



**Housing Policy Working Party  
Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 17th  
February 2016 at 2pm in the Members Room**

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**Present**

<b>Councillors</b>	Tony Boto (Chair)	TB
	Rupert Reichhold (Vice-Chair)	RR
	Richard Lewis	RL
	Helen Harrison	HH

**Also in attendance**

<b>Executive Director</b>	Sharn Matthews	SM
<b>Head of Planning Services</b>	Paul Bland	PB
<b>Housing Services Officer</b>	Louise Bagley	LB
<b>Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager</b>	Carol Conway	CC
<b>Environment Protection Manager</b>	Karen Pell	KP
<b>Environmental Health Protection Manager</b>	Jenny Walker	JW

		<b><u>ACTION</u></b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Apologies</b>	
1.1	Apologies were received from Cllr North, Cllr Peacock, Aine Cooper and Richard Palmer	
<b>2.</b>	<b>Minutes of the meeting of 20th January</b>	
2.1	The minutes were approved and signed by the chairman	

<b>3.</b>	<b>Matters arising</b>	
3.1	The Housing Options Contract had now been approved by Policy and Resources Committee subject to a couple of minor amendments. The contract would now go back to Midland Heart for final approval of the amendments prior to signing.	CC
<b>4.</b>	<b>Housing Allocations Policy Review</b>	
4.1	<p>LB gave a brief overview of the 'Choice Based Lettings Scheme', known as Homes Direct.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The waiting list is now known as the housing register and 'points' have been replaced with 'bands'.</li> <li>• Available properties can be viewed via the website, at the offices or any Council building, and applicants can also see the number of properties that are available.</li> <li>• There are currently just under 1300 applicants on the housing register. There are around 350 properties available to bid on each year. This figure includes sheltered housing.</li> </ul>	
4.2	The Housing Allocation Policy outlines who is eligible on the housing register and what band they are placed into. Applicants must complete an application form. They are encouraged to do this online to speed up the process, but paper applications are also accepted.	
4.3	An applicant must be at least 16 years old (with a guarantor until aged 18), have a local connection and be able to maintain their tenancy. They must be eligible under immigration regulations. Only armed forces/war widows are eligible without a local connection to the district.	
4.4	Applicants are placed in Bands 1-4 according to the level of their need. In addition, homeless applicants and other urgent applications are given a Priority Card. A person with the highest band at the earliest date will be the 'top bidder'. If two parties with the same banding bid on a property, it will go to the party who was first placed in that band. Checks on applications are carried out at the point of nomination which is more accurate than at the point of application. Feedback on properties advertised is provided, listing the type of property, the band, band date and number of bids received.	
4.5	Medical and social panel meet every four weeks. There is a qualified nurse on the panel who provides advice on how medical circumstances can affect housing needs.	
4.6	Once an applicant has refused two offers their application is deferred for six months. Homeless applicants can only bid	

	once, although it is their choice what property they bid for. Applicants can request a review if they are deferred.	
4.7	Automated bidding can be actioned to aid someone to bid for the specific type of property/area they are seeking. Applicants can also bid over the telephone if they wish.	
4.8	<p>Suggestions for amendments/alterations to the Housing Allocation Policy were invited.</p> <p>Issues to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local connection and rural allocation</li> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Homeowners and those with financial assets</li> <li>• Under occupancy and affordability</li> <li>• Medical needs and adapted properties</li> </ul> <p>A programme has been drawn up to enable the working party to consider different aspects of the housing allocation policy at future meetings.</p> <p>It was agreed that a training session on the council's statutory obligations in respect of allocations and homelessness should be arranged for the working party.</p>	<p>HPWP</p> <p>CC</p>
4.9	<p>It was noted that benefits would be capped from September 2016 at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Couples and lone parents £384.62 per week (reduced from £500)</li> <li>• Single claimants £257.69 per week (reduced from £350)</li> </ul> <p>At present it is not known exactly how many benefit claimants in East Northamptonshire will be affected. A paper would be prepared for the Welfare Reform Committee and shared with the Housing Policy Working Party.</p>	
<b>5.</b>	<b>Accessible Properties Review</b>	
5.1	<p>JW and KP talked through the aspirations framework. The goals are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make better use of the stock we have and provide data to demonstrate the needs in the district</li> <li>• Make best use of the grants and resources available</li> <li>• Develop an up to date property database including all adapted/accessible properties, supported accommodation and care homes.</li> </ul>	
5.2	<p>Other points raised</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temporary accommodation is very expensive, and not the best option for the client.</li> <li>• An ENC owned and controlled housing company that operates as a business and generates revenue may be an option for housing some of the applicants for whom there is currently no suitable affordable stock.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is no means testing for disabled facilities grants (DFG's) where there is a child involved.</li> </ul>	
<b>6.</b>	<b>NPPF Consultation Response</b>	
6.1	<p>It was agreed that the consultation response had answered the questions posed in a balanced way.</p> <p>The onus is on the council to test whether employment and commercial land is appropriate for housing development or not.</p> <p>The Joint Planning Unit (JPU) has applied for government funding to create a brownfield land register.</p>	
<b>7.</b>	<b>Clawback Policy Update</b>	
7.1	<p>The Housing and Planning Bill is going through various amendments in Parliament which may affect any decisions made in respect of clawbacks. It was therefore agreed not to progress the clawback policy until the final content of the Act was known. It was noted that Rockingham Forest Housing Association may go into a group structure with Grand Union Housing Association.</p>	
<b>8.</b>	<b>Any Other Business</b>	
8.1	<p>LB asked for members support for a representative from Homes Direct to attend all or part of future meetings, by invitation, and when appropriate, to assist with decisions in respect of the review of the Allocations Policy. Members agreed to this.</p>	LB
8.2	<p>SM advised that universal credit was rolled out for single claimants on 5 October 2015, and is due to be extended to couples and families from January 2017 at the earliest. The rollout should be completed by 2021.</p> <p>Housing Benefit responsibility for pensioners, supported exempt accommodation and Discretionary Housing Payments will remain with the council.</p>	
<b>9.</b>	<b>Next Meetings</b>	
	<p>Weds 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016 Weds 20<sup>th</sup> April 2016</p> <p>On <b>April 20<sup>th</sup> at 12 noon</b> working party members are invited to the opening of the Castle Court sheltered housing scheme.</p> <p>CC to ensure working party members are invited to attend.</p>	CC
	The meeting concluded at 15.50	