



**Housing Policy Working Party
Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday
15 June 2016 at 2pm in the Kasen Room**

Present

Councillors	Tony Boto	TB
	Richard Lewis	RL
	Helen Harrison	HH
	Steven North	SN
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
Interim Protection Manager	Jenny Walker	JW
Homes Direct Representative	Beverley Tebbutt	BT

		<u>ACTION</u>
1.	Appointment Of Chairman	
1.1	Councillor Tony Boto to be appointed Chairman of the Housing Policy Working Party for the year 2016/17	
2.	Apologies	
2.1	Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sarah Peacock and Richard Palmer	
3.	Appointment Of Vice Chairman	
3.1	Councillor Helen Harrison to be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Housing Policy Working Party for the year 2016/17	
4.	Minutes of the meeting of 20 April 2016	
4.1	The minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2016 were approved and signed by the Chairman.	
4.2	Starter Homes Consultation - Response	

	<p>PB gave a brief summary regarding the planning issues in regard to the starter homes consultation. A Members briefing will be issued to all councillors within the next 3 /4 weeks</p> <p>TB enquired about the Joint Core Strategy. PB replied that it is to be adopted in July and the Part 1 Local Plan would then be in place.</p>	
5.	Matters arising	
5.1	Welfare Reform Update	
	SM provided an update from Lucy Hogston (Benefits Manager) that from late Autumn 2016 the Benefit Cap will be lowered from £26,000 to £20,000 per annum	
6.	Housing and Planning Act and Welfare Reform updates	
6.1	CC reported that the Housing and Planning Act 2016 had now completed its passage through parliament and received Royal Assent. The main implications for ENC are as follows:	
6.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government aims to build 200,000 starter homes exclusively for first time buyers aged over 23 and under 40 for sale at a 20% discount on market prices. • The Act creates a new duty on all local authority planning departments to promote the supply of starter homes in their area. • The government can set regulations to require starter homes to be included on residential sites, but rural exception sites will be exempt. The government is consulting on the detail of this. • Increased government powers where the LA does not have a local plan • The government will have powers to grant automatic planning consent on any land allocated in a Development Plan Document • A package of measures to tackle rogue landlords in the private rented sector • Enabling private landlords to regain possession of property they believe to be abandoned without a court order • Duty on LAs to ensure they have enough plots available for self build to meet local demand. 	
7.	Working Party Risk Review	
7.1	<p>SM presented a Risk Review report which highlighted 5 Risks relevant to the HPWP which are briefly summarised below:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Failure to deliver sufficient affordable housing in the district 2) Fraudulent homeless and housing register applications 3) Increase in appeals against homelessness and housing 	

	<p>register decisions</p> <p>4) Increase in homelessness applications</p> <p>5) Cessation of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme</p> <p>SM noted a further problem regarding the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Cap and the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) which needs to be formalised as a risk as these housing benefit restrictions are impacting on our ability to house our applicants. Mitigating actions were to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work with Registered Providers to find solutions • monitor the situation and gather case studies with a view to challenging the LHA rate as it is much lower than rents charged in the district. <p><i>However, advice was provided after the meeting as follows:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The LHA rate cannot be appealed through the normal Housing Benefit appeals process. It may be possible to appeal to the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) directly. The other option is to appeal the Broad Rental Market Areas (BRMA) but this can only be done by Judicial Review.</i> • <i>In any event an appeal is unlikely to be successful. ENC's LHA rates are based on two BRMAs - Peterborough and Northants & Central. When the VOA set the LHA rates they looked at the whole of the BRMA not just East Northants, and although East Northants shared accommodation rents are higher than the SAR this may not be the case in Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough which are also included in our BRMA. In addition to this the LHA rates are then set at the 30th percentile, so are lower than average rents. Also from 2016 LHA rates are going to be frozen for 4 years, so even if the market does change or we find further evidence of higher rents they cannot be changed during that time.</i> 	
8.	Housing Allocations Policy Review – income, capital, affordability, home owners, home ownership initiatives	
8.1	<p>At the meeting held on 20 April 2016 the Housing Policy Working Party considered a paper which outlined the housing position in the district in respect of:</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 	

8.2	<p>Concern had been raised that the income levels reported from the CACI data were artificially low as they had included pensioner households who would generally be on lower incomes than working households but may be asset rich.</p> <p>Members had requested that more work be undertaken to ascertain what pensioner household incomes were in the district to in turn enable an estimation of the incomes of working age households. At this stage it has not been possible to do so as the CACI data on which the figures are based does not break down incomes by age group. Incomes are not included in the Census data.</p> <p>A discussion took place regarding how to improve the way in which information on household incomes was collected on the housing register application forms and changes that were required to get more accurate data.</p>	
8.3	<p>The following changes to the Allocations Policy were agreed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owner-occupiers of all ages will only be eligible if either:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. They are unable to afford their current accommodation; or ii. Their current accommodation is unsuitable for their needs <p>And they have insufficient assets and/or income to purchase a suitable property, either outright or on a shared ownership basis</p> • Applicants will have to declare their income within set bands, as well as any assets. They will be advised that they will be expected to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Provide proof of income and assets before they will be allocated a property ii. Advise Homes Direct of any changes in circumstances, including any increase in their income or assets. 	
8.4	<p>Members also agreed, in respect of older owner-occupiers that the level of capital that can be retained from the sale of their home either to live on, or to keep as savings (e.g. for future care needs) was £16,000 per household, which is in line with the benefit level.</p>	
8.5	<p>Regarding a further recommendation to amend ENC's allocation policy to enable individual RP allocation policies to be taken into account, provided this is clearly stated in the advert under the CBL Scheme, SN suggested that this recommendation required further discussion and the item be deferred to the next meeting.</p>	CC
8.6	<p>It was further agreed that consultation would need to be</p>	

	<p>undertaken with RPs to ensure that blanket policies are not being implemented and that 75% of vacancies or more are let according to the council's allocations policy.</p> <p>The allocations policy review timetable is to be updated and the consultation draft of the revised policy is to be taken to the Policy & Resources Committee meeting of 5 December.</p>	
9.	Any Other Business	
9.1	<p>AC provided a paper for Members information, regarding a Shared Ownership Event which had been held on Saturday, 11th June, to promote the substantial increase in shared ownership properties available in the district. Over 150 people had attended the event.</p> <p>CC thanked AC for all her hard work on this successful event, particularly as it had been held at the weekend.</p>	
10.	Next Meeting	
10.1	The next meeting will be held on 13 July 2016 at 2:00pm in the Kasen Room	
10.2	<p>Dates for future meetings are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 September • 12 October • 9 November • 7 December – all meetings will commence at 2pm. 	
	The meeting concluded at 15.50.	

Housing Policy Working Party - Work Programme - Version 4 - 14.7.16

Area	Work Required	Timescales	Progress
Completed work			
Renewal of Housing Options Contract	Renewal of housing options contract with Midland Heart	Completed	Revised contract approved by Policy and Resources Committee in February 2016. Signed by ENC and Midland Heart and in effect from 1.4.16
Current Work			
Government changes to housing policy	Appreciation of what the changes are and how they will affect the provision, allocation and management of affordable housing in the district. Respond to government consultation documents as required.	On-going	Initial briefing of issues at HPWP meeting in November 2015. Updates and consultation documents brought to Working Party as available. Response to NPPF changes consultation prepared Jan 2016. Response to Starter Homes consultation prepared April 2016
Housing Benefit and Welfare Reforms	Overall understanding of the changes and their impact to inform policy making.	On-going	Initial briefing of issues at HPWP meeting in November 2015. Updates brought to Working Party as available
Clawback policy	Consideration of the clawback provisions in the stock transfer agreements and of options available. Formulation of policy to enable decisions to be made in individual cases without need for committee decisions.	Jan-17	Initial discussion paper brought to HPWP in January 2016. HPWP agreed to defer pending further details on the extension of the Right to Buy and compensation arrangements for RPs
Housing Allocations Policy	Consider local priorities, in light of current and new legislation and guidance, and make changes to allocations policy as required, including eligibility criteria, local connections, medical and social needs, affordability, income and capital limits. Consider consultation requirements for new allocations policy.	Mar-17	Allocations and homelessness legislation training undertaken April 2016. Medical considerations and procedures agreed March 2016. Affordability, capital and income limits agreed April and June 2016. Local connections and interface with RP policies agreed July 2016. Initial draft policy to be presented to September meeting and final consultation draft to October meeting prior to submission to December P&R committee for consideration. Following consultation, final document to P&R March 2017 and adoption from 1st April 2017

Accessible properties	Develop joint policy for the provision, adaptation and allocation of accessible properties	On-going - some elements include long-term planning for future specialist provision	HPWP agreed joint procedures for allocation of affordable accessible stock and DFG funding March 2016. Framework register of approved contractors and suppliers in place. Database of affordable accessible stock in place. Countywide study being commissioned with NCC on housing needs of older people. In-house OT under consideration.
Property Investment Opportunities	Consider scope for Property Investment Vehicle	On-going	Report on housing investment opportunity considered April 2016 and subsequent report agreed by P&R. Further report to P&R in July outlining options for future use of the properties if purchased
Risk Review	Consideration of risks to council of decisions of working party and of new policies, legislation and regulation	On-going	Initial review undertaken June 2016 and additional risk added to the Risk Register in respect of the effects of the introduction of the Local Housing Allowance Cap. Risk to be added to HPWP agendas as standing item
Future work			
Housing Mix Requirements Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)	Establish housing needs from SHMA, Census, incomes and other available data. Consider requirement for Housing Needs Surveys to further inform mix of housing types and tenure on future housing developments, including the SUEs, rural exception sites and specialist and supported housing. Develop SPD on housing mix required on future developments	Depends on level of work required on further needs analysis	First draft of SPD in place but needs to be revised in line with new legislation on Starter Homes (once finalised) and changes to HCA funding and welfare reforms. Further work required on needs analysis. Countywide study on older people's housing and support needs will feed into the needs analysis work. Initial paper on way forward to be brought to HPWP meeting in September 2016
Housing and Homelessness Strategy	Review Housing and Homelessness Strategy	Due by end 2017	
Housing Options Contract	Decide whether to re-tender the contract or to bring the contract back in-house. Oversee specification and either tender documentation and process or reintegration of the service	Contract due for renewal 31.3.2019 but decision on direction to be taken needed by end 2017 to enable time for re-tender or reintegration process.	