

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Panel (to be confirmed at the next meeting)

Date: Thursday, 30 November 2023

Venue: Collingwood Room - Civic Offices

PRESENT:

Councillor Mrs K Mandry (Chairman)

Councillor S Ingram (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors: R Bird, H P Davis, Mrs C L A Hockley, Mrs K K Trott and
M R Daniells (deputising for F Birkett)

**Also
Present:**



1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor F Birkett.

2. MINUTES

Councillor Mrs K K Trott, requested an update on item 7 of the previous minutes which related to the Pilot Tenant Satisfaction Measures Survey, specifically in relation to the creation of the new post. The Director of Housing advised the Panel that this would form part of the plan for early 2024.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Panel held on 28 September 2023 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

3. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman made the following announcements:

Vivid (Scoping Report/Invitation)

Members will be aware that, following our last scrutiny meeting, Officers approached VIVID with our invite and scoping report requesting their attendance at a future panel meeting. Members have already been separately advised by officers that this request was declined. Instead, VIVID have offered to attend a more informal meeting. I can confirm that such a meeting has been arranged by Officers for the 14th December, and all Councillors have been given the opportunity to attend. I would encourage Members of the Housing Scrutiny Panel to utilise this opportunity to find out more about the work that VIVID do, and to put any questions they have to senior staff from VIVID.

Appointment to Head of Service

Members of the panel will be aware that for many months there have been some senior vacancies in the Fareham Housing team. I am pleased to advise that following a recruitment process, Officers have now appointed Abi Travers to the vacant Head of Housing (Pathways and Neighbourhoods) position. Abi currently works for Runnymede Borough Council, and she will be joining Fareham Housing in January. Abi's role will be very similar to that previously held by Caroline Newman.

Tenant Satisfaction Survey

Officers have advised that the first official Tenant Satisfaction Survey is expected to run from the 4th December until the 12th January. All Council tenants will be invited to participate. The results of the survey will then form part of our Tenant Satisfaction Measures that need to be reported to the Regulator of Social Housing in 2024.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISCLOSURES OF ADVICE OR DIRECTIONS

There were no declarations of interest made at this meeting.

5. DEPUTATIONS

There were no deputations made at this meeting.

6. EXECUTIVE BUSINESS

The Panel considered the Executive items of business which fall under the remit of the Housing Portfolio, including Executive Member decisions and Officer delegated decisions, that have taken place since the last meeting of the Panel on 28 September 2023.

(1) Affordable Housing at Welborne

There were no comments or questions for clarification in respect of this item.

(2) Empty Homes Strategy - Adoption

Councillor R Bird enquired as to whether there is an expectation that the Panel will have periodic reports on the progress of this strategy. The Director of Housing confirmed that, due to the relatively low numbers, there were no plans to bring further updates to the Panel on this item.

(3) Facilitating the use of the Local Authority Housing Fund

Councillor Mrs K K Trott requested an update on the progress of this proposal following the Executive decision on 9 October 2023. The Director of Housing confirmed that it is progressing well and that the Council has already had an offer accepted on a property in Stubbington, and they have identified further chain free properties in South Fareham and Portchester.

(4) Renewal of the contract for the Housing department software

There were no comments or questions for clarification in respect of this item.

(5) Town centre property acquisition for affordable housing provision

Councillor Mrs K K Trott asked for an update on this decision. The Director of Housing confirmed that this project is moving forward, and that a verbal agreement on the price has been reached.

7. DEPARTMENT FOR LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES VISIT

The Panel received a presentation by the Interim Consultant for Housing & Benefits which provided members with feedback on a recent visit by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to undertake a peer 'deep dive' into the Council's Housing Options and Temporary Accommodation Services. A copy of the presentation is appended to these minutes.

The Panel commented on the great progress made by the Interim Consultant for Housing & Benefits, along with all of her staff. The Panel noted the impressive progress made by the teams in addressing many of the issues that the department was impacted by. The Panel asked for a special thanks to be given to John Hornby, Housing Options Support Officer, for all of his hard work throughout this.

Members were encouraged to hear that more emphasis was being placed on re-engaging with residents and tenants, with more home visits and face to face visits.

Councillor Daniells enquired as to whether the Council has access to the apprentice levy, and if so, were we using that as a source to recruit new members of staff. The Interim Consultant for Housing & Benefits confirmed that the Council has looked into using the apprenticeship levy for some of its recruitment but at present was unable to utilise it due to restrictions within the scheme. She advised members that they will continue to look into this scheme for future recruitments.

(Councillor H Davies left the meeting at the end of this item and did not take part in the remainder of the meeting).

RESOLVED that the Housing Scrutiny Panel notes the content of the presentation.

8. AFFORDABLE HOUSING UPDATE

The Panel received a presentation by the Housing Development Officer which provided members with an update on progress with the Fareham Housing sites and other relevant strategic housing matters. A copy of the presentation is appended to these minutes.

(Councillor R Bird left the meeting at the end of this item and was not present for the remainder of the meeting).

RESOLVED that the Housing Scrutiny Panel notes the content of the presentation.

9. DRAFT ALLOCATIONS POLICY

The Panel received a report by the Director of Housing which provided Members with a summary of the proposed changes to the existing Housing Allocations Policy.

The Housing Manager (Accommodations and Allocations) informed the Panel that some minor changes to the draft policy had been made since its publication on the Housing Scrutiny Panel agenda and that these would be reflected in the published Executive report.

Councillor Daniells enquired about whether the policy would now take into account gender reassignment. The Housing Manager (Accommodations and Allocations) informed the Panel that whilst the Policy doesn't specifically cover this, all cases are considered against individual needs and requirements, and

that any rules that the Council set within the Allocations Policy will not be rigid and there will be some flexibility where this is necessary.

RESOLVED that: -

(a) the Housing Scrutiny Panel notes the content of the report; and

(b) the Executive note that the Panel has no comments to make on the proposed new draft Allocations Policy.

10. INTERIM PROCESS ON DAMP AND MOULD

The Panel received a presentation by the Director of Housing which provided members with information in respect of the new damp and mould interim process document for the Council’s Housing portfolio. A copy of the presentation is appended to these minutes.

(Councillor Mrs K K Trott left the meeting at the end of this item and did not take part in the remainder of the meeting).

RESOLVED that the Panel notes the content of the presentation.

11. HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL PRIORITIES

Members considered the scrutiny priorities for the Housing Scrutiny Panel.

The Director of Housing addressed the Panel on this item and informed them that an item updating members on Staffing is likely to be coming to the February meeting.

There were no further suggestions put forward for the Scrutiny Priorities.

(The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.00 pm).

..... Chairman

..... Date