



**Housing Policy Working Party
Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 18th November
2015 at 2pm in Kasen Room**

Present

Councillors	Rupert Reichhold	RR
	Tony Boto	TB
	Steven North	SN
	Richard Lewis	RL
	Helen Harrison	HH

Also in attendance

Executive Director and Interim Head of Planning Services	Sharn Matthews	SM
Planning Policy and Conservation Manager	Richard Palmer	RP
Housing Enabling Officer	Aine Cooper	AC
Housing Services Officer	Louise Bagley	LB
Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager	Carol Conway	
Benefit Manager	Lucy Hogston	LH
Environmental Protection Manager	Karen Pell	KP

ACTION

1. **Apologies**
- 1.1 Apologies had been received from Councillor Sarah Peacock
2. **Terms of Reference**
- 2.1 The Terms of Reference had been agreed by Policy and Resources Committee. The minutes of this meeting would be forwarded to the Policy and Resources Committee for consideration. The working party resolved to recommend to the Policy and Resources Committee approval of the 2 suggested additions to the Terms of Reference.
- 2.2 Group Members
- 2.3 Members of the group introduced themselves

CC

2.4 Appointment of Chair

2.5 TB was nominated and appointed for the position of chair. RR was nominated and appointed as vice chairman

3. Introductions – who does what?

Officers explained their roles and gave some detail on the work they carry out with respect to the housing related responsibilities of this council

4. Scope of the Working Party

4.1 The Housing Options Contract is an urgent item to be considered as the current contract expires on 31 March 2016. Policy and Resources Committee has already agreed to extend the contract for another 3 years, but minor amendments and updates will be required. Housing Services have a meeting with Midland Heart this month to go over any changes. Once everything is agreed between the parties the contract will go to P&R committee early next year for approval.

CC/LB

4.2 The housing allocations policy was approved in 2013 but needs to be reviewed and updated. It was agreed that specific timeframes need to be set for the various tasks to be completed by.

4.3 Housing Mix Requirements Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

The district wide housing mix requirements assessment shows what we have and what we need in the district in terms of property size, tenure and affordable housing. An SPD is being developed which will provide developers with more guidance on what is acceptable in planning terms for new housing. However publication of details related to the Government's Starter Homes initiatives would be required before significant further work could be completed (see below).

4.4 Clawback Policy

The Working Party need to consider developing a policy to determine how requests for clawback provisions to be waived will be dealt with to avoid each individual request being taken to P&R for approval.

4.5 Welfare Reforms

The Working Party needs to be aware of the reforms and any implications they may have for the council.

4.6 Housing and Tenancy Strategies

These were adopted in 2012. The Housing Strategy outlines the council's priorities for housing in the district, whilst the Tenancy Strategy provides guidance for Registered Providers working in the district when framing their own policies.

4.7 Work Programme

Many issues are inter-related. Until the Housing and Planning Bill becomes legislation it is not known what changes this will bring. Councillor Boto to liaise with Carol to agree timescales for elements of the work required.

TB/CC

5. The Housing and Planning Bill

The Housing and Planning Bill was published on 13 October 2015, had its second reading on 2 November 2015 and will now proceed to committee stage.

5.1 Starter Homes

Starter homes will be delivered as affordable housing as part of Section 106 Agreements. Starter Homes will be new homes available for first time buyers under the age of 40, at 20% below the market value, with a £250,000 cap outside of London. Starter homes will be exempt from CIL and other tariff based contributions. The Bill will mean developers will achieve 80% market value of properties as opposed to the 50-60% they are currently achieving for rented and shared ownership homes.

Concerns were raised that a balance of properties should be built to attract a mixture of people. It was also noted that the Welfare Reform Bill will introduce a 1% per annum rent reduction for social landlords for the next 4 years. This will result in developers wanting to renegotiate numbers and tenure on existing S106 obligations.

5.2 Self-build and custom housebuilding

The Council will be expected to hold a register for custom-build and self-build homes. The Council will have a duty to grant outline planning permission for enough sites to meet the demand for this

5.3 Extension of the Right to Buy (RTB)

RTB is being extended, and will be available to those who have been a social housing tenant for at least 3 years. It is hoped there will be concessions for rural areas and sheltered housing but as yet there has been no detail provided on exemptions. Discounts will depend upon how long a person has occupied the property.

5.4 Sale of vacant high value local authority housing

Local authorities will be expected to sell high value council homes as they become vacant. As a non-stock-holding council ENC should not be affected by this. However, SM raised a potential risk that monies could possibly be obtained by the government through receipts from historic RTB agreements.

5.5 Pay to Stay

Social housing tenants with a household income of £30,000 or more per annum will be expected to pay a market or near market rent. It was noted that Housing Services keep records of private rents to keep track of current market rental prices.

5.6 Ending of lifetime tenancies

It is likely that lifetime tenancies will end, with 5 to 15 year tenancies being offered instead. It is believed that this is for new tenancies only but this has not yet been clarified. It is hoped that there will be exemptions for retirement, supported and specialist housing.

5.7 Rogue landlords and letting agents

Legislation will enable councils to issue banning orders, with fines in place if the order is breached. The government will set up a database of rogue landlords that the Council will be responsible for entering information into. Rent repayment orders are to be extended over a broader range of offences.

5.8 Planning

The planning aspects of the Housing and Planning Bill were considered, with focus on the Brownfield Register. The Working Party queried whether former airfield sites will be classified as Brownfield sites as this was unclear at this stage although thought unlikely. The council will have to create a Brownfield Register.

5.9 Housing Implications for East Northamptonshire Council

As a Council we are not directly affected by some of the proposed measures as we are not stock holders of homes, but some of our registered partners will be affected and there will be knock-on effects on the council such as reduced stock and less new affordable rented and shared ownership developments coming through. It is therefore extremely important to have the right Allocations Policy in place to minimise the pressures on front line staff.

The homelessness and waiting list figures will be brought to the next working party meeting.

LB

6. Welfare Reforms

6.2 Removal of spare room subsidy (Bedroom Tax) – sees benefits being reduced if a house is not being fully occupied. 585 households in East Northants were affected by this last year, with the figure currently at 439 affected households. This figure has not changed much in recent months, possibly due to the lack of suitable properties available for people to 'downsize' into.

6.3 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) have helped some, but it is uncertain how long these payments will be available

6.4 Universal Credit (UC) has been introduced in the district for single job seekers only. They receive one monthly payment to cover their rent and living expenses.

- 6.5 Tax credits - Current earning thresholds are to be halved by next year

LHA freeze -From April 2016 there will be a local housing allowance freeze for the next 4 years.
- 6.6 Under 21s - From April 2017 automatic entitlement to Housing Benefit for 18-21 year olds out of work will be removed. There will be exemptions for vulnerable people, but details are yet to be clarified on who will be classed as vulnerable.
- 6.7 Council tax support - In April 2013 the Council designed their own scheme. The Council are proposing 20% is the minimum amount paid towards council tax from next year.

7. Accessible Properties Aspiration

- 7.1 This is a 3 phase plan, for the short, medium and long term, with the phases running concurrently. The aim is to deliver an improved service with a fairer allocations system, make better use of the DFG budget and plan for future needs for adapted and accessible properties.. The DFG policy needs to be reviewed in conjunction with housing allocations and planning policies.

8 Working Party Work Plan

- 8.1 CC ran through the work plan. Some points are dependant on the Housing and Planning Bill. TB and CC to agree work plan and timetable for consideration by the Working Party. TB/CC

9 Future Meetings

- 9.1 Agenda TB
CC
LB
AC

An agenda is to be produced for each meeting together with a work plan with timeframes. TB to liaise with the housing team on meeting contents for the future

- 9.2 Proposed meetings

It was proposed to hold the meetings on the second Wednesday of each month, between 2pm-4pm in the Kasen Room if available.
Proposed dates of future meetings:

9th December 2015
13 January 2016
10 February 2016
9 March 2016
13 April 2016

- 9.3 Next meeting

It is proposed to hold the next meeting on 9 December 2015 at 2pm in the Kasen Room.

9.4 Conclusion of meeting

The meeting concluded at 16.06pm

Housing Policy Working Party

Terms of Reference

1. Membership

Members: Councillor Steven North
Councillor Richard Lewis
Councillor Rupert Reichhold
Councillor Sarah Peacock
Councillor Tony Boto
Councillor Helen Harrison

Lead Officers:

Sharn Matthews	Executive Director
Richard Palmer	Planning Policy Manager
Jenny Walker	Health Protection Manager
Karen Pell	Environmental Protection Manager
Carol Conway	Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager
Louise Bagley	Housing Services Officer
Aine Cooper	Housing Enabling Officer

There may also be a need to involve other officers as and when required, such as representatives from Benefits, Finance, or Planning Services as well as from Registered Housing Providers and other partners.

2. Terms of Reference

- i. To consider any proposed changes to the terms and conditions of the Contract for the Housing Options Service prior to presentation to Policy and Resources Committee
- ii. To review the Housing Allocation Policy for presentation to Policy & Resources Committee
- iii. To steer the development of flexible and fair housing policies for the provision, adaptation and allocation of accessible properties for presentation to Policy and Resources Committee
- iv. To steer the development of a Supplementary Planning Document in respect of the Housing Mix Requirements for the district for presentation to Planning Policy Committee
- v. To consider the consequences for housing in the district, and report any recommended action to the appropriate committee, as a result of
 - a. Changes to the Right to Buy and rent setting legislation for housing associations

- b. Welfare reform and in particular the introduction of Universal Credit
 - c. The current refugee crisis.
- vi. If appropriate following the review of the Allocations Policy and changes to legislation, to review the Tenancy Strategy for presentation to Policy & Resources Committee

Agreed by Policy and Resources Committee 21.9.15

Suggested additions

To consider the development of a policy in relation to the clawback provisions in the Stock Transfer agreement from 2001.

To ensure housing and planning objectives are closely reflected through the plan making process, in assisting future policy development