

Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Leisure and Community held on 5th February 2014 from 7:00 to 7:32 p.m.

Present: Councillors: Jacqui Landriani (Chairman)
Dick Sweatman (Vice-Chairman)

Richard Bates	Cherry Catharine	Sue Hatton*
Margaret Belsey	Phillip Coote*	Anne Jones, MBE
Liz Bennett	Mims Davies	Natalie March
Pete Bradbury	David Dorking	Sue Seward*
		Mandy Thomas-Atkin

* Absent

Also Present: Councillors Dumbovic, Matthews, Moore, Snowling and Webster.

44. SUBSTITUTES AT MEETINGS OF COMMITTEE – COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 4

The Committee noted that Councillors Dumbovic and Matthews replaced Councillors Hatton and Coote respectively for the duration of the meeting.

45. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Coote and Hatton.

46. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

47. REVIEW OF THE HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME

The Chairman thanked Members who had attended the pre-meeting workshop on Housing Allocation.

The Committee received a report from Lynne Standing, Head of Housing, Environmental Health and Building Control. She outlined a number of proposed revisions to the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme, which were due to the context in which the Council operated. She explained that a significant increase in the housing register had not seen a corresponding effort from applicants to bid for vacancies. She added that the government had issued new statutory guidance on the allocation of social housing to ensure local residents are prioritised, and that Affinity Sutton, the owner of most of the social housing stock in Mid Sussex, had decided to limit the number of vacancies available for Council nominations to 75%.

Responding to Members' questions, the Head of Housing confirmed that applicants for social housing had a duty to inform the Council of any changes in their circumstances. She also confirmed that Affinity Sutton wanted to move to a position whereby the Council enjoyed nomination rights to 75% of their vacancies, and that the proposal was therefore that tenants who had alternative access to their landlord's stock should not remain on the Council's housing register, as they had other options available to them. The Head of Housing also confirmed that EU citizens would not be able to come onto the Council's housing register without a local connection or unless they were homeless.

One Member expressed concern that the Council no longer had nomination rights to 100% of the social housing stock.

In reply to further questions from Members, the Head of Housing confirmed that, to establish a local connection on the basis of close family members resident in Mid Sussex, those family members needed to be resident in Mid Sussex for five years. She confirmed that vacant properties were advertised on the Council's website, via printed literature and through the Assisted Bidding process. She added that those applicants who would be disqualified from the Council's housing register had a local connection elsewhere and should apply to join the appropriate housing register.

Responding to other Members' questions, the Head of Housing confirmed that it was not proposed to remove Band D but that applicants would be prioritised firstly based on need and secondly on the amount of time an applicant had been on the register. She also confirmed that applicants with a legal interest in other property were not eligible for housing.

In response to a question from Members, the Head of Housing, Environmental Health and Building Control confirmed that the impact of the revised scheme would be monitored quarterly.

As there were no more questions, the Chairman took Members to the report's recommendation, which was agreed.

RESOLVED

That the revised Housing Allocation Scheme at Appendix 1 to the report be endorsed and taken to full Council to take effect from 1st May 2014.

48. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY REPORT 2013

The Committee received a report from the Head of Housing, Environmental Health and Building Control. She explained that the Equality Act 2010 placed a duty on Councils to produce an annual report on progress with their Equality and Diversity Scheme. She explained the new public sector duty to promote equality of opportunity between those with "protected characteristics" and others and outlined the nine characteristics. She referred to the appendix to the report and invited questions from Members.

One Member welcomed the Council's proportionate approach and noted the low rate of recorded hate crimes in Mid Sussex. Another Member expressed concern about the increased levels of recorded domestic abuse in Mid Sussex. Several Members added their concerns about the level of engagement with young people and pointed to the low number of young people registered to vote.

Responding to Member's questions, the Head of Housing referred to the Think Family Programme, which drew organisations together to support families and young people and confirmed that a progress report would be brought to the Committee on 15th October 2014.

Neal Barton, Housing Policy and Performance Officer outlined some of the ongoing work of the Council's Young Persons Development Officer with young people throughout Mid Sussex.

Responding to a Member's question about housing initiatives, Tom Clark, Solicitor to the Council confirmed that work was underway to bring forward a Rural Exception site at Crawley Down.

One Member welcomed the use of social media to engage with young people and improve access overall to Council information and services.

The Head of Housing confirmed that the Council was using a range of digital media to further engage with the community, especially young people and that this would continue to develop and increase over time.

In reply to another Member's question, the Solicitor to the Council confirmed that the voter registration period was due to end the following week and that the Council had achieved a 93% registration rate, up on the previous year.

As there were no further questions, the Chairman took Members to the report's recommendation, which was agreed.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Member for Health and Community be recommended to approve the Equalities and Diversity Progress Report 2013 at Appendix 1 to the report.

49. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR LEISURE AND COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14

The Committee received details of the Committee's work programme for the forthcoming year.

Responding to a Member's concerns, the Chairman confirmed that provision for cycling activities had been discussed previously and it had been agreed that the support of the Town and Parish Councils was necessary for any initiative to succeed, adding that the Council's Principal Development Manager had offered to re-examine any proposals in the future.

As there were no further questions, the Chairman took Members to the report's recommendation, which was agreed.

RESOLVED

That the Committee's work programme be noted.

Chairman.