



**Housing Policy Working Party
Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 20th
April 2016 at 2pm in the Kasen Room**

Present

Councillors	Tony Boto (Chair)	TB
	Rupert Reichhold (Vice-Chair)	RR
	Richard Lewis	RL
	Helen Harrison	HH
	Steven North	SN
	Sarah Peacock	SP

Also in attendance

Executive Director	Sharn Matthews	SM
Head of Planning Services	Paul Bland	PB
Housing Services Officer	Louise Bagley	LB
Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager	Carol Conway	CC
Housing Enabling Officer	Aine Cooper	AC
Environmental Health Protection Manager	Jenny Walker	JW
Homes Direct Representative	Beverley Tebbutt	BT

		<u>ACTION</u>
1.	Apologies	
1.1	None.	
2.	Minutes of the meeting of 23rd March 2016	
2.1	The minutes were approved and signed by the chairman.	
3.	Matters arising	
3.1	An item on Risk would be brought to the next meeting.	CC

4.	Housing and Planning Bill and NPPF update	
4.1	CC reported that the Housing and Planning Bill is at the report stage with the House of Lords. Amendments had been put forward.	
4.2	New starter homes criteria of 20% on schemes of 10 units or more or 0.5 or more hectares – House of Lords proposed amendment to set thresholds and percentage locally.	
4.3	If Starter Homes are sold within the first 5 years the 20% discount would have to be repaid. House of Lords proposed amendment to 20 years and with a tapered percentage to be repaid.	
4.4	These amendments are subject to government approval and may not be accepted. The Government has, however, accepted that rural exception sites should be exempt from the Starter Homes requirement.	
5.	Welfare Reform update	
5.1	SM provided an update from Lucy Hogston (Benefits Manager) as follows:-	
5.2	<p><u>Universal Credit</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal Credit for single claimants was ‘rolled out’ in East Northamptonshire on 5.10.15. • DWP have confirmed that roll out for couples and families will start from May 2016 but only for 30 Local Authorities. ENC is not one of these. • If ENC is ‘assigned to’ the January – April 2017 roll-out, we will be informed in July 2016. If we are in the transition from April 2017 onwards, we will be informed in September 2016. • Existing cases will be migrated from 2018 to 2021. • At the moment we have 24 customers who are in receipt of Universal Credit, and a further 25 waiting for their claims to be processed by the Department for Work and Pensions. <p>• <u>Benefit Cap</u> In the Autumn statement the government proposed to reduce the benefit cap as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Couples and lone parents £500 per week reducing to £384.62. • Single claimants £350 per week reducing to £257.69. • The new cap is likely to be introduced from September/October 2016. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will receive notification from the DWP detailing the number of possible cases affected. <p><u>Removal of Spare Room Subsidy</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently there are 424 cases affected by the RSRS, this has reduced by 18 in the last 6 months and by 161 since it was first introduced in April 2013. <p><u>Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DWP grant for 2015/16 was £91,995, DHP grant spent £89,740, this provided assistance to 163 customers. DWP grant for 2016/17 is £113,698 and we expect to spend all of this grant. <p><u>Council Tax Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum payment of 20% was introduced from 1 April 2016. Three year independent review of Local Council Tax Support recently carried out by Eric Ollerenshaw OBE which made a number of recommendations, one of which is not to include CTS into Universal Credit. 	
6.	Housing Allocations Policy Review – income, capital, affordability, home owners, home ownership initiatives	
6.1	<p><u>CC presented a discussion paper detailing:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> affordable stock in the district numbers on the housing needs register homelessness figures income levels house prices and private rents recent changes to legislation and government housing and welfare policy Right to Buy access to shared ownership current eligibility on the council’s housing needs register for home owners, and people who could afford to purchase 	
6.2	<p>A discussion ensued regarding whether people in low housing need and those who could afford to find their own housing solutions should be allowed on the housing needs register. Older owner occupiers are allowed on the list because there are some difficult to let properties, particularly sheltered bedsit accommodation in rural locations. However, such applicants were often successful in bidding for other properties and it was felt this should be tightened up</p>	

	and income and capital restrictions placed on eligibility to go on the list.	
6.3	TB and RL queried the accuracy of some of the incomes data in the report as it included older people who may have low incomes but may be asset rich. These people may be living in their own home with no need for a mortgage. SN stressed the need for better information for this and for other work that the council is involved with. It was also stressed that we need to differentiate between the needs of locally based people and of those moving into the district and potentially commuting to work elsewhere.	CC to speak to AH.
6.4	Concern was raised about the extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate to all public sector tenants under 35 and that there would be a shortfall between the rent charged for a property and the benefit payable. RPs are becoming reluctant to house people under 35, unless they can demonstrate a stable work record. This will cause difficulties for the council to discharge our homelessness duties. There are very few HMOs in ENC and it is therefore difficult for people to find shared accommodation although the number may increase if there is demand.	
6.5	It was agreed that the eligibility criteria for the housing needs register needed to be tightened up and that the paper should be revised and brought back to the next meeting with further income information and suggestions for changes. Decisions on changes to the allocation policy were therefore deferred to the next meeting.	CC
6.6	RL suggested that the criteria RPs use for their allocations policies should be added to the list of items for consideration. SN felt a legal opinion may be necessary on how far we could enforce our allocations policy over RPs. CC advised that this had been sought before and we were unable to impose our policy. CC to provide details. SN felt it was important to consider all the options before taking the allocation policy back to P&R. The older nomination agreements needed to be revisited to ascertain what was originally agreed.	CC Housing Strategy Team

6.7	RL left the meeting at 3.30pm.	
7.	Starter Homes Consultation	
7.1	<p>The government had issued a consultation paper on the technical aspects of the Starter Homes proposal. The deadline for consultation responses is 18 May 2016. Relevant officers had met and suggested responses to the consultation document were put forward and changes made. It was agreed that the Head of Planning should exercise his delegated authority to respond to the consultation in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of Planning Policy Committee. The main points of response were agreed as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The property price cap is too high for a starter home in the district and needs to come down to £200,000. The discount should be repaid in full during the first 5 years and then on a tapering basis for the next 5 years. Suggestion that if a person needs to move because of their work, then the discount could be portable to another property. There should be a total ban on renting out the property during the discount payback period. • Starter Homes should be available for all first time buyers irrespective of age. • All ex service personnel should have access to Starter Homes not just those injured or widowed. • Starter Homes site size threshold to be set locally according to need and site viability. Objectively assessed housing need used to inform planning policy should be used to determine level. • Percentage of starter homes to be set locally as above. • Local discretion required to apportion affordable housing between starter homes and other affordable homes according to local need and viability. • Exemption from Starter Homes should be allowed where they are not viable. A standard approach to viability would be welcomed. • Starter Homes should be exempt from dedicated supported housing and purpose built student housing. • Custom Built schemes and those with high levels of affordable housing should be exempt. 	PB

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural exception sites should be exempted from the Starter Homes requirement. • Commuted sums in lieu of starter homes may be appropriate in some exceptional circumstances. • Exemptions and commuted sums for private rented housing should be considered on a site by site basis. For specialist older people's housing, mixed tenure developments should be encouraged in lieu of starter homes. • Starter Homes monitoring reports could be annexed to the Annual Monitoring Report but not until April 2018. <p>The government has yet to publish an equalities statement and an impact assessment in respect of the proposals so the response cannot be fully formulated yet.</p>	
8.	Housing investment Opportunity	
8.1	The Policy and Resources committee paper to be taken to the meeting on 25th April 2016 was noted.	
9.	Any Other Business	
9.1	None.	
10.	Next Meeting	
	The next meeting will be held on Weds 15 th June at 2pm.	
	The meeting on Weds 18 th May 2016 at 1.30pm has been cancelled	
	The meeting concluded at 4.10pm.	