

# FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

## Minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Panel

(to be confirmed at the next meeting)

**Date:** Thursday, 9 January 2025

**Venue:** Collingwood Room - Civic Offices

**PRESENT:**

**Councillor** Mrs K Mandry (Chairman)

**Councillor** Mrs L E Clubley (Vice-Chairman)

**Councillors:** R N Bird, Mrs P M Bryant, D J Hamilton, S P Ingram and  
L J Whittle

**Also  
Present:**



**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

**2. MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2024 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 interests made at this meeting.

**5. DEPUTATIONS**

There were no deputations made at this meeting.

**6. EXECUTIVE BUSINESS**

**(1) Change of tenure of 29 Cottess Way, Hill Head and disposal of 5 Gordon Road, Fareham including the freehold**

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

**(2) Melvin Jones House**

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

**(3) Fareham Housing Repairs & Maintenance Policy - Adoption**

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

**7. OPPORTUNITIES PLAN UPDATE**

The Panel received a report by the Assistant Director (Finance and ICT) which presented an update on the current Opportunities Plan for particular projects linked to the Housing portfolio. Members were asked to consider and comment on the report and to propose any new ideas they may have had in the workshop preceding the meeting.

RESOLVED that the Housing Scrutiny Panel considered and commented on the progress made with the current Opportunities Plan projects.

## **8. FAREHAM HOUSING DEVELOPMENT SITES UPDATE**

The Panel received a presentation by the Housing Delivery Manager which updated Members on the progress being made with Fareham Housing sites and other relevant strategic housing matters.

Members commented on the details surrounding the decision to give delegated authority to the Director of Housing following consultation with the Executive Member for Housing to acquire, dispose or change the tenure of homes, which is scheduled to be considered at the February Executive meeting. Members asked that officers consider the transparency of this delegation and asked that regard be given to report when this delegation is used to this Panel. Officers advised that this would be discussed with the legal partners in creating the report to the Executive.

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

## **9. MANAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE OF THE VOID PROCESS**

The Panel received a report by the Director of Housing which provided an update on the changes, and improvement thus far, in how Fareham Housing address the 'voids' process.

Members commented on the excellent improvement in the management and performance of the voids process and commented positively on the increased income and savings since the changes have come into effect. Members noted the recognition that there are further opportunities to improve the efficiency of the process, and the positive impact that a faster void process can have by making properties available sooner for customers. Officers explained how caution should be applied if setting a target for average void time, given that the Council's current proactive approach to disabled adaptations (which often take longer) is important to maintain.

Members asked that in future reporting, the data could provide a little more detail, including total number of voids, more cost information, and potentially looking at those involving disabled adaptations separately.

RESOLVED that the Housing Scrutiny Panel notes the content of the report, including the changes undertaken and underway, and the intention to see ongoing improvements moving forward.

## **10. FAREHAM HOUSING DECANT POLICY**

The Panel received a report by the Director of Housing which provided an overview of the Draft Fareham Housing Decants Policy. The Policy described the legislation and process governing when occupants are required to move accommodation in an emergency or to enable repairs, major works or redevelopment.

Members asked for clarification on the rent fees for tenants who are decanted to alternative accommodation, either permanently or on a temporary basis. Officers confirmed that in the case of temporary decants the rent would be the same as the permanent property and any benefits received for this would continue. In the instance of permanent moves, alternative properties would be assigned based on the allocations property and consider tenant needs and affordability, with officer's offering advice and guidance to tenants throughout the process.

Members of the Panel queried the number of decants that were not permanent each year. Officers advised that although no data was immediately to hand, the numbers were very low last year, and numbers would have the potential to fluctuate if, for example, there was a fire or flood event impacting multiple homes.

RESOLVED that, having considered the report and the attached Draft Fareham Housing Decants Policy as included in Appendix A to the report, the Housing Scrutiny Panel puts forward the comments, as detailed above, to the Executive to be taken into account when considering approval to present the draft policy for public consultation.

## **11. UPDATE ON TENANT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

The Panel received a report by the Director of Housing which provided members with an update on the progress with improving tenant engagement following the adoption of the Tenant Engagement Strategy in September 2024.

Members praised the enthusiasm of officers in getting this new initiative off the ground, and their appreciation for the update. Members recognised that much more is planned as part of the Council's journey to improve and enhance tenant engagement.

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

## **12. TENANT ALTERATIONS POLICY**

The Panel received a report by the Director of Housing which informed members of the new draft Fareham Housing Alterations and Improvements Policy and the associated 'easy read' version for Council tenants and leaseholders.

The Panel enquired if tenants must 'make good' on any alterations they make to their property when they vacate. Officers explained that this would be decided on a case-by-case basis and would be agreed with the tenant when an alteration is approved.

Members asked about the number of requests received from tenants to make alterations. Officers advised that small alteration requests are made frequently but larger alterations such as extensions are rare with tenants signposted to Building Control, Planning and other professionals for advice and relevant statutory permissions. All requests are looked at on a case-by-case basis with

tenants needs and the future use of the property considered with each request.

It was noted by the Panel that changes are required to Appendix C of the Policy document to provide clarity on the process.

RESOLVED that the Housing Scrutiny Panel puts forward the comments and observations, as detailed above, in advance of the draft policy being presented to the Executive for approval to proceed to public consultation.

### **13. OPTIONS ON HOW TO BETTER ENGAGE TENANTS IN THE SCRUTINY PROCESS**

The Panel received a report by the Director of Housing which provided Members with details of proposed options to develop effective tenant scrutiny mechanisms within the Council, including the introduction of a tenant scrutiny framework to support the council to deliver on the regulatory requirements.

Members of the Panel were delighted to see the proposals for tenant scrutiny, and strongly supported the need to allow this initiative to be led and developed by tenants. Members expressed how they would welcome hearing about, and supporting, how tenants wish to scrutinise the Council as landlord, and that the steer is with them as to how exactly this is done. Although it was agreed that a mechanism for Officers and/or Members to support the scrutiny process should be provided, especially in the early days of the process.

Members also expressed the need to keep the approach under review (as led by the tenants themselves) to ensure that it does not become stale.

Members were advised on when the group of Tier 1 engaged tenants will next meet to consider and decide the approach, which will not be limited to just the options articulated as part of the report.

RESOLVED that the Housing Scrutiny Panel:

- (a) considered the proposed options to introduce tenant scrutiny, as attached as Appendix A to the report, in advance of the options being presented to the tenant engagement group; and
- (b) supports the favoured scrutiny approach of the tenant engagement group.

### **14. FAREHAM HOUSING SHARED SPACES GUIDANCE**

The Panel received a report by the Director of Housing which informed Members of the new draft Fareham Housing 'Shared Spaces' guidance and the accompanying 'Easy Read' version.

Members only comment on the document was that they thought it was very good and will be a useful guide to tenants and officers.

RESOLVED that the Housing Scrutiny Panel provides the observations and comments, as detailed above, in advance of the draft Fareham Housing 'Shared Spaces' guidance being made available for tenants.

**15. FAREHAM HOUSING: COMPLIANCE WITH HEALTH & SAFETY**

The Panel received a report by the Director of Housing which provided information in respect of Fareham Housing's compliance with Health and Safety Standards as a social housing landlord.

The Director of Housing addressed the Panel to advise that Members should note that in paragraph 24 of the report, where reference is made to an item subject to legal action, this should instead read that we are in discussion with our legal team about the potential to take action.

Members thanked Officers for the comprehensive document, which provided assurance and insight on very important matters pertaining to safety in council homes. Members highlighted the gas safety inspections, and the reassurance that this gave given the risk that this can pose in homes and for occupants.

Members asked Officers to further explain the approach to smoke detection/alarms and were pleased to hear more about the approach taken dependant on the nature of the premises (such as sheltered housing, general purpose flats, and general purposes houses) and that there is ever decreasing use of battery operated alarm systems in Council houses (with mains operated increasing). Members were also further assured on the annual checks by the gas servicing contractor of the carbon monoxide detector within homes, and their replacement where required.

Overall Members found the report very reassuring in highlighting the Council's compliance with the statutory safety standards.

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

**16. HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL PRIORITIES**

Members considered the Scrutiny Priorities for the Housing Scrutiny Panel.

RESOLVED that Members considered the scrutiny priorities for the Housing Scrutiny Panel.

(The meeting started at 6.06 pm  
and ended at 7.07 pm).

..... Chairman

..... Date