

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Health and Housing Policy Development and Review Panel

(to be confirmed at the next meeting)

Date: Thursday, 15 January 2015

Venue: Collingwood Room - Civic Offices

PRESENT:

Councillor Mrs M E Ellerton (Chairman)

Councillor D L Steadman (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors: T G Knight, Mrs K K Trott, Miss S M Bell and D M Whittingham

Also Present: Councillor B Bayford, Executive Member for Health and Housing (item 6)



1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor N R Gregory.

2. MINUTES

It was AGREED that the minutes of the Health and Housing Policy Development and Review Panel meeting held on 13 November be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

3. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chairman's announcements.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISCLOSURES OF ADVICE OR DIRECTIONS

There were no declarations of interest or disclosures of advice or direction made at this meeting.

5. DEPUTATIONS

There were no deputations made at this meeting.

6. HEALTH UPDATE

The Panel received a verbal update by the Executive Member for Health and Housing on local strategic health issues.

He informed the Panel that the Accident and Emergency departments are struggling to cope with the winter health demand, and as such the Government has provided some additional funding for this. Gosport War Memorial has received some of this money and has been able to secure an extra 15 low intensity beds which will help move people out of the A&E department and into other non-emergency wards.

He also informed the Panel that the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has now set up 4 integrated core teams, 2 in Gosport and 2 in Fareham. These are made up with district nurses, social workers, health visitors and community support workers.

Councillor Knight enquired as to whether the recent problems with the A&E departments are causing routine operations to be cancelled. Councillor Bayford confirmed that all elective surgery has been cancelled during the high periods of illness in order to make more staff available to work in the A&E department.

The Executive Member for Health and Housing was thanked for his verbal update.

7. ANNUAL REVIEW OF HOUSING WAITING LIST & ALLOCATIONS POLICY

The Panel received a verbal update from the Head of Housing, Revenues and Benefits on the housing waiting list and allocations policy.

She explained to the Panel that the housing department has just begun a Vanguard Intervention and it is therefore too early in the process to do a review of the housing waiting list and allocations policy. Once the review has been underway for a while both of these subjects will be reviewed and at that point they will be able to be reported back to the Panel.

The Head of Housing, Revenues and Benefits was thanked for her update.

8. PRESENTATION - LOCAL HOUSING COMPANY

The Panel received a verbal presentation from the Director of Community on the Local Housing Company that has been set up by Fareham Borough Council, Eastleigh Borough Council, First Wessex and Radian Housing Association.

He explained that the information has been in the public domain for some time and the last report on this went to the Executive in November 2013. It has been a long legal process but the company was finally registered as Aspect Building Communities Limited in December 2014.

In order to assist members to understand the process and the reasoning behind the formation of the Housing Company, the Director of Community broke the presentation down into specific sections.

To start with he explained what is meant by affordable housing. Affordable Housing is socially rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing provided to eligible households whose needs are not by the market. Eligibility is determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices. Such homes are provided with some form of subsidy and include provision for the homes to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households such as shared ownership.

He then reviewed local demand and supply, which relates to the Council's housing waiting list and availability of affordable housing. He explained that there are currently 1400 people on the Council's housing waiting list. There are 4000 affordable homes in the Borough and 2200 of those properties are owned by Fareham Borough Council with the remainder being owned by Registered Providers (Housing Associations). Taking into account new build properties and vacated properties there are approximately 300 vacancies each year in the affordable housing stock. The average waiting time for anyone on the waiting list in the high or medium band is approximately 2.5 years for 1 or 2 bed accommodation, but considerably longer for those requiring 3 or 4 bed accommodation. Therefore the demand for affordable housing greatly exceeds the supply. He also reminded the Panel that the housing waiting list is restricted to those with a local connection to Fareham (and must be at least 2 years).

The presentation then looked at the reasons that prevent Fareham Borough Council from building more housing. Part of the reason is land supply as the Council owns very few sites that are suitable for development. The other reason being the availability of funding. Prior to 2012 (and for approx. 25 years) Council's had been prevented from building new homes. However in 2012 there was a major change by the Government to the housing finance. Every housing authority had to buy their way out of the current housing subsidy system they were in, which cost Fareham Borough Council £49,000,000, (this will be repaid over the next 30-40 years) from rental stream which the Council is now able to keep rather than paying to HM Treasury. Along with each authority having to buy their way out of the subsidy system they were in, the Government's set a borrowing cap on each local authority's housing account restricting the amount of funding the Council can borrow to build new housing. For Fareham Borough Council the cap was set at £52,000,000, therefore there is very little headroom to fund new development.

The presentation then went on to explain how the local housing company could help with this. Within the powers of economic and social wellbeing local authorities are allowed to enter into partnerships and or create companies for the benefit of the local community, which is how the housing company was formed. The sole purpose of the company is to build new affordable housing in the borough. The benefits of the company will be to increase the availability of affordable housing, the houses will not be subject to right to buy so will always remain in the affordable housing market. Any land sold or money borrowed and loaned to the Company for building affordable housing within the borough will have to be reported and approved by the Executive first.

So the company in simple terms is a legal entity by which the Council is able to build more affordable housing in the Borough. The Council's Executive will have control over the decisions to sell land and or lend money to the housing company. Any profits made will be reinvested within the company for the sole purpose of providing more affordable homes or repaid direct to the partner organisations.

The Director of Community concluded the presentation by explaining that the next step with the company is to find a suitable site for building on, and it is hoped that within the next year a proposal will be brought forward for consideration by the Executive.

It was AGREED that the Director of Community be thanked for his extremely informative and interesting presentation, which was very easy to follow and understand.

9. PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15 AND DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

The Panel considered a report by the Director of Community on a review of the current work programme 2014/15 and the draft work programme for 2015/16.

The Panels attention was drawn to the changes to the current work programme as set out in paragraph 3 of the report.

Members were also informed that at the next meeting of the Panel they would be asked to agree the draft work programme for 2015/16 so if any members have any suggestions for the work programme to let officers know by the next meeting.

Councillor Knight put forward the following suggestions for the work programme:

- Rough Sleeping
- Food Bank
- Housing Waiting List/Allocations Policy
- Farelets
- Local Dr's Surgeries – long waiting times
- Housing and Council Tax Fraud
- Use of Fareham Hospital

The Director of Community agreed that all of these items can be included into the 2015/16 work programme.

It was AGREED that the work programme for 2014/15, as set out in appendix A to the report, be approved.

(The meeting started at 6.00 pm
and ended at 7.35 pm).