

21 JANUARY 2026

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 January 2026

- * Cllr Steve Clarke (Chairman)
- * Cllr Kate Crisell (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

- John Adams
- * Hilary Brand
- * Sean Cullen
- * Richard Frampton

Councillors:

- * John Haywood
- Patrick Mballa
- * Neil Tungate

*Present

In attendance:

Substitutes:

Barry Rickman

Councillors:

Peter Armstrong
Steve Davies

Councillors:

Alan O'Sullivan
Dan Poole

Officers Attending:

David Brown, Brian Byrne, Kirsty Farmer, Kevin Green, Richard Knott, Peter Matthew, Chris Pike, Chris Pope, Ryan Stevens, Paul Thomas, Saqib Yasin and Lee Ellis

Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Adams. Cllr Rickman was in attendance as a nominated substitute.

38 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2025 were confirmed as a correct record.

39 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

40 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

41 CORPORATE PLAN: KEY PERFORMANCE DATA FOR QUARTER 2 2025-2026

An overview was provided by the Performance and Insight Manager and the Panel considered the Corporate Plan Key Performance Data for Quarter 2 covering the period July to September 2025.

A Panel member asked what actions would be undertaken in the short and medium term to address KPI 2 – the number of households in external emergency accommodation. In response, the Service Manager - Housing Options and Tenancy Accounts confirmed that alternative solutions had been found for families in emergency accommodation. Those families often faced complex situations and their requirement for suitable accommodation would be ongoing. It was also confirmed that the number of households in emergency accommodation had now decreased and the recent increase in prevention rates had begun to have a positive impact in reducing emergency homelessness.

It was also clarified that KPI 3 - the number of households with children under 16 in external emergency accommodation over 6 weeks, could vary due to the complex nature of families and they could be in external emergency accommodation for up to 9 weeks, whilst work was undertaken to find suitable accommodation.

Due to the Renters Rights Act some private sector landlords had already left the market. As a result, the Council would proactively engage with private sector landlords and their tenants to promote the benefits of the Renters Rights Act and to build relationships with that sector.

A Panel member asked what benefits had been seen as part of the CCTV rollout. It was confirmed by the Service Manager for Community Safety and Support that an additional forty-four CCTV cameras had been installed, which included rural areas where previously there had been no CCTV cameras. Work had been undertaken with the District Commander to ensure that local police were aware of the presence and locations of these cameras. Community safety engagement events had also been undertaken with the retail sector to make them aware of the cameras and to reference them when reporting crime.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Panel considered and reviewed the Q2 2025-2026 dashboard; and
2. Comments be forwarded for consideration by the Cabinet.

42 DRAFT NEW FOREST CREATIVE AND CULTURAL FRAMEWORK

An overview was provided by the Chief Operations Officer of the draft New Forest Creative and Cultural Framework.

A Panel member asked how the handover to Creative Forest would be undertaken and who would be the Strategic Lead at the Council. It was confirmed that the handover process wasn't fully prescribed although the key stakeholder would be Creative Forest. Creative Forest would be the lead organisation to deliver the framework alongside key stakeholders at the Council who would cover culture, health, wellbeing and economic development. The framework would contain key aims, priorities, KPIs and measures of success. Data would be reported to the Stakeholder Board which would ensure that the framework delivered its objectives.

Concern was raised by a Panel member that whilst the establishment of Creative Forest would protect against local government reorganisation, it would also create a burden on a fragile network of freelancers and micro-businesses to deliver economic growth and the ambitions of the partnership. In response, it was felt that

there was a wealth of experience, backgrounds and skills being brought together by resilient organisations into Creative Forest. Following consultation, the governance process would be handed over to Creative Forest.

RESOLVED:

That the Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel reviewed and supported the draft Cultural and Creative Framework which would then be considered by the Cabinet, prior to public consultation.

43 COMMUNITY GRANTS 2026/27

The Service Manager, Revenues Benefits and Customer Services provided an overview on the Community Grant Funding for 2026/27 and asked the Panel to consider the recommendations of the Community Grants Task and Finish Group.

The Chairman of the Community Grants Task and Finish Group stated that it had been a difficult role for the Group to decide who to award funding to and that they supported the report. However, they were concerned that following the recommendations of the Group that they had not been consulted on recommendation 4 relating to proposals for expenditure in 2027/28.

The Chairman of the Community Grants Task and Finish Group did not support this additional recommendation. He felt it would lead to a lower amount of funding being awarded to Band B Revenue Grant applicants and that the ringfencing for Band A Revenue Grants should be removed. In response, the Chief Operations Officer explained that the additional recommendation was part of a long-term vision brought about by local government reorganisation and the need to protect the current process due to the timetable for the future Community Grants Task and Finish Group and its impact on budgets. It was possible that the new Council could change the community grants process as part of its financial prudence, and the proposed recommendation would provide an opportunity to ensure a medium-term legacy for residents of the New Forest.

Two members of the Community Grants Task and Finish Group also spoke against this additional officer recommendation.

Panel members were concerned that criteria were proposed to be introduced for a future Community Grants Task and Finish Group which had not been discussed by the Group and would be more restrictive.

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing thanked members for their feedback and reiterated his thanks to the members and Officers involved in the Community Grants Task and Finish Group. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that he had attended the summary at the end of the Task and Finish Group and that there was uncertainty with local government reorganisation.

The Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered a change to the recommendations presented in the report relating to the 4th recommendation. This was for any further procedural changes brought about by local government reorganisation to be considered by the Community Grants Task and Finish Group and agreed through the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel made the following recommendations to Cabinet:

1. To approve Community grants totalling £157,500 in revenue grants and £97,949 in capital grants, as detailed in Appendix 1, for inclusion in the Medium-Term Financial Plan and proposed budget for 2026/27;

2. To approve the proposals, as detailed in Paragraph 19;
3. To approve the Community Transport grants totalling £44,359, as set out in Paragraph 25; and
4. To award Band A organisations a rolling 3-year award, if agreed by the Community Grants Task and Finish Group, and for any further procedural changes brought about by local government reorganisation to be considered by the Community Grants Task and Finish Group and agreed through the Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing.

44 DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2025-2028

An overview was provided by the Service Manager – Community Safety and Support on the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025 – 2028.

The Chairman of the Panel expressed concern as to whether the Council's unique policies would be resilient enough to ensure that they continued to work well following local government reorganisation. In response, it was confirmed that the Council chaired the District Domestic Abuse Forum which included statutory partners, at both the local and County level, so those partnerships were already established, along with commissioned services. No changes were envisaged to change those arrangements as a result of local government organisation.

It was confirmed that individuals who had a lived experience of domestic abuse were part of the forum.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel noted the findings of the public consultation conducted on the NFDC Domestic Abuse Strategy and supported the implementation of the strategy through Cabinet.

45 HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY

An overview was provided by the Service Manager – Housing Options and Tenancy Accounts on the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026/2031.

A Panel member asked how the Council would make sure that no resident faced a housing crisis before they received the help that they needed. It was confirmed that the Council placed an emphasis on homelessness prevention at a very early stage. There was easy to access information on the Council's website, and this would be provided to any enquiries. Information and improvements were regularly made and there was enhanced working with partners as well as upskilling voluntary organisations to provide information.

Following a Panel member's recent experience with a rough sleeper in their ward, they stated that they wished to convey their thanks to those Officers who responded and were able to find accommodation.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel considered and supported the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy ahead of a review by the Cabinet.

46 DRAFT REVISED ALLOCATIONS POLICY

An overview was provided by the Service Manager – Housing Options and Tenancy Accounts on the draft Revised Allocations Policy.

A Panel member asked how the Council had made sure that Band 1 of the housing register was robust and that those residents within this Band were only there for a short period of time. In response, it was confirmed that Band 1 was the highest priority band and although no guarantee could be provided regarding how long someone could be in Band 1, it tended to be for the shortest amount of time possible.

It was confirmed that the Council monitored the number of people on its housing register, the number of nominations and their associated timeframes. There would also be relevant KPIs to monitor performance, alongside the time taken to allocate the properties.

RESOLVED:

The Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel supported the:

1. revision to the current Housing Allocation Policy 2020, as outlined in this report;
2. pathway for progress of the draft policy, through Cabinet and Council ahead of statutory consultation; and
3. provision that any future changes to the policy, which were not major, can be delegated for approval by the Strategic Director Housing & Communities, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness.

47 HOUSING LANDLORD ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (ASB) STRATEGY

An overview was provided by the ASB and Neighbourhood Manager on the Housing Landlord Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Strategy.

A Panel member asked how the strategy ensured compliance with statutory landlord responsibilities and new regulatory standards. In response, it was confirmed that Anti-Social Behaviour, Hate Crime and Good Neighbourhood Management polices were the key tools which the regulator would look at to ensure compliance, along with tenant satisfaction measures. The effectiveness of interventions was based on data via the case management system, which allowed the Council to track the type of reports received and services could be adapted to support the issues.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Panel noted the findings of the public consultation conducted on the Housing Landlord ASB Strategy; and
2. Supported the adoption of the strategy by Cabinet.

48 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET AND THE HOUSING PUBLIC SECTOR CAPITAL EXPENDITURE PROGRAMME FOR 2026/27

An overview was provided by the Principal Service Accountant on the Housing Revenue Account Budget and the Housing Public Sector Capital Expenditure Programme for 2026/27.

The Chairman asked whether the proposed budget would enable reports of damp and mould to be effectively dealt with, and this was confirmed. A further update was requested by the Chairman on the management of garages and their stock condition. It was confirmed that the Council had recently received a full stock condition survey of garages and an options appraisal would be required, along with the projected cost of investment.

A member asked whether housing could replace those garages which were in disrepair. It was confirmed by the Assistant Director – Housing that garage sites weren't always attractive for development due to their size, scale, complexity, contamination issues and the requirement for planning permission. A business case approach would need to be followed on options, but some sites would be looked at for housing need.

It was confirmed that the Council was up to date with its Decent Home and Housing Health Rating System surveys, with 80% now completed. 800 properties were currently outside of the five-year survey and these would be completed by the end of March 2026.

The Co-Optee - Tenant Involvement Group stated that tenants were supportive of the housing services and were pleased that they lived in good, safe, maintained homes. It was important to understand how rent increases affected tenants. It was acknowledged that rent increases were necessary and supported by tenants.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel considered and supported the HRA budget and housing public sector capital expenditure programme for 2026/27 which recommends:

1. that from 06 April 2026, an increase in dwelling rents of 4.8% from the 2025/26 weekly rent level, plus the maximum weekly rent convergence increase allowable, in accordance with Government guidelines to be announced in early 2026, be agreed;
2. that from 06 April 2026, an increase in garage rents of 4.8% from the 2025/26 weekly rent level be agreed;
3. that from 06 April 2026, shared ownership property rents be increased in line with the applicable rent review provisions within each lease. For the eight properties held under leases allowing RPI+0.5%, an increase of 5.00% from the 2025/26 weekly rent level be agreed, for all properties which are subject to CPI+1% under the current model lease, an increase of 4.8% be agreed and the weekly rent of one property sold under previous legislation be agreed to increase by 4.8%;
4. that from 06 April 2026 Service Charges will continue to reflect actual charges;
5. that the HRA budget, as set out in Appendix 1 of this report, be agreed; and
6. that a Housing Capital Programme to 2028/29, as set out in Appendix 4, be agreed.

49 SOCIAL HOUSING REGULATION ACT (2023) PROGRESS REPORT NUMBER 5 (SAFETY & QUALITY STANDARD)

An overview was provided by the Assistant Director – Housing on the Social Housing Regulation Act (2023) Progress Report Number 5 (Safety & Quality Standard).

The Tenant Engagement Manager confirmed that a minimum of 580 tenant surveys needed to be completed. Officers would analyse the tenant satisfaction data received. An annual report was reviewed by senior managers and service leads considered where improvements could be made. Sentiment analysis would be undertaken this year to provide an indication as to what the key factors for dissatisfaction were.

The Chief Operations Officer explained that the tenant satisfaction measures would provide only one aspect of feedback, alongside complaints, feedback from visiting officers, repair operatives, members and stock condition surveys.

RESOLVED:

That the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel:

1. considered the Housing Landlord's compliance against meeting the Safety and Quality Standard and make any further recommendations to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness;
2. noted the high-level of performance against this standard to ensure the health and safety of our tenants and achieve positive tenant outcomes; and
3. would receive a further report on the Competence and Conduct Standard for Social Standard at its next meeting.

50 PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S UPDATE

The Panel received updates from the Portfolio Holders.

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing provided an update and confirmed that the renewal of the Council's two Public Spaces Protection Orders had progressed as planned. A report would be presented to the next meeting of the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

In conjunction with the Environment and Sustainability Portfolio Holder, the Community Safety Team had undertaken action against environmental crimes, the outcome of which would be reported in due course.

Food safety inspections had been undertaken and were on-target to complete all high-risk inspections. A short fall in the completion of medium risk inspections was expected. There was a strategy in place based on the new code of practice to use alternative, risk-based approaches. There had been a similar turnover of businesses in the past year, and the Council had charged for all new inspections, prioritising and assessing those that were high risk within a month of notification of the new business. Hampshire County Council no longer ran the school catering contracts, and schools had to outsource to a new food contractor or go in-house. This had resulted in approximately forty new registrations and inspections for the Council. In addition, there had been over thirty-five requests for re-inspections of food businesses, when a business wished to improve their food hygiene rating score following completion of work required to raise the score.

Annual inspections had been carried out for all thirty-five caravan sites and reports forwarded to the licence holders, certification checked, and any breaches followed up by Officers.

The Licencing Team had tested the capability for the use of tablets for new driver vehicle knowledge tests. This was intended to go live from March 2026. The software would automatically mark the test, which would be more efficient.

The Portfolio Holder wished to thank Parish and Town Councils for their contribution and engagement throughout the local government reorganisation process, in particular during the recent consultation on the options.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness confirmed that the Council had undertaken a mock housing inspection, and the first regulator annual meeting had been held in December 2025.

It was reported that housing had recently been delivered at the former Hythe Hospital and at a New Milton site. This had resulted in forty applicants moving off the housing register. There would also be an additional twenty properties at Salisbury Road, Totton available in March 2026 and at a developer site in Calmore there would be between forty and sixty properties available for those on the housing register. The Council continued to deliver against its affordable housing target.

The Portfolio Holder thanked the housing team and those who supported their work for their involvement, support and in-sight.

51 WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman reminded the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel members that they were able to suggestion agenda items for the Work Programme.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be approved.

CHAIRMAN