 which had been added to the existing budget.

The Task and Finish Group having considered the members community engagement grants recognising that the annual amount of £600 had not been increased for a number of years felt that the grant should be increased to £1,000 per year, which would enable more money to be distributed directly in their wards. The revenue and capital grant applications had followed a more streamlined process to simplify administration, and the recommendations were included in the report. It was highlighted that organisations seeking revenue grants which were considered to be key partners, were recommended to be awarded a three-year funding agreement, which would give them greater financial security. As part of this agreement, the organisations would be set targets and objectives and receive

regular monitoring. It was proposed to continue to support two community transport schemes, Group Hire and Call & Go until 31 August 2025, when the contracts were due to come to an end. Finally, the group considered the merits of a community lottery scheme which could generate circa £67,000 to support local groups. This would require some initial set up costs and officer time, but the running costs of a lottery scheme were minimal.

The Chairman of the Community Grants Task and Finish Group addressed the Panel and expressed his thanks to members of the task and finish group for their work in the grant process. He highlighted that the funding requested from the applications was greater than that available. The more streamlined approach for assessing applications had helped the process, enabling more focussed discussion. The proposal to increase member engagement grants would enable councillors to award more funding in their area to support the local community. He expressed his support to a community lottery scheme which would help local charities and organisations.

It was questioned by a Panel member whether the proposed three year funding agreement with key partner organisations was advisable, given the uncertainty of local government at the current time. The Strategic Director for Housing and Communities acknowledged this but felt that a Service Level Agreement would provide a commitment to key partner organisations working in the community, often supporting vulnerable people, which would provide them with stability of funding for the duration of the agreement. Officers would provide support and regular monitoring to ensure key objectives were met.

RESOLVED:

The Panel recommended the following to Cabinet:

1. That Councillor Community Engagement Grants be increased from £600 to £1,000 a year from 1 April 2025;
2. That Community grants totalling £152,500 in revenue grants and £77,871 in capital grants, be approved, as detailed in Appendix 1, for inclusion in the Medium-Term Financial Plan and proposed budget for 2025/26;
3. That the Community Transport Grants totalling £44,359 be approved, as set out in paragraph 28; and
4. That officers be requested to produce a detailed report on how a community lottery scheme could be successfully run in the District, and the short to long-term implications for the Council, and for the report to progress through the Council's decision-making process.

31 DRAFT AIR QUALITY STRATEGY

The Panel considered the draft Air Quality Strategy.

The Environmental Protection Team Manager presented the draft Air Quality Strategy, highlighting that the Government required local authorities without Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) to produce an Air Quality Strategy. The District Council had revoked its last remaining AQMA in Lyndhurst in 2023.

The draft Air Quality Strategy identified sources of pollution in the District. Six priority areas had been identified to improve air quality. The strategy had been developed in consultation with key stakeholders.

The Panel noted that the Council continued to have a statutory duty to review and assess local air quality against the Government's set of air quality objectives and that this work would continue alongside the work to implement the Air Quality Strategy. The actions arising from the Air Quality Strategy would need to be funded and all funding streams would be considered, for example the Defra air quality grants.

A Panel member questioned whether air quality would be monitored with the expected rise in new planning developments which would result in additional traffic movements. It was confirmed that through the planning application process, consultation was carried out with environmental health to consider the impact of new development and whether any mitigation measures would be required. Reducing the impact of new developments was an action area within the draft AQS. In addition to this, there was an adopted Air Quality Supplementary Planning Document to assist developers when submitting their planning application and to outline the expectations of the District Council.

A member asked whether air quality monitoring continued to be carried out along the Redbridge Causeway. This was confirmed and it was below the air quality objective level.

RESOLVED:

The Panel supported the process for implementing the Air Quality Strategy and recommended that Cabinet approves the draft Strategy for public consultation.

32 HOUSING LANDLORD ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (ASB) STRATEGY AND POLICIES

The Panel considered the proposed draft Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy (housing landlord) and policy framework to prevent and tackle ASB within the Council's housing stock.

The ASB & Neighbourhood Manager presented the report recognising that in 2023/24 housing services had received 160 reports of ASB, which represented 31 per 1,000 homes. The strategy and policies had been developed to respond to the changing legislative and regulatory landscape, as well as feedback from residents on the management of ASB.

The draft Strategy proposed the following four priorities:

1. Prevention and early intervention
2. Managing risk and supporting victims
3. Working in partnership
4. Putting tenants first

The Regulator of Social Housing and Housing Ombudsman Service had strengthened their approach to investigate the failings of landlords. It was expected that there would be an increase in standards, including that in relation to ASB complaints. Landlords were expected to formalise their position on any reports which do not meet the threshold for what can reasonably be considered as ASB. In

response to this, a leaflet and policy had been developed on how to be a good neighbour. In order to manage the new requirements, staff and new management systems had been put in place, this included a new neighbourhood team.

The proposed policies would seek approval from the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness ahead of the Strategy to improve service delivery and outcomes. The draft Strategy, when approved by Cabinet would be consulted upon. The policies would be reviewed following the adoption of the strategy to ensure they were in alignment.

A member raised an individual issue in relation to ASB behaviour and how this had been managed. Given the specific nature of the issue, the Chairman requested that this be discussed with officers outside of the meeting.

A member sought further information in relation to the digital consultation proposed to be carried out on the draft ASB Strategy. The ASB & Neighbourhood Manager reported that the Tenant Engagement System, "Go Vocal", which was an online platform would be used as part of the consultation. This would send out a link to tenants to seek their views. This would aid engagement but would not be the only method of consultation.

A member expressed concern that not all housing tenants would be able to comment digitally and questioned the percentage of tenants who did not have digital means. This information however was not readily available at the meeting. The Strategic Director of Housing and Communities reported that through the transformation process there was a strong emphasis on digital engagement and that there was a changing narrative towards digital consultation. It was recognised that with a greater emphasis on digital, it would be necessary to engage with communities and upskill them, when required to do so.

RESOLVED:

1. The draft ASB, Hate Crime, and Good Management Policies be supported for approval by the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness; and
2. That the proposed ASB Strategy be supported for approval by Cabinet for formal consultation

33 CONDENSATION, DAMP AND MOULD POLICY FOR HOUSING (LANDLORD SERVICES)

The Panel considered the proposed Condensation, Damp and Mould Policy for Housing (Landlord Services).

The Service Manager – Housing Maintenance Programmes and Servicing presented the proposed draft new policy for Housing Landlord Services in relation to condensation, damp and mould. For the 12 month period from Autumn 2022, the District Council had received 546 reports of damp / mould. A further 400 had been received in the following 12 month period.

The draft policy acknowledged the serious impact damp and mould could have on the physical and mental health of people and sought to remedy this by introducing a number of measures. This included triage / risk assessment, education, reporting systems, staff training for identification and prevention, a database to record and monitor outcomes and use of independent professionals in complex cases.

It was also recognised that certain types of people might be at a greater health risk of damp and mould and officers would consider this on a risk-based approach. The Panel noted that the Housing Ombudsman had seen a significant increase in number of reported cases. Awaab's Law, via the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, will require landlords to comply with new requirements and, if they fail to do so, tenants were able to hold landlords to account by taking legal action through the courts for a breach of contract. It was further highlighted that the Council's complaints procedure had been aligned with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. An annual budget of £60,000 funded from the HRA would be required to support the policy and approval would be sought through the Council's annual budget setting process.

A question was asked by a Panel member about the complaints received in relation to condensation and mould and the proportion of these which were as a result of how someone was living in the property and those which were actual property defects. The Service Manager – Housing Maintenance Programmes and Servicing reported that this information was not readily available but would provide an answer outside of the meeting. It was acknowledged that housing tenants were able to prevent condensation, damp and mould and one of the main priorities was to educate tenants. Ventilation and heating was often at the heart of the conversations with residents on damp and mould.

Information had been provided to tenants on damp and mould in the tenant magazine, Hometalk. It had also been discussed at the Tenant Involvement Group as well as information being available on the District Council's website. All tenants who receive any retrofit work would receive advice and Go Vocal was used to send out a link to tenants on this topic.

The Strategic Director for Housing and Communities further highlighted that information had been publicised more widely on this subject on social media, the regular bulletin sent out to local residents as well as information being on the Council's website. The Private Sector Housing Team in their work also provide information to both residents and landlords. Officers engage with tenants who report issues and that engagement continues with tenants, with follow up calls to check on progress to ensure that damp and mould does not return. It was confirmed that officers would provide support to the tenant for as long as it took to resolve the problem.

RESOLVED:

That the proposed Condensation, Damp and Mould Policy be supported for approval by the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness.

34 SOCIAL HOUSING REGULATION ACT (2023) PROGRESS REPORT

The Panel considered the Social Housing Regulation Act (2023) progress report.

The Assistant Director – Housing reported that the update on progress outlined the Council's progress towards meeting the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 and the consumer standards which came into force on 1 April 2024. The earlier items the Panel had considered on the agenda demonstrated the work being carried out within the housing department in order to embed the requirements of the Social Housing Regulation Act and ensure that this be formalised with new and updated strategies and policies.

The housing department had a good level of compliance, particularly in relation to health and safety matters as well as a balanced HRA budget which was positive, however there was a continued drive to improve for the benefit of housing tenants. The recent Corporate Peer Challenge review had recognised the success of the housing department.

The District Council was required to be compliant across four consumer standards and an inspection would be carried out at least once every four years by the Regulator for Social Housing, on a risk based approach. Matters such as health and safety compliance, policies and procedures, the stock condition survey, and the number of homes meeting the decent homes standard would all form part of the inspection. A six week notice period would be given of the inspection. Given this was a risk to the council, it was proposed that as part of the preparedness for inspection and assurance that the future inspection be added to the Corporate Risk Register.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Panel requested thanks be passed onto officers in the housing department for their hard work.

A Panel Member questioned whether there were any high rise buildings which needed to be considered under the Fire Safety Act. The Service Manager Housing Major Projects, responded, reporting that as a local authority there were no high rise buildings under the regime, nor were there any in relation to the second tier down which was buildings over 11 metres. There were however regulatory requirements under the fire regulation order. A large piece of work had been carried out in relation to fire safety which involved writing to tenants, holding engagement sessions, information in the Hometalk magazine as well as the creation of a new fire safety webpage, therefore, it was felt that the council was in a good position in relation to compliance with its regulatory fire safety duty.

A Panel Member questioned the quality of the data collected and the ability to interrogate it to identify any areas of concern. In response, it was noted that the data was good quality and that it could be acted upon. The Strategic Director of Housing and Communities further highlighted that the data collected was used to produce a comprehensive set of performance dashboards which were updated monthly and this would flag up any issues at an early stage. The Tenant Satisfaction Measures sat behind the data reports which would inform managers. There was confidence that there were systems in place to identify problems. It had been identified that the housing department was light on some tenant data in relation to vulnerabilities around protected characteristics, and this data would be collected by a third party, working with tenants and this information would feed into the design of policies and strategies.

In response to a member question about benchmarking with other social housing landlords, it was confirmed that as the Tenant Satisfaction Measures data had been published for other social housing landlords, it enabled officers to compare its performance with that of others. It was also noted that across Hampshire, a landlord group was being brought together to consider a more strategic approach and through this, information would be shared, enabling learning from others.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Housing department's compliance with the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 and progress in improving services for tenants be noted;

2. That the work associated with improving preparedness for inspection was noted;
3. That putting preparedness for regulatory inspection on the Corporate Risk Register be supported

35 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET AND THE HOUSING PUBLIC SECTOR CAPITAL EXPENDITURE PROGRAMME FOR 2025/26

The Panel considered the Housing Revenue Account Budget and the Housing Public Sector Capital Expenditure Programme for 2025/26.

The Strategic Director for Housing and Communities presented the report which proposed the HRA budget for 2025/26. It was highlighted that over the last few years, Stock Condition Surveys had been completed and modelling carried out which gave a clear picture of the requirements needed to upgrade the housing stock in terms of energy efficiency as well as component parts, such as kitchens and bathrooms. There was a robust plan over the next 30 years of the work required and the budget had been prepared to reflect this. It was proposed there be an increased level of capital spending of £18.939 million to reflect on improvement works, which would also include fire safety and statutory compliance as well as decarbonisation works and energy efficiency measures, which would reduce tenants fuel bills. The total proposed capital expenditure budget was £30.8 million and this included £15.2 million for the affordable development programme, which was a Corporate Plan objective.

In order to achieve the level of spending, there would be increased borrowing. A 30 year business plan had been finalised which forecast the ability to borrow against the expected HRA income. The business plan recognised that it was possible to take on additional borrowing as well as pay back the loan with interest.

The maximum rent increase was proposed, at 2.7%, which was based on the inflation rate in September 2024. It was highlighted that since then, inflation had increased and the costs to provide improvement works would increase as a result. There would be a need to refinance, some of the existing debt in order to bring a balanced budget. The 30 year business plan would be reviewed and amended to reflect this.

Finally, the Tenant Involvement Group met and been consulted with since the report had been published. The group expressed support to the recommendations and recognised there was a balance between rent increases and the need to improve and maintain the housing stock.

RECOMMENDED:

The Panel recommended approval to Cabinet of the HRA budget and housing public sector capital expenditure programme for 2025/26 as follows:

1. that from 07 April 2025, an increase in dwelling rents of 2.7% from the 2024/25 weekly rent level, in accordance with Government guidelines, be agreed;
2. that from 07 April 2025, an increase in garage rents of 2.7% from the 2024/25 weekly rent level be agreed;

3. that from 07 April 2025, an increase in shared ownership property rents of 3.2% from the 2024/25 weekly rent level, in accordance with Government guidelines of RPI +0.5%, be agreed, and that the weekly rent of one additional property sold under previous legislation be increased by 2.7%;
4. that from 07 April 2025 Service Charges will continue to reflect actual charges and following a reduction in window cleaning and utility costs, these respective charges will be reduced;
5. that the HRA budget, as set out in Appendix 1 of this report, be agreed; and
6. that a Housing Capital Programme to 2027/28, as set out in Appendix 4, be agreed.

36 PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S UPDATE

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness expressed thanks to members of the scrutiny panel for considering the reports presented at the meeting. He also expressed his thanks to the housing department for all the work staff had been doing. He highlighted that the Corporate Peer Challenge had recognised the housing team for their work.

The Portfolio Holder provided members with an update on the following:

- Moore Close, New Milton: This was the latest completed housing development, built to the Future Homes Standard plus.
- Former Advertiser and Times site, New Milton: This would provide 20 plus homes for social rent and temporary accommodation and would be completed later this year.
- Hythe Hospital development: Last week he had visited the site which would provide 22 homes for social rent. Construction was expected to be completed in the next year. He highlighted that he was proud that the District Council had been investing in social housing.

The Chairman reported that he had visited the Moore Close development and had spoken to a tenant who had moved into an adapted flat. The tenant had advised him that when they had moved in the property it was warm, despite the heating not being on. The surfaces were also easily adaptable to suit the needs of someone using a wheelchair. This demonstrated the quality of the homes and their flexibility.

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing reiterated his thanks to members and their engagement in the scrutiny process. He provided an update on the following:

- Community Grants: The work carried out by members of the Community Grants Task and Finish Group was recognised and their recommendations had been considered at the meeting. He welcomed the more streamlined process for applications and their review, recognising that the Town and Parish Councils were no longer able to apply and instead directed to CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) for funding. The hard work of the officers involved in the community grant process was also recognised;
- St Georges Hall, Calshot: A launch event for had been held on 29 and 30 October. Members of the local community had been invited to attend on the second day and had been well attended. Tribute had been paid to Dora

Tarrant, a 1961 evacuee from the Tristan Da Cunha Islands, who made a significant impact in the community.

- Community Forum event on 4 December: This had focussed on planning for adverse incidents. He apologised to members of the Panel who had not been invited to event, but would ensure they were invited to the next Community Forum meeting. The event had been well attended with positive feedback.
- Totton Police Station had opened on 11 December. This was another well attended event and he hoped this would be a welcomed facility in the local community.
- Food Safety Inspections: High risk food inspections were on target for completion by the end of the financial year. New food premises inspections were being carried out based on risk. 88 applications had been received in the last three months.
- Draft Licensing Policy: This had been considered at the General Purposes and Licensing Committee and it would be recommended for approval at the next Full Council meeting.
- Arts and Culture: An engagement exercise had been carried out which would be used to inform the Cultural Strategy. A draft Cultural Strategy would be brought to a future meeting of the Panel for consideration.

37 WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be approved.

CHAIRMAN

Housing & Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel

22 January 2025

Air Quality Strategy



Main points for consideration



- Government requires Local Authorities to produce an Air Quality Strategy (AQS) where there are no Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA).
- New Forest District Council revoked it's remaining AQMA in Lyndhurst in September 2023.
- The draft AQS details local sources of pollution and identifies 6 priority areas to improve local air quality.
- Relevant stakeholders involved in developing the draft AQS include development control, public health, climate change, transport and industry.
- A steering group will be formed with relevant stakeholders to agree annual work plans to implement the AQS.
- The Council has a statutory duty to review and assess local air quality against Government set air quality objectives and this work will continue alongside the work to implement the AQS.

Implications/Issues to consider



- The AQS will extend beyond achieving compliance with the air quality objectives by:
 - identifying local issues and concerns
 - understanding of the impacts of air quality in the New Forest on public health
 - working collaboratively with partners across the district and local region on measures which could improve air quality
- Any resulting AQS actions are currently not funded within existing budgets.
- All available funding streams including those from Government, such as Defra air quality grants, will be considered to aid implementation of the AQS.
- Local authorities are waiting for details of Defra air quality grants, but previous successful grants included assessments and actions which supported the implementation of AQS work.

Recommendations Proposed



That Panel:

- Consider the draft Air Quality Strategy and support the process for implementing an AQS for the New Forest District Council.
- Support the recommendation to Cabinet on 5 February 2025, for approval to consult on the draft Air Quality Strategy.

Corporate Plan Performance

Saqib Yasin



Main Points for consideration



- The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) originate from our Corporate Plan 2024-2028 and are presented in dashboard form
- As an organisation, we encourage a culture of transparency. We have committed to publish quarterly dashboards of KPIs. (as per our Performance Management Framework)
- The KPIs and targets themselves have been extensively considered and are not now subject to further review or change
- The dashboard is flagged for those measures under the remit of the Housing and Communities panel

Implications/Issues to consider



- Homelessness Duty cases and households in emergency accommodation are linked. Although performance has dipped last quarter, it started from a strong baseline position. There is no indication of a continued downward trend.
- Number of families with children under 16 in external emergency shared accommodation over 6 weeks. Small numbers meant this was amber in numerical terms in Q1. Performance back on track Q2.
- CCTV – a number of new cameras have been deployed, and this is reflected in our spend.
- There are very high compliance rates for our five safety and compliance management, Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs).
- The number of Appletree Careline services to customers continues to fluctuate against a revised set of challenging stretch targets.

Recommendations Proposed



- None for onward action
- Note: Continued inclusion of commentary / narrative for each measure is encouraged. It provides useful context and focus for discussions. This will also provide mitigation for any areas underperforming and forewarn PH.

Community Grants 2025/26



Main Points for consideration



1. A full review of the annual community grant programme was undertaken in summer 2024 and adopted for this year's process. An additional £40k was added to the existing budget for the Task and Finish (T&F) Group to decide how to distribute.
2. The T&F Group reviewed the Councillor Community Engagement grants, which have not been reviewed for some time, and recommend increasing from £600 to £1,000pa
3. Revenue and Capital Community grants applications were reviewed with recommendations, using the recently approved changes to the schemes to simplify administration
4. To continue supporting two community transport schemes, in partnership with HCC and Community First Wessex, until 31 August 2025, where a full review and procurement exercise will commence
5. Panel are to consider the suitability of a community lottery scheme to run alongside the community grants programme to provide additional financial support to local organisations and groups.

Implications/Issues to consider



1. The T&F Group decided to allocate the additional £40k by increasing Councillor Community Engagement grants, revenue grants budget and set-up costs of a community lottery scheme, should it be deemed suitable to adopt.
2. Increasing Councillor Community Engagement grants will enable Councillors to provide more support to their local areas, increase local engagement, and provide support for smaller grant amounts, often ineligible for other schemes.
3. Revenue Grants – changes mean that 3-year funding agreements will be developed and agreed with those in Band A to support long term projects and promote closer working
4. Community Transport schemes to continue until 31 August 2025 for Group Hire and Call & Go. The Wheels to Work funding and scheme was to end due to HCC originally planning to end their funding. **However**, HCC have since reversed their decision and will extend their funding until 31 August 2025 so the scheme may continue. The NFDC Full community grant budget is allocated. Officers working with HCC and Community First Wessex on assumption our funding is to end and what alternatives are available to support the scheme, if viable.
5. The merits of a community lottery scheme. Could generate up to an additional £67k to support local groups (which we approve if included), and over 120 local authorities operate this scheme, including several Hampshire based authorities, but will require initial set up costs and resources, and support from local groups

Recommendations Proposed



That Panel approve the Task & Finish Group recommendations

1. To increase Councillor Engagement Grants from £600 to £1,000 from 1 April 2025
2. To approve community grants of £152,500 in revenue grants and £77,871 in capital grants.
3. To approve community transport grants of £44,359 for Call & Go and Group Hire.
4. That the Panel further consider the adoption of a Community Lottery scheme, making a recommendation to Cabinet to either:
 - Request Officers produce a detailed report on how a community lottery scheme could be successfully run in the district, and the short to long-term implications for the Council, and for the report to progress through the Council's decision-making process. **OR**
 - Not advance the scheme at the current time.



Housing Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy 2025-2029

Main Points for consideration



- This report introduces a new housing strategy and policy framework (within landlord services) to prevent and tackle ASB in the Council's housing stock.
- Between 2023/2024 Housing Services received 160 reported cases of Anti-Social Behaviour, which represents 31 cases per 1,000 homes.
- This strategy and related policies responds to a changing legislative and regulatory landscape, as well as feedback from our residents on how we have managed previous reports of ASB, and how living through ASB feels to our residents.
- The Council has developed a strategy to deliver effective prevention and support initiatives under the following priorities:
 - a) Preventing and early intervention:** publishing a new ASB Policy, Hate Crime Policy and a Good Neighbourhood Policy
 - b) Managing risk and supporting victims:** actions will be determined via a risk assessment or harm matrix whilst making it clear what types of reports will be considered "anti-social", "unreasonable" or a "nuisance".
 - c) Working in partnership:** building on the work already undertaken in our district through effective community safety partnership arrangements, including the longstanding and effective work of the Safer New Forest Partnership.
 - d) Putting tenants first:** record, track, and monitor outcomes of reports and ensure the tenant engagement service are actively involved in service improvement.
- Interventions identified within our strategy will pay close attention to the social demographic profile in the New Forest and effectively target and support groups who may be disproportionately impacted by ASB.

Implications/Issues to consider

- The Regulator of Social Housing & Housing Ombudsman Service has strengthened their investigative approach, and their response to failings. Landlords have been notified of the increase in expected standards in a series of special reports from the Housing Ombudsman, who have published complaints where evidence of maladministration has been found, with a large focus on ASB complaints.
- The Ombudsman has recommended that landlords provide a clear statement of their approach to ASB and the way it intends to work with residents and relevant, organisations to combat what is largely a social behavioural problem. It is clear that landlords should **support victims** and follow **a risk-based approach** to reports of ASB.
- Landlords have been repeatedly instructed to formalise their position on reports that don't meet the threshold to be reasonably considered ASB. To reflect this change of approach, a new "How to be a good neighbour" leaflet has been developed, the NFDC website has been updated, and new system processes are being introduced.
- New staff response and case management processes have already been actioned to ensure the Council's operational response to ASB reports mirrors the policy and data requirements of the new regulatory regime.
- A new Neighbourhood Team has been created within existing budgets (led by the Housing ASB & Neighbourhoods Manager) this team will focus solely on the individual response to ASB & Neighbourhood reports as well as being a visible presence on estates and communal buildings.



Recommendations Proposed



- Panel Members are asked to consider the proposed policies and make recommendations to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness who will be required to approve the policies. The Policies are required in the shorter-term at a service level to improve service delivery and outcomes.
- The ASB strategy will inform a longer-term framework of service delivery, partnering with local agencies and support in aligning our goals and resources with the corporate plan objectives. It is asked that panel members recommends to Council the approval of the draft ASB Strategy and to carry out formal public consultation.
- Once the strategy is fully adopted the Policies will be updated in line with any changes required and will be continuously reviewed.
- In accordance with this aim, Panel Members are asked to consider the proposed ASB Strategy and make recommendations to Cabinet.

Housing Landlord Condensation, Damp and Mould Policy



Main Points for consideration



- This report introduces a new Condensation, Damp, and Mould Policy for Housing (Landlord Services).
- In the 12-month period commencing Autumn 2022, the Housing Service received 546 reports of damp/mould, and in the 12-month period commencing Autumn 2023, a further 400 were received.
- The policy recognises and acknowledges the serious impact damp and mould can have on people, both physically and mentally, and seeks to remedy this at the earliest opportunity by introducing:
 - a) Customer Contact Triage Workflow, Script and Risk Matrix;
 - b) Educational material and tenancy support for tenants;
 - c) Website Form for e-reporting and automated email responses;
 - d) Training for key staff in identification and prevention and regular topic feature in staff briefings;
 - e) Database to record, track, and monitor outcomes of reports and insight on repeat reporters;
 - f) Use of independent professionals when warranted in complex cases.
- Certain individuals may be at increased risk of the health impacts of damp and mould exposure, and through our health needs risk-based approach we will identify and prioritise those individuals most at risk and prioritise our resources to respond accordingly.

Implications/Issues to consider



- The Housing Ombudsman has seen complaints about damp and mould increase significantly in the past few years and called for a 'zero tolerance' approach. The inquest into the tragic death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak and widespread media reporting has pushed the issue to the top of the agenda.
- Awaab's Law, via the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, requires landlords to comply with new requirements and, if they fail to do so, tenants will be able to hold their landlords to account by taking legal action through the courts for a breach of contract (tenancy).
- The Council's complaints procedure now aligns with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, meaning we can deal with Pre-Action Protocol letters alleging disrepair through the complaints process.
- An annual budget of circa £60k funded by the HRA is required to support this policy and this will be agreed as part of the Council's annual budget setting process.

Recommendations Proposed



- Panel Members are asked to consider the proposed Condensation, Damp, and Mould Policy and make recommendations to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness who will be required to approve the policy.

Social Housing Regulation Act Progress

Main Points for consideration



- This report outlines the Council's progress towards meeting the Social Regulation Act (2023) and the Act's consumer standards which came into effect on the 1st April 2024 and is presented to the Panel for scrutiny, accountability, and transparency as part of the Council's governance arrangements.
- This report gives:
 - assurance of satisfactory progress towards meeting the requirements of the consumer standards and the Council's current strengths and potential weaknesses as it prepares for regulatory inspection from the Social Housing Regulator for the first time,
 - feedback from our residents as reflected in the high scoring Tenant Satisfaction Measures, taking account of the learning opportunities presented by complaints and tenant engagement approaches.
- The Council is undertaking a gap analysis against the consumer standards and forming a detailed action plan to address the gaps in strategy, policy, and performance to deliver compliant and high standard homes and housing service to tenants that are tailored to meet the needs of vulnerable tenants with appropriate support being put in place.
- Building on the partnership work already undertaken in our district through effective stakeholder engagement to build a robust evidence base to prepare for inspection and better service delivery across internal departments, external stakeholders, tenants and with other landlords and councils.

Implications/Issues to consider

- The Social Regulation Act (2023) requires landlords to deliver against all the consumer standards which in turn improves outcomes for our tenants, and mitigates longer term legal, financial and reputational risk to the Council. The self-assessment and activities being undertaken to prepare for the inspection insure against the possibility of the Council being unprepared for regulatory inspection and not achieving a compliant grade.
- The Landlord service is delivering a good service to its residents as evidenced by the Tenant Satisfaction Measures and a non-compliant grade is unlikely, there are IT systems for example under development including a Corporate CRM system which will allow our tenants to self-serve which remain in development as part of the Transformation Programme. The regulator will expect staff to make the systems we have already work effectively for tenants recognising that most landlords are in a constant change cycle.
- There are a significant number of policy and practice improvements that need to be planned and implemented over the next twelve months including tenant data collation and analysis, governance arrangements particularly in relation to tenant engagement, equality and diversity with a focus on vulnerable tenants and tailoring services, learning from complaints and implementing any Ombudsman recommendations across landlord functions, contract management, stakeholder management, and collating an evidence base and context document of around 250 documents, policies and audit reports for submission when the time comes for inspection.
- The reality is it can't all be done at the same time and priority-based Action Plan that is transparent and resourced is the desired outcome from the gap analysis work. The aim is to have an approved plan in place by June 2025.

Recommendations Proposed

- Panel Members are asked to consider the progress made to date in meeting the requirements of the Social Housing Regulation Act (2023) through our approach and work against the consumer standards, action planning and learning from complaints and make recommendations to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness on our preparedness for Regulatory Inspection and ambition to achieve a compliant grading from the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH).
- The Panel support a recommendation to put preparedness for regulatory inspection on the Corporate Risk Register to ensure Corporate oversight is maintained even though our landlord functions are of a good standard, and the risk of being found non-compliant by the regulator against the consumer standards is currently low. The risk is the uncertain inspection timetable and the short notice approach of the regulator whilst we are in the process of compiling our evidence base and making the required policy and practice changes in the landlord functions.
- The resultant Consumer Standard Action Plan will inform a longer-term work programme of service improvement including improving systems, producing new policies, and initiating a range of service improvement projects and aligning our service improvement goals and resources with the corporate plan objectives.



Housing Revenue Account Budget and the Housing Public Sector Capital Expenditure Programme for 2025/26



Main Points for consideration



The report sets out a proposed balanced HRA budget for 2025/26, including decisions to be taken on dwelling rents, garage rents, shared ownership and service charge.

The proposed budget includes uplifted maintenance budgets meaning that a total of £18.939 million will be spent on maintaining tenant's properties in 2025/26. This proposal supports the Council's Corporate Plan commitments and responsibilities to its tenants.

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Budgets of £1.5m and £1.87m are proposed for Fire Safety & Statutory compliance, and Decarbonisation respectively.

The proposed Capital Programme totals £30.820m, including spend of £15.2m on the continued development and acquisition of new Council dwellings. The Capital programme requires external loan finance of £12.865m, with the cost of this borrowing covered in the medium-long term through the rents payable.

The budget is supported by a 30 year business plan forecast and spending decisions taken within this proposed budget support the financial sustainability of the HRA over this longer term period through the protection of the minimum reserve balance and an appropriate level of interest cover.

Implications/Issues to consider



- Maximum rent uplift recommended to maximise the upgrades of properties.
- The report recommends increasing expenditure on housing maintenance and capital programmes to escalate work to ensure compliance with Housing Regulatory and safety standards, and energy efficiency targets. This proposed increase is in line with 30-year projections and the HRA's capacity for fiscal borrowing and debt increases to accommodate the programme.
- The proposed uplifted rent (in line with government guidelines) and service charges, as well as partial re-financing of the HRA settlement loan enable increased expenditure on housing maintenance and capital programmes. This increased expenditure ensures compliance with Housing Regulatory Standards. The proposed budget is supported with 30 year projections and potential for fiscal borrowing and debt increases to accommodate the programme.

Tenant Involvement Group



Members of the TIG were given the opportunity to review, scrutinise and challenge senior managers on the proposed HRA budget and report for 2025/26.

Members of the TIG understand the recommended rent increase and, notwithstanding the recognised impact on tenants, realise the necessity and welcome continued input on the budget and budget setting. The TIG also understand that the majority of Councils and providers of social housing will be increasing rents by the allowed 2.7%.

Tenants feel the Council continue to take the 'tenant voice' and impact on tenants into account within budget setting and providing housing services.

The TIG group appreciate the Council's proposed focus on tenants' homes, reflected in the budgets outlined for both reactive maintenance and planned work, alongside a continued and appropriate focus on sustainability through the Council's decarbonisation and energy efficiency programmes.

Tenants also recognise the need for new Council homes and support the proposed budget to continue to provide much needed affordable homes in our communities.

Members of the TIG are reassured with the explanation from Officers of the Council, alongside answers to questions from the TIG, that the proposed budget and spend on tenants' homes and services has been thoroughly considered to ensure the right spend for both tenants and the Council.

Recommendations Proposed

1. that from 07 April 2025, an increase in dwelling rents of 2.7% from the 2024/25 weekly rent level, in accordance with Government guidelines, be agreed;
2. that from 07 April 2025, an increase in garage rents of 2.7% from the 2024/25 weekly rent level be agreed;
3. that from 07 April 2025, an increase in shared ownership property rents of 3.2% from the 2024/25 weekly rent level, in accordance with Government guidelines of RPI +0.5%, be agreed, and that the weekly rent of one additional property sold under previous legislation be increased by 2.7%;
4. that from 07 April 2025 Service Charges will continue to reflect actual charges and following a reduction in window cleaning and utility costs, these respective charges will be reduced;
5. that the HRA budget, as set out in Appendix 1 of this report, be agreed; and
6. that a Housing Capital Programme to 2027/28, as set out in Appendix 4, be agreed.





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