

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Health and Housing Policy Development and Review Panel

(to be confirmed at the next meeting)

Date: Thursday, 13 November 2014

Venue: Vannes/Pulheim Room

PRESENT:

Councillor Mrs M E Ellerton (Chairman)

Councillor D L Steadman (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors: T G Knight, N R Gregory, 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

There were no apologies of absence.

2. MINUTES

Councillor Knight addressed the Panel regarding minute 9 of previous minutes. He explained that the last sentence in the main paragraph which read 'The Panel discussed the merit of the sheltered housing service and an intensive support service by a single agency (i.e. Fareham Borough Council) could lead to confusion for the tenant and their relatives. The Panel concluded that the Council should focus its efforts on providing a good quality sheltered housing service which would not be reliant on funding from other agencies.', was confusing and did not fully represent the views of the Panel.

It was suggested that the sentence now read 'The Panel discussed the merit of the Sheltered Housing Service and an Intensive Support Service being delivered by a single agency (i.e. Fareham Borough Council). The Panel noted that the funding for the Intensive Support Service would be in the control of Hampshire County Council (HCC) and therefore could be subject to future changes in eligibility criteria and levels of funding. The Panel expressed concern that as Fareham Borough Council would not have complete control over the future of the intensive Support Service, it would place the Council and its Sheltered Housing staff in a difficult position and cause confusion for the residents and their relatives (who may not necessarily understand, or be interested in the complexities of the funding) should the level of HCC funding and eligibility criteria be changed. The Panel concluded that Fareham Borough Council should focus its efforts on providing a good quality sheltered housing service which would not be reliant on funding from other agencies and therefore FBC should not bid to deliver the Intensive Support Service.

It was AGREED that, subject to the amended above, the minutes of the Health and Housing Policy Development and Review Panel held on 11 September 2014 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

3. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that the Officer/Member Homeless Working Group had recently attended, as observers, a meeting of a multi-agency rough sleeper forum at Fareham Police Station, which discussed individual cases of homelessness. All members of the working group felt that it was a useful meeting.

The Chairman also made reference to the excellent work of the Homelessness Outreach Worker and asked officers to investigate the possibility of securing funding to extend this post.

The next meeting for the working group is set for Friday 28 November 2014.

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 explained to the Panel that the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has set up a project team which consists of the Head of Planning for CCG, and GP from Brook Lane Surgery and Councillor Bayford. The main purpose of the project team is to look at ways in which to use the Fareham Community Hospital to greater affect. One of the areas they will be looking at is the feasibility of providing a minor injuries unit to take the pressure off of Queen Alexandra hospital who had another black alert last week and had to close the A&E department for a time.

Another area the project team will be looking at is Mental Health. Councillor Bayford informed the Panel that he had recently attended a seminar in Winchester where a lot of concern had been expressed regarding the lack of support for mental health suffers, and this is something that the CCG wish to improve upon.

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

7. REVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS

The Panel considered a report by the Director of Community on a Review of Homelessness.

The report was present by the Housing Options Manager, who outlined the changes to the homelessness service over the past 12 months, this included reviewing the Homelessness and Housing Options Strategy, a restructure of the Housing Options Team (including a new temporary post of Tenancy Support Officer), the Launch of Fare-Lets (the Council's own letting agency), and the challenges for the homelessness team for the next 12 months.

The Panel were informed that the main issue that has repeatedly come up over the past year has been that of rough sleeping, which is currently being examined in more detail by the Member/Officer Working Group. The Panel were also informed that at the next meeting the working group they will be agreeing on the issues they will be taking forward and will start to look into the options they have for tackling these issues.

Councillor Steadman expressed concern over the proposed changes to 101 Gosport Road, and how that may impact upon the service that Fareham can deliver. The Housing Options Manager explained that the changes are as a result of the financial challenges facing Hampshire County Council and that Fareham Borough Council, but to work with HCC in order to minimise the impact to the Hostel.

Members also asked questions regarding the proposed housing company which will be set up by FBC, Eastleigh Borough Council EBC, Radian Housing and First Wessex. Councillor Knight requested that a report come to the Panel to update Members on the proposal. Members requested that a copy of the report that previously went to the Executive outlining the proposals for the housing company be resent to all of them. The Director of Community addressed the Panel to state that he would resend the requested report to all members of the Panel, and suggested that a presentation be added to the work programme outlining the principals to the scheme.

It was AGREED that the Panel notes the content of the report.

8. WELFARE REFORM UPDATE

The Panel considered a report by the Director of Community which provided an update to the Welfare Reform.

The report outlined the changes to the welfare system since April 2013 and how this is impacting upon residents in the Borough. The report looked at the Social Sector Size Criteria, the Benefits Cap, Local Support for Council Tax and Universal Credit.

Members enquired as to whether there have been staffing cuts due to the changes to the welfare reform, and if so how has this impacted upon the service being delivered to customers. The Head of Housing, Revenue and Benefits confirmed that there had been no changes to staff, and as a result of the recent Vanguard intervention a much better service is now being provided to the customer. The only change is that due to the change is the service the revenue staff are now taking on more recovery work.

The Panel were informed that as of the 1 October 2014 Fareham Borough Council lost its duty to investigate benefit fraud as the responsibility of this has now been transferred to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), and as such the Council's two Fraud Investigators have now been transferred to the DWP. However the Council still has a duty to investigate housing fraud and council tax support fraud, and so a new Fraud Investigator post has been recruited and should start on 1 December 2014.

It was also explained to the Panel that the Council Tax Support scheme has to be reviewed every year. A public consultation was carried out which received a good response, the majority of people who responded felt that the current scheme was fair. As a result it is proposed that the Council Tax Support Scheme stays the same for next year.

It was AGREED that the Panel notes the content of the report.

9. REVIEW OF THE WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel considered a report by the Director of Community on the Panel's Work Programme 2014/15.

The Director of Community suggested that the presentation on the Local Housing Company be added to the March meeting.

It was AGREED that, subject to the inclusion of the presentation on the Local Housing Company, that the Work Programme 2014/15 as set out in Appendix A to the report be approved.

(The meeting started at 6.00 pm
and ended at 7.47 pm).