

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for
Community, Housing and Planning held on 6 March 2019
from 7:00 p.m. to 8:07 p.m.**

Present: Councillors: Neville Walker (Chairman)
Margaret Hersey (Vice-Chairman)

Andrew Barrett-Miles*
Edward Belsey*
Richard Cherry
Phillip Coote
Sandy Ellis

Sue Hatton
Chris Hersey
Colin Holden
Anne Jones*
Edward Matthews*

Anthony Watts Williams
John Wilkinson
Peter Wyan

*Absent

Also Present: Councillor Andrew MacNaughton, Cabinet Member for Housing & Planning
Councillor Norman Webster, Cabinet Member for Community

1. SUBSTITUTES AT MEETINGS OF COMMITTEE - COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 4.

Councillor Marples was substituting for Councillor Belsey and Councillor Binks was substituting for Councillor Jones.

2. APOLOGIES.

Apologies were received from Councillor Belsey, Councillor Jones, Councillor Barrett-Miles and Councillor Matthews.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

None.

4. TO CONSIDER ANY ITEMS THAT THE CHAIRMAN AGREES TO TAKE AS URGENT BUSINESS.

None.

5. MINUTES.

The Minutes of the Committee held on 29 January 2019 were agreed as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY PROGRESS REPORT 2018.

Neal Barton, Policy and Performance Manager introduced the report, which showed how the Council is meeting its responsibilities under the Equalities Act. This year's report had been updated with information about support for the armed forces community under the Armed Forces Covenant and bronze employer recognition scheme. He highlighted the support for vulnerable people through the use of the Corporate Grants Scheme, the work of the Health and Wellbeing Team, the annual play day events, development of Dementia Friendly Communities and the Silver Sunday events. Also the work with Citizens Advice to assist vulnerable claimants moving to Universal Credit. The report also provided information on the Council's staff, including the gender pay gap, and highlighted areas for

development in 2019 including increasing the number of changing places toilets and more work on being dementia friendly.

In response to questions about holding more play days across the district the Policy and Performance Manager advised that more play days are planned for 2019. A Member suggested that a play day could be held at Janes Lane Recreation Ground, Burgess Hill where there will be new accessible play equipment and a Changing Places toilet.

Members also discussed hate crime, conviction rates for crime generally, progress with Dementia Friendly communities, the importance of bus services to rural areas, expansion of the falls prevention programme and queried how widely the report is published.

The Policy and Performance Manger stated that the report is published on the Council's website. The Scrutiny Committee receives an annual report on the Mid Sussex Partnership, which provides more information about crime in the District. It was confirmed that the Health and Wellbeing Team are looking to expand the falls prevention programme through additional venues and a road show. The Team were also involved with providing Dementia Friends training and would investigate the possibility of including this in staff induction.

A Member noted that there is a new armed forces veterans' identity badge, which was confirmed by the Cabinet Member for Community who suggested that this should be publicised more.

Judy Holmes, Assistant Chief Executive noted that it was an aspiration of the Council to achieve Disabled Parking Accreditation for all the Council's car parks and further information will be provided to the Scrutiny Committee for Customer Services and Service Delivery.

The Cabinet Member for Community acknowledged the importance of bus services for rural areas. With regard to expansion of the play days, he suggested that Town and Parish Councils could look to run their own school holiday play days. He agreed that the Falls Prevention Service is important and needs to be taken to the rural areas. Disabled facilities grants were working in tandem with the Wellbeing Team to help elderly residents live independently in their own homes.

The Cabinet Member commented that conviction rates are the responsibility of the Police and criminal justice system. Additional Police and Community Support Officer posts are planned following the increase in the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner's precept for 2019/20. He had visited the CCTV suite at Lewes Police Headquarters to view the extensive capabilities of the new camera system. He also mentioned the adoption of new powers to deal with antisocial behaviour discussed at the last meeting of this Scrutiny Committee

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for his comprehensive report and noted that no Members wished to speak so moved to the recommendation, which was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

The Committee:

- (i) Endorsed the Council's approach to meeting its duties under the Equality Act, as evidenced by the Equality and Diversity Progress Report 2018 included at Appendix 1.

7. REVIEW OF THE HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME.

Emma Shuttleworth, Business Unit Leader for Housing Services introduced the report and advised that there are two types of changes to the Allocation Scheme. The first type of change provided clarity and ensured the Scheme was consistent with current legislation, these changes were highlighted in grey. The Committee was asked to scrutinise the second type of change highlighted in yellow, as they were substantive changes to the scheme. Following this meeting key partners would be consulted and once approved by Council the scheme would be implemented as soon as operationally possible.

The Business Unit Leader noted that the amended areas related to Applicants who did not qualify to be on the housing register, special rules for Homeless Main Duty Applicants, Direct Allocations and Allocation of Extra Care vacancies. The Members were advised that removing the exclusion of Clarion tenants would allow them to return to the register. Providing accommodation to the homeless relates to the Council's duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act and would place accepted households at the top of band C but below armed forces personnel. This would allow them to move through the system more efficiently. The Council only has to make one satisfactory offer of housing to homeless families to discharge their duty, so the proposed change removes the 12 week free bidding period in the current scheme to align with the new legislation.

Members were informed that the change relating to direct allocations is to cater for exceptional circumstances which occur possibly twice a year. An example would be to directly allocate a wheelchair accessible property if a wheelchair user is in emergency temporary accommodation as it is hard to find suitable wheelchair accessible temporary accommodation.

The Business Unit Leader highlighted the change in the way extra care vacancies are allocated and confirmed that West Sussex County Council have an Extra Care Coordinator who works directly with the providers. She noted that the initial pilot scheme has worked well in the south of the county and this will be rolled out across the district.

The officer confirmed that all Housing Associations who are part of the Common Housing Register would be impacted by the changes, not just Clarion tenants. The Council encourages all Housing Associations to join the housing register and has nomination rights to their properties. Households are nominated according to the priorities set out in the Housing Allocation Scheme. The Council has reciprocal arrangements with Franklands Village so that if their tenants are rehoused through the register the vacancy that arises in their stock is then made available for a nomination from the register.

As there is no refuge in Mid Sussex the change to statutory guidance should not impact on victims of domestic abuse. Currently the Council's allocation scheme gives priority for rehousing if victims of domestic abuse are accepted as homeless. The allocation scheme has been changed so the Council accepts a duty to rehouse them even if they don't have a local connection. The indefinite disqualification for providing false information has been amended to 5 years. Judy Holmes, Assistant Chief Executive noted that social housing is a valuable asset and the Council must be satisfied that the applicant gives truthful information.

Members sought clarification on provision for rough sleepers and key workers, and asked who decides to add people to the register. The Business Unit Leader confirmed that not all rough sleepers have a priority need under the homelessness legislation so there may be no duty to provide accommodation for them, but in extreme weather conditions

temporary accommodation is arranged. The team also work with the rough sleeper support service Turning Tides to assist rough sleepers into the private rented sector.

She also confirmed that the provision for key worker housing is not in the current programme for Homes England as the Government have not allocated any funding to develop key worker housing. The Officer advised that the Council works with key providers and housing associations who accept the Council's nomination agreement and steers developers towards key Housing Associations on S106 sites.

It was confirmed that Radian are a new housing association to Mid Sussex. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning advised that Radian would be providing social housing in the Pease Pottage development.

The Committee sought clarification on Clarion's rights over 25% of the lettings. Members were advised that in future Clarion would only use their 25% in exceptional circumstance when in future their tenants could be rehoused through the register.

Sam Horne, Housing Needs Team Manager advised that the team assist with securing private rented accommodation for those people who are not eligible to go on the register. The officer advised that it is a criminal offence to secure social housing using false information and they could be evicted. She was not aware of any criminal proceedings in Mid Sussex and noted that it did not happen very often.

Members also queried what actions might take place if tenants' behaviour was unacceptable. The Members were informed that landlords would recharge tenants for any damage. Housing Associations could refuse to rehouse applicants who have these types of debts.

Tom Clark, Head of Regulatory Services confirmed that the Council has no direct tenants and that households placed in the Council's own temporary accommodation would be licensees.

The Business Unit Leader confirmed that the impact of the proposed changes to the allocation of housing would be monitored and should not have a negative impact to other people on the register. She noted that the revised housing allocation scheme would be implemented as soon as practicably possible once the consultation had been completed and approved by the Council.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning acknowledged that work had been ongoing to address issues with Clarion. The change to the allocation scheme will help Clarion's tenants.

The Chairman noted that no Members wished to speak so moved to the recommendation, which was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

The Committee:

- (i) Commented on the proposed amendments prior to the scheme being issued to key partners for their comments;
- (ii) Agreed that the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning could authorise any further minor changes following Scrutiny and consultation with partners prior to submission to full Council on the 26th June 2019 for approval.

8. QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10 DUE NOTICE OF WHICH HAS BEEN GIVEN.

None.

The Chairman concluded the meeting by thanking the committee and the Vice-Chairman for their help and support during the committee's administration.

The meeting finished at 8:07 pm.

Chairman.