



East  
Northamptonshire  
Council

## Policy and Resources Committee – 16 January 2012

### Housing Policy Working Party

#### Purpose of report

This report seeks Member approval for the creation of, and nomination of three Member volunteers to sit on, a Housing Policy Working Party.

#### Attachment(s)

Appendix 1 - Housing Policy Working Party Draft Terms of Reference

#### 1.0 Background

- 1.1 There are a number of significant pieces of work that the Council will be required to undertake over the next 6 months, in relation to housing and housing policy issues; which are set out below in section 2.
- 1.2 This work will involve the consideration of some complex and inter-related key issues, and for some fundamental decisions to be made. Effective early Member involvement is therefore important and a new working party is proposed to assist with this.

#### 2.0 Housing Policy Changes

- 2.1 The Localism Act proposes significant housing reform, which is intended to make the system of allocating housing fairer and more effective; and to make it easier for decisions to be taken locally.
- 2.2 The key features of the Act in relation to housing reform, and relevant to us, are:
  - Allocations Reform – greater freedom for Local Authorities to set their own policies relating to who can go onto housing waiting lists. This means, for example, that we will be able to prevent people who have little chance of ever securing affordable housing (due to low priority / need) from joining the Housing Register.
  - Tenure Reform – under the previous system social landlords were only able to grant lifetime tenancies. The Act enables landlords to grant tenancies of varying length depending on people's circumstances. This section also covers the introduction of the new Affordable Rent tenancy, which has recently been incorporated into PPS3.
  - Homelessness Legislation Reform – under previous rules, people who became homeless were able to refuse offers of accommodation in the private sector. The Act provides the option for Local Authorities to discharge their homeless duty by way of an offer of private rented accommodation, where it is deemed appropriate.
- 2.3 The Act requires us to produce a Tenancy Strategy, which should set out our views in relation to the tenure reform issues. In addition, we will need to review our existing Housing Allocation Policy.
- 2.4 All of this will mean that in addition to revising documents, some fairly fundamental issues will need to be considered - and decisions made - such as:
  - What type of tenancies do we want providers to offer our residents? For example, what length?
  - What affordable housing products do we want developers and

- providers to offer and where?
- What changes, if any, do we want to make to our Housing Allocation Policy? For example, do we want to prevent certain low priority / need groups from applying for housing?
- Do we want to discharge our homelessness duty into the private rented sector?

2.5 In considering all of these issues, we will also need to be mindful of the significant changes to the Benefit System and the impact that these changes will have on our residents – and in particular on our housing applicants. For example, there is a significant change in the amount of housing benefit that can be claimed by young people which could result in increased youth homelessness and housing need. Other changes could result in a much higher rate of tenants seeking smaller properties that match more closely their entitlement to housing benefit.

2.6 There is also a financial dimension for the council to consider. If, as suggested by some commentators, there is an increasing number of residents unable to afford market or affordable rents and the number of social rented units stays the same (or even falls through conversion to affordable rent), then it is possible that the council will face higher costs for support in temporary accommodation such as Bed and Breakfast which impacts on revenue budgets.

2.7 The impact of this also means that we may need to review our Planning Policy aspirations towards the provision of new affordable housing in developments. Whereas previously we had sought to broaden the range of tenures - from social rented to also include Affordable Rented and part buy-part rent schemes (shared ownership) - local market forces and consideration of the costs of homelessness may suggest a different strategy.

### **3.0 Next Steps**

3.1 In order to be able to effectively consider all of the issues above, progress the key documents, and make the required decisions, officers are of the view that a Working Party would be an appropriate way forward to develop policy.

### **4.0 Equality and Diversity Implications**

4.1 There are no equality and diversity implications.

### **5.0 Legal Implications**

5.1 There are no legal implications associated with the recommendation below.

### **6.0 Risk Management**

6.1 There are no risks associated with the recommendation below.

### **7.0 Financial Implications**

7.1 There are minimal financial implications. There may be some very small costs associated with the production of revised / new strategies and policies – such as publication costs.

### **8.0 Corporate Outcomes**

8.1 The creation of a working party, and subsequent progression of the work detailed in section 2 above would contribute to the following Corporate Outcomes:

- A Good Quality of Life – Sustainable: Sustainable Development
- A Good Quality of Life – Healthy: Improved Housing

- High Quality Service Delivery

## 9.0 Resource Requirements

9.1 There are no additional resource requirements associated with the recommendation below.

## 10.0 Recommendation

10.1 The Committee is recommended to

- (1) Approve the creation of a Housing Policy Working Party
- (2) Agree the Housing Policy Terms of Reference attached at Appendix 1
- (3) Nominate / appoint Members to sit on the working party

*(Reason: to deliver the Empty Homes Project, and enable officers to administer the Homelessness Grant 2011/12.)*

<b>Legal</b>	Power: Localism Act 2011	
	Other considerations: Housing Act 1996	
<b>Background Papers:</b>		
<b>Person Originating Report:</b> Cat Hartley, Housing Strategy Manager chartley@east-northamptonshire.gov.uk 01832742078		
<b>Date: 12 December 2011</b>		
<b>CFO</b>	<b>MO</b>	<b>CX</b>

(Committee Report Normal Rev. 22)

## Housing Policy Working Party

### Terms of Reference

#### 1. Membership

Members: tbc. (*experience in the following areas would be useful*):

- RSL/Register Provider management
- Working with groups at high risk of homelessness or in receipt of housing benefit
- Services delivered under the Housing Contract
- Council Finances

Key/Lead Officers:	Sharn Matthews	Executive Director
	Trevor Watson	Head of Planning Services
	Lisa Hyde	Head of Customer and Community Services
	Jenny Walker	Environmental Protection Manager
	Cat Hartley	Housing Strategy Manager

There may be a need to involve other officers as and when required, such as representatives from Finance or Planning Services.

#### 2. Terms of Reference

- To establish the full impact of the changes to housing benefit for housing applicants.
- To develop and agree the principles for the new Tenancy Strategy for presentation to P&R, to include:
  - => Establishing preferred tenancy types and affordable housing products.
  - => Establishing 'affordability' levels for housing applicants
  - => Agreeing the content of the new Policy
- To develop and agree the principles for the new Housing Allocation Policy for presentation to P&R, to include:
  - => Assessing the options provided in the Localism Act and considering whether to take them forward.
  - => Agreeing the content of the new Policy

- To develop and agree the principles for the new Housing Strategy for presentation to P&R, taking into account the Government's new Housing Strategy.
- To develop and present to Planning Policy any consequent changes on the mix and level of affordable housing required across the District