

17 JULY 2024

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, 17 July 2024

- * 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:

Councillors:

Steve Davies

Councillors:

Dan Poole

Officers Attending:

David Brown, Brian Byrne, Joanne McClay, Ryan Stevens, Paul Thomas, Ritchie Thomson, Karen Wardle and Kealy Whenray

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mballa.

4 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

The minutes of the meetings held on 20 March and 13 May 2024 were confirmed as correct records.

5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

6 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

7 CCTV – PROPOSED EXPANSION ACROSS THE DISTRICT

The Panel considered the report detailing the proposed expansion of CCTV across the District, which recommended that an additional 21 cameras be erected in specific locations as well as to upgrade to the remaining analogue cameras to digital capability.

The Service Manager Community Safety & Support presented the report, highlighting that it was a Council priority to reduce crime and disorder and the perception of crime. A grant had been awarded through the Safer Streets Fund, which was restricted for the installation of CCTV in within rural areas. Bransgore, Fawley and Fordingbridge had been identified. A review had been carried out of the CCTV network across the District using crime data to identify gaps in CCTV coverage and 21 locations were proposed for the installation of a CCTV camera. Extensive consultation had been carried out with the local towns and parishes identified.

It was highlighted that the current network was fibre optic and that a number of the proposed locations were in rural areas. A trial had been carried out in Fordingbridge with 4G installations which reduced upfront and going costs as well as benefitting from increased flexibility in terms of camera relocation. The result of the trial found that high quality footage had been demonstrated with no service interruption or loss of transmission. It was therefore proposed to upgrade the remaining analogue cameras to digital which would reduce the ongoing revenue costs.

Members expressed their support to the proposals to expand the CCTV network and acknowledged that extensive consultation had been carried out with the Town and Parish Councils affected by the proposals.

In a response to a question about local businesses requesting access to CCTV footage, the Service Manager, Community Safety & Support suggested that any incidents of crime should be reported immediately to the police, who would in turn make a request to the District Council to review the CCTV footage. It was highlighted that officers had worked closely with the local community in relation to the new CCTV cameras installed in Fordingbridge and this work would be replicated. Officers would engage with both residents and businesses, inviting them to a public meeting to raise awareness and answer questions or any concerns they might have.

RESOLVED:

The Panel noted the following recommendations to Cabinet:

1. To expand the public space CCTV camera network, adding 21 cameras across the district referred to as 'phase one'; and
2. That following completion of phase one, the remaining 29 analogue cameras on the public space network are upgraded to digital capability enabling the analogue transmission to end, creating opportunities to reduce the annual network costs associated with transmission of footage.

8 REVIEW OF THE REVENUE AND CAPITAL COMMUNITY GRANTS SCHEME

The Panel considered the review of community capital and revenue grants.

The Service Manager – Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services outlined the report highlighting that community grants were made available each year, whereby organisations were invited to apply for funding. Members were involved via a Task and Finish Group to assess applications and form recommendations which were taken forward through scrutiny and onto Cabinet for determination. A range of

organisations receive funding to support to residents, on matters such as mental health or the cost of living crisis.

The process for the grants awarded for the current financial year was detailed in section 7.1 of the report. The Panel noted that it had required a significant level of administration, the volume of applications had been unprecedented and therefore the expectations of organisations who had applied for funding needed to be managed.

The review of community grants considered eligibility criteria for revenue grants, and proposed seven options for the Panel to consider. In relation to capital grants, it was proposed that a set of additional principles be agreed for inclusion to the scheme and that applications that meet the criteria would be scored against a matrix of criteria, for example, value for money and meeting the Corporate Plan priorities.

It was recognised by members that the Task and Finish Group for the Community Infrastructure Levy had considered applications which had been scored against a matrix system. This process had worked well as a detailed assessment had been carried out by officers and each eligible application had been scored. Members had then sought clarification in relation to specific matters on some applications. A response was then provided at a later meeting to members.

The Panel discussed the options presented in the report in relation to the revenue grants. The view was expressed by a number of Panel members that they wished to continue to be involved in community grant process and therefore felt that options 2 and 3 were best suited for this. They recognised that these options would reduce administration and ensure that applications meet minimum criteria. There was a discussion regarding whether organisations should continue to be invited to give a presentation in relation the revenue applications. It was felt that the applicant should be invited to attend, where appropriate, enabling members to still scrutinise applications and ask questions to obtain clarity to support their decision making and recommendations.

The Community Funded lottery scheme was discussed which could run alongside the existing revenue grant scheme. Members agreed to explore this further through the Community Grants Task and Finish Group to understand how it could operate and provide further grant funding opportunities.

A member asked for clarification on the reasons behind the option of three year grants. The Service Manager – Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services reported that some organisations apply each year and were successful in gaining funding, and if they met key council priorities or support Council services it could be beneficial to award a longer term grant which would give that organisation more financial stability and certainty.

A member questioned the possibility of increasing the councillors' community engagement grant from the current amount of £600 per year, particularly in recognition that the proposed minimum community revenue grant request would be £3,000, leaving a gap. The Service Manager Revenues, Benefits and Customer Service reported that the budget allocation for all community grants would be considered through the Task and Finish Group process.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Panel recommend to Cabinet the following

1. That the proposed eligibility criteria for the Revenue Grant scheme, as detailed in Section 9.1 of the report be adopted;
2. That Option 2 (Multi-year project and 1 year awards Task and Finish Group) be adopted, with an amendment to invite organisations to the Task and Finish Group to answer member questions and provide clarity to specific matters on the application.
3. That the proposed process and eligibility criteria for the capital grant scheme be adopted, as detailed in section 11 of the report; and
4. That the Community Grants Task and Finish Group explore and consider a Community lottery funded scheme to run alongside the Community Grants programme, as detailed in section 10.7 of the report.

9 HOUSING - ANNUAL COMPLIANCE REPORT

The Panel considered the annual compliance report in relation to housing.

The Service Manager Housing Major Projects presented the report which detailed the housing compliance performance across the statutory safety requirements in respect of the Council housing stock. Compliance was a key priority of the housing service and this was embedded in day to day work. An update was also provided on the work to identify Reinforced Autoclave Aerated Concrete (RAAC) within housing buildings and on damp, mould and disrepair.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures had been introduced through the Social Housing Regulation Act which required a range of new and significant measures to improve services and greater emphasis had been placed on tenant safety. The District Council had submitted and published its performance data on 8 July 2024.

Members were pleased to note there was 100% compliance in some of the statutory areas and that overall, there was a high standard of compliance.

Members questioned the large volume of reports in relation to damp, mould and disrepair in Autumn 2022, and the decrease to 354 the following year. It was noted that a range of measures had been introduced to triage such reports against a risk matrix to determine the risk priority and action required. Information had also been made available to tenants to provide guidance and advice on how to prevent condensation and mould forming.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Panel requested thanks be passed onto members of staff working in the housing compliance team for their hard work in order deliver a high level of compliance across all the statutory housing compliance areas.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Housing Compliance Annual report covering the period up to 30 June 2024 in response of the Housing Services performance against key statutory compliance areas be noted.

10 TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES

The Panel received a presentation providing details of the performance against the Tenant Satisfaction Measures for 2023/24 which had recently been published and submitted to the regulator.

The Tenant Engagement Manager highlighted key statistics, which included 81% of tenants being satisfied with the housing service overall and that 82.8% of tenants had been satisfied with the repairs service, which was positive news. Four areas had been identified for improvement relating to communal areas, approach to antisocial behaviour, the council listening to views of tenants and acting upon them and how the council deals with complaints. Work was being carried out with the Tenant Involvement group to scrutinise the complaints process and response rate and a number of recommendations for improvement had been proposed.

An interim comparison of the District Council against 84 registered providers, demonstrated that the NFDC was in the top quartile of high performers, scoring above average. The one area identified as below average was in relation to complaint handling, whereas all other areas were performing well in terms of the national average.

The Chairman highlighted to the Panel an example of improvement works to a local housing estate, which had involved participation of the Tenant Engagement Manager working over a weekend. The Chairman thanked him for his contribution and spoke about the residents being appreciative of this work and the positive benefits for the local community. It was noted that a tenant had volunteered to become part of the Tenant Involvement Group after seeing this community work being carried out.

The Panel recognised the proactive work being carried out with tenants to promote and encourage involvement. It was acknowledged that private rented housing was not included within the tenant satisfaction measures, however the regulator had made it clear that work was expected to be carried out with mixed tenure communities.

The Chairman congratulated the team on the work carried out in relation to tenant satisfaction and welcomed further opportunities to encourage greater community involvement.

11 CREATIVE AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The Panel received a presentation from the Creative and Cultural Development Manager providing an overview of the work being carried out in the district and the direction of travel.

The presentation included:

1. Current Areas of work
 - Cultural Strategy: A New Forest Cultural Development Board had been established with a range of partners, including Hampshire Cultural Trust, Culture in Common, Folio, social prescribers and the Arts Council England.
 - Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) projects: Funding has been used for a number of projects, the development of Folio and rural and outdoor arts development (ROAM), this was to raise awareness of arts and culture in outdoor communities.

- Folio: The District Council was talking a lead on this with sector support. 16 organisations and over 200 freelancers were involved in the New Forest.
 - Culture in Common: This had been created with Arts Council funding and was designed to create art with the community.
 - External Project support: The Council had been supporting organisations and projects with consultancy advice, for example with Furzey Gardens / Minstead Trust.
 - Internal project support: Examples of small scale projects included the cedar carving at Appletree Court and a roving litter sculpture.
2. Cultural Strategy Update: There were three areas of work. The first being community engagement, led by Culture in Common. Engagement sessions had been held with Councillors, industry and local residents to seek information on what residents would like to see and how they felt about the cultural offer in the area. Data collection and asset mapping would bring together existing information and identify what was available. The third piece of work was early scope and delivery funding. Discussions were taking place with the Arts Council England on potential funding streams. It was highlighted that there was some uncertainty in relation to this following the recent General Election and any resulting impact.
 3. Community Engagement Sessions: There had been over 150 attendees to various engagement sessions involving local town, parish and district councillors, folio, young people and local residents. An artist and poet had been in residency during each of these sessions. Recommendations arising from this will help form the basis for the forthcoming Cultural Strategy and action plan.
 4. Timeline for Cultural Strategy: The engagement data was being reviewed and the priorities and themes were emerging. It was anticipated that the Strategy would be published in early 2025, but this would depend on the direction of travel from central government.
 5. Activities carried out in the district over the last two years: This included Waterside Arts Festival, the Lake Monster trail at Gang Warily and creative clubs. It was highlighted how over this time, there had been a movement from low cultural engagement to mid cultural engagement which was a positive step forward.
 6. Future work 2024-2026: The District Council would continue to take a leading role in cultural development working with partners. Further funding would be sought, and resources would be aligned. Funding had been sought for a further year for Culture in Common and a decision was expected shortly. Decisions would be required in relation to the future governance of Folio. A public art programme would be considered, and discussion would be held with planning to consider whether CIL funding could be made available. ROAM would be developed further to raise awareness of the cultural offering and ensure that it was as accessible as possible for local residents.

Members highlighted examples of organisations and venues which they felt needed some advice and support to raise the profile and awareness in order to encourage greater attendance at events. The Creative and Cultural Development Manager acknowledged this as an issue and it was hoped that through ROAM, this outreach work would create relationships with the community which would encourage future engagement.

In response to a member question about the data collection work which had been carried out, feeding into the Cultural Strategy, it was noted that the data would be high level and create a picture of the current cultural offering and a map of the assets in the District. It would then be used to identify further development opportunities.

A member asked about the Film Industry, recognising that this was not represented in the District and that anyone seeking employment needed to travel to other areas. Film New Forest was sat within the Council's economic development team and had been scaled back to a film office only. There had been challenges with film requests making it harder for filming to take place in the district. The data collection for the Cultural Strategy would include a skills audit for the creative sector which might pick up on opportunities for young people in terms of education and training.

Members recognised that more could be done in relation to public art and that there were historical events and famous people associated with the forest which though public art could encourage more people to visit places in the forest. It was also recognised that any public art should be installed for the benefit of the local community and in consultation with them.

12 PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S UPDATE

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing reported on the following matters:

- **Red and Black Pepper Indian Army Exhibition:** The Portfolio Holder had attended the launch last Thursday at the New Forest Heritage Centre in Lyndhurst. He encouraged everyone to attend this fascinating exhibition.
- **St Georges Hall, Calshot refurbishment:** The improvement works were close to completion and the facility would be open shortly to the public. The project had been part funded by the Rural England Prosperity Fund. The building had been improved to encourage wider use as well as retaining original features. The Portfolio Holder hoped that the community would celebrate this new improved facility.
- **Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs):** It had been one year since the two PSPOs had come into force across the District. These were enforced by Forestry England, New Forest National Park Authority and the Verderers. Since implementation, there had been 953 engagements with members of the community seen to breach the orders, the majority of these were tourists. 159 engagements related to PSPO 1 (fires) and 784 related to PSPO 2 regarding the feeding and petting of animals. Only one fixed penalty notice had been issued in conjunction with the police. Awareness and education was a priority. The PSPOs had been promoted through a multimedia approach, including the provision of leaflets for circulation at New Forest campsites. The Community Safety Team would approach hotels and B&Bs to ensure literature was available to visitors.
- **Safer New Forest:** There had been a record number of summer engagement sessions with free bike tag registering. The team had attended events in New Milton, Fordingbridge, Hythe, Lymington Ringwood and Totton, which were also attended by the local neighbourhood policing team.
- **Water Quality:** The water quality at the NFDC managed beaches at Barton on Sea, Calshot and Milford on Sea had been awarded an excellent status by the Environment Agency. Lepe Beach, managed by Hampshire County Council had also received an excellent rating. The River Avon at Fordingbridge had been designated inland bathing water by Defra, following regular monitoring.

- The Food Safety Team would be attending the New Forest Show and have a stall for children, “Be a food safety detective”. This would give the opportunity to look at food safety standards in a fridge and to identify hazards.

The Portfolio Holder the Housing and Homelessness reported on the following matters:

- **The new Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) role:** Both the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman Service had been given more statutory authority to ensure that complaints handled by the Council followed a new complaint handling code. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness was responsible for complaints received against the Housing Landlord function. He reported he would have the lead responsibility to support a positive complaint handling culture. Every two months a legal officer would attend his Portfolio Holder briefing to ensure that he receives regular updates on the volume, category and outcome of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance; regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling; and regular updates on the outcomes of Ombudsman investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings.
- **Portfolio Holder Question:** Further to the question at the recent Council meeting on Right to Buy, and the supplementary questions from Cllr Jack Davies, in relation to the total number of Council properties, the Panel noted that as at 31st March 2024, the total number of homes advised to the new Regulator of Social Housing was 5,285. Over the next 3 to 4 years, an additional 100 properties could reasonably be expected to be added to that total. The Portfolio Holder reported he had emailed Cllr Davies this response.

13 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel noted that there would be a report presented at the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting in November, on the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement, which would include complaints to the Housing Ombudsman. Members of the Panel were advised they were welcome to attend this meeting and to participate in the discussion.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be approved.

CHAIRMAN