

NEWARK AND SHERWOOD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of **Homes & Communities Committee** held in the Civic Suite, Castle House, Great North Road, Newark, Notts NG24 1BY on Monday, 10 June 2019 at 6.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor T Wendels (Chairman)
Councillor R Holloway (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Mrs K Arnold, Councillor M Brock, Councillor Mrs B Brooks, Councillor Mrs I Brown, Councillor M Brown, Councillor S Carlton, Councillor L Dales, Councillor L Goff, Councillor J Lee and Councillor Mrs S Saddington

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Mrs L Hurst, Councillor P Peacock and Councillor Mrs P Rainbow

Prior to the commencement of the meeting the Chairman, Councillor T. Wendels, thanked the previous Committee Chairman, Councillor R.B. Laughton, for the work he had undertaken as Chairman of the Committee over the previous 6 years, stating that he had left an outstanding legacy.

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS AND AS TO THE PARTY WHIP

NOTED that no Member or Officer declared any interest pursuant to any statutory requirement in any matter discussed or voted upon at the meeting.

2 DECLARATION OF ANY INTENTION TO RECORD THE MEETING

NOTED that there would be an audio recording of the meeting undertaken by the Council.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 11 MARCH 2019

AGREED (unanimously) that the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 PRESENTATION BY INSPECTOR HEATHER SUTTON (ATTENDANCE IS SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY)

Inspector Heather Sutton was unable to attend the meeting in person but had submitted a written report which was circulated to all Members present.

In considering the report a Member queried why a knife arch was deployed in Newark on 25 May if, as the report inferred, there was no knife crime in the area. The Business Manager – Public Protection, who had held discussions with Inspector Sutton, advised that nationally knife crime continued to be an issue but that at present the Newark & Sherwood area were the lowest in the county. The knife arch and stop and search held on 25 May was to highlight and demonstrate the proactive approach taken to potential knife crime in the area. The above action was part of a night time economy event held jointly by the Council and the Police.

A Member referred to the recent Police action on drugs and the use of sniffer dogs, stating that when she attended neighbourhood meetings with the Police they inferred that they had little interest in low level drug crime. The Business Manager confirmed that the Police focussed more resource on dealers and suppliers but did continue to make efforts to try to tackle local low level drug abuse. Again, he confirmed that the action referred to was part of the aforementioned night time economy event.

A Member of the Committee commented that he hoped to be able to hold community events at Chatham Court and Cleveland Square in an attempt to ascertain what was needed by the community and how things could be put in place to help.

AGREED (unanimously) that the written report by Inspector Heather Sutton be noted.

5 COUNCIL HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME - ANNUAL UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Director – Communities & Environment which updated Members on applications to the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme and sought approval for some minor amendments to the Scheme. The report provided information on banding and lettings data and online registration. The proposed minor amendments were listed at paragraph 4 of the report.

In considering the report a Member of the Committee referred to an email he had received querying why more 4/5 bedroomed homes were not being built. The Senior Housing Options Officer advised that the findings of previous housing needs assessments had found that smaller homes were required.

A Member referred to the number of empty properties throughout the district which included flats above shops and whether any work could be carried out to bring them back into use. The Assistant Director – Housing Management & Responsible Repairs for N&SH acknowledged this concern but advised this report focussed on the allocation of social house. The Business Manager – Public Protection advised that long term empty properties were usually referred to Environmental Health due to them being in a poor state of disrepair. He added that there were numerous reasons they remained empty and that efforts were made to bring them back into use, however, there were very few meaningful powers local authorities had to encourage private owners to bring their properties back into use.

A Member of the Committee referred to the online registration and sought assurances that an application to join the housing register could still be done in paper format, noting that not all members of the public had access to a computer. In response, the Assistant Director acknowledged the comment and provided assurances that a paper application would be accepted.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- (a) the contents of the report, which provided an annual update on the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme, be noted;
- (b) the proposed minor amendments and draft Scheme be approved;
and

- (c) delegated authority be given to the Director – Communities & Environment, following consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Homes & Communities Committee, to approve any further minor amendments required, that do not require formal consultation, to ensure the Scheme continues to adhere to statutory requirements.

6 DISTRICT WIDE HOUSING ASSESSMENT

The Committee considered the report of the Director – Growth & Regeneration which sought approval to commission a new district wide housing assessment in order to provide an up-to-date evaluation of housing need, the wider housing market and affordability across all tenures. The report set out the background to the statutory requirement on strategic housing authorities to undertake regular assessments of future housing requirements within the district and the common themes within the assessments. Paragraph 4 of the report was in relation to the new housing assessment with the methodology being listed in paragraph 4.3.

AGREED (with 10 votes for and 1 abstention) that the commissioning of a new district wide housing assessment based on the collection of primary research and secondary data, with the budget provision for this detailed in paragraph 8.1 of the report, be approved.

(Councillor Lee was absent from the room when the vote was taken)

7 RESHAPING THE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP AND SETTING NEW PRIORITIES

The Committee considered the report of the Director – Communities & Environment which set out the purpose, legislation and duties around Community Safety, the existing structure of the Bassetlaw and Newark & Sherwood Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and the proposed changes that aimed to improve the functioning of the CSP. The report provided background information as to the existing structure and priorities; governance and priorities; and funding. Paragraph 4 of the report set out the proposals for change and the revised priorities for the CSP with the rationale behind each being tabled in paragraph 4.7.

A Member of the Committee queried the omission of drug abuse from the list of priorities for the CPS and whether it could be included. The Business Manager – Public Protection advised that he would take the comments back to the CSP and acknowledged that drug abuse certainly drove many of the priorities listed in paragraph 4.6 of the report.

Whilst acknowledging that resources were in decline, a Member queried whether any information was available as to the actual cost of dealing with persistent problem individuals. She commented that working families often struggled to access help yet resources were spent on an individual case. The Business Manager advised that he would make enquiries as to the costs referred to. The Member suggested that at some point the individual in question should have a phased withdrawal of the assistance given to them.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- (a) the Joint Strategic Group of the Community Safety Partnership move to a quarterly cycle;
- (b) it be noted that the Leader of the Council is the Council's elected representative on the Group;
- (c) the priorities for the Community Safety Partnership be endorsed; and
- (d) the Newark & Sherwood Complex Needs Outreach Worker be funded for the remainder of the year from the Community Safety Partnership reserve.

8 UPDATE ON THE BETTER CARE FUND

The Committee considered the report of the Director – Communities & Environment which updated Members on the schemes that had been delivered from funding within the district's allocation of the Better Care Fund (BCF). The report provided information as to the background of the BCF and that it is allocated for the statutory delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants across the district. The BCF governance arrangements and the terms of reference were listed in paragraph 3.0 of the report with details of the delivery of local schemes being listed in paragraph 4.0.

In considering the report a Member queried whether it was the case that if an adaptation was carried out at the property it resulted in it being ineligible for a 'Right to Buy' application. The Business Manager – Public Protection advised that the properties covered in the BCF were in private ownership. The Business Manager – Housing Strategy & Development advised that adaptations in Council owned properties did not automatically result in them being ineligible for 'Right to Buy'. He added that he would provide Members with the information as to the relevant criteria. The Chairman suggested that this could be an item for inclusion on the Committee's Forward Plan.

In response to how a householder would know about the scheme, the Business Manager – Public Protection advised that NSDC administered the grant following a referral from the Occupational Therapist at Nottinghamshire County Council. They would first review the property before making their referral.

9 APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO WORKING PARTIES/TASK & FINISH GROUPS

The Committee considered the report to appoint two Members to the Local Development Framework (LDF) Task Group established by the Economic Development Committee.

AGREED (with 11 votes for with 1 vote against) that Councillor Mrs Rhona Holloway and Councillor John Lee be appointed to the LDF Task Group.

10 AFFORDABLE HOUSING DELIVERY 2018/2019

The Committee considered the report of the Director – Growth & Regeneration which sought to provide Members with the details on affordable housing delivery across the district for the 2018/19 financial year, together with a guide on future anticipated delivery, together with progress on the delivery of the approved 5 year Council housing development programme, details of which were provided in paragraph 3.0 of the report.

A Member of the Committee queried whether there was any further information available since the report had been written in relation to the proposed development at Fernwood. The Business Manager – Housing Strategy & Development confirmed that no further information was available, adding that it would be on a new housing development site.

The issue of empty properties was again raised with the Member querying whether it was possible to exercise Compulsory Purchase Orders to bring empty properties back into occupation. The Business Manager advised that the Council undertook some work on this issue in previous years and that information on the findings of that could be provided. He added that the process was costly and lengthy and was not currently a priority for the Council.

In relation to a query about progress on the Extra Care Scheme in Boughton, the Business Manager advised that the scheme was ready to be progressed and was awaiting the final financial approval from the Policy & Finance Committee. Once received, the commencement of the scheme would be imminent.

AGREED (unanimously) that the affordable housing delivery in 2018/2019, future anticipated delivery and progress with the Council's five year development programme be noted.

11 CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING ANNUAL UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Business Manager – Public Protection which provided Members with an update on the corporate safeguarding matters and to provide assurance that the Council's activity was in line with its safeguarding responsibilities, policies and procedures. The report set out internal structure changes to safeguarding responsibilities, noting that the Director – Communities & Environment would take on the Corporate Lead for the Council, the Business Manager – Public Protection becoming the Lead Safeguarding Officer and the Chairman of the Homes & Communities Committee becoming the lead elected Member. Paragraph 3.0 of the report set out details of the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children's Board, giving information as to the Strategic Leadership Team and its remit.

A Member of the Committee commented that he would wish to see face to face safeguarding training being offered to all elected Members and not those just newly elected to the Council. The Business Manager confirmed that face to face training was also available to existing Members.

AGREED (unanimously) that the report be noted.

12 ROUGH SLEEPERS - SUCCESSFUL BID

The Committee considered the report of the Director – Communities & Environment which provided Members with information as to the successful outcome of two county-wide funding bids submitted under the Government’s Rough Sleepers Initiative. Paragraph 3.0 of the report set out the amount of funding received, who the funding was for and what the next steps were.

A Member of the Committee queried whether it was possible to provide a shelter all year round and not just at set times when the temperature dropped to a certain level. The Business Manager – Housing, Health & Community Relations advised that discussions were being held with the Salvation Army with a view to the provision of a winter shelter.

The issue of accommodation provided to families when a relationship had broken down was raised with a Member stating that it resulted in fathers not being given appropriate accommodation in order for them to maintain a relationship with their child(ren). The Business Manager agreed that parental responsibility was a complex issue and advised that further information on the implementation of this under the Council’s Housing Allocations Scheme could be provided if required. The Member stated that she would welcome future updates on the matter.

AGREED (unanimously) that the report be noted.

13 WARM HOMES FUND - SUCCESSFUL BID

The Committee considered the report of the Director – Communities & Environment which updated Members on the outcome of the Warm Homes Fund (WHF) bid and the revised project delivery arrangements following the Committee’s support for the Scheme. The report set out the background to the bid and the outcome thereof together with the anticipated benefits/risks and the next steps to be taken.

AGREED (unanimously) that the report be noted.

14 URGENCY ITEM - HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION REPORT - BI-ANNUAL REPORT

AGREED (unanimously) that the Urgency Item – Minute of Decision in relation to the approval of the content of the Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) draft report for 2019-21 be noted.

15 FORWARD PLAN FOR 1 JUNE 2019 TO 31 MAY 2020

AGREED (unanimously) that the following items be included on the Homes & Communities Forward Plan:

Councillor T. Wendels
Review of Disabled Facilities Grant – Better Care Fund

Councillor J. Lee
Empty Homes
Homeless Strategy

Councillor Mrs I. Brown
Review of the Housing Allocation Scheme and Parental Responsibility
Criteria

Meeting closed at 7.20 pm.

Chairman