



**Housing Policy Working Party
Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 13th
July 2016 at 2pm in the Kasen Room**

Present

Councillors

**Tony Boto
Steven North
Helen Harrison
Richard Lewis
Sarah Peacock**

Also in attendance

Head of Planning Services	Paul Bland	PB
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	CC
Homes Direct Representative	Beverley Tebbutt	BT

		<u>ACTION</u>
1.	Apologies and introductions	
1.1	Apologies were received from Sharn Matthews and Jenny Walker	
2	Minutes of the meeting of 15th June 2016	
2.1	The minutes were approved and signed by the Chairman	
3	Matters arising	
3.1	All matters arising were covered on the agenda	

4	Updates	
4.1	<p>Housing and Planning Act. The H & PA has recently been made an Act, and secondary legislation is awaited to provide more details. The results of the Starter Homes consultation are awaited. Right to Buy pilots are ongoing and the government will decide how to proceed once these pilots have been completed.</p> <p>There is £2.3 billion of government funding for Starter Homes. The JPU have put together a bid for North Northamptonshire for a portion of this, with 3 potential developments located within the East Northamptonshire district.</p> <p>The ‘Neighbourhood Planning and Infrastructure Bill’ will be going through Parliament but is likely to relate more to planning than housing.</p>	
4.2	<p>Welfare Reform.</p> <p>There are 89 cases in the district that will be affected by the implementation of the new lower benefit cap in November. The cap will reduce from £26,000 down to £20,000.</p> <p>We should be notified in August when Universal Credit is going to be rolled out in the district.</p> <p>Spire Homes had not been allocating properties to under 35s who would be affected by the Local Housing Allowance Cap, but they have now agreed to continue to allocate until the cap comes into effect in April 2018.</p>	
5	Housing Policy Working Party Work Plan Review	
5.1	CC gave an overview of the work plan, highlighting current and future actions to be undertaken. It was agreed the work plan would be included with the minutes of the June 15 th meeting for the September P&R Committee meeting.	CC
5.2	Local Housing Company to be amended to ‘Property Investment Opportunities’. P&R committee had agreed to purchase 2 properties from a Registered Provider and had noted the options for their future use, the final decision to be delegated to a group of members and officers.	CC
5.3	A paper is to be brought to the next meeting of the HPWP in September with proposed options for members to consider in respect of gathering improved information on future housing mix requirements for the district. It was agreed that housing aspirations as well as housing needs should be considered and that links would need to be made with economic development.	CC, RP

	A report is to be taken to the Planning Policy Committee on the Local Plan Part 2. The consultation on the Local Plan can include questions on housing mix, needs and aspirations.	RP
6	Housing Allocations Policy Review	
6.1	Conflicts between Registered Provider and ENC policies	
6.2	<p>CC talked through this paper, highlighting several key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most nomination agreements provide for 75% nomination rights • For affordable stock provided as part of a larger market housing scheme, a S106 agreement will normally dictate 100% nominations • As part of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme Service Level Agreement, all properties advertised through Homes Direct are let in accordance with the council's allocations policy. This is causing problems where RP policies conflict with ENC policies, leading to nominations being refused by the RP • Kettering Borough Council lost an ombudsman's case in 2013 as their allocations policy was not robust enough to allow them to accept a refusal and provide another nomination. • LGSS advise that we need to make our allocations policy more robust in this regard, a point which was reinforced during the HPWP allocations training. • We cannot set a one size fits all policy as RPs have differing policies from each other. We risk losing properties from the CBL scheme if we do not take account of individual RP policies. 	
6.3	<p>Members were asked to consider 5 options and the pros and cons of each were discussed. It was agreed that none was ideal but that an amended Option 5 would be the best in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintain high levels of properties advertised through our CBL scheme, thereby maximising our ability to house our applicants • not leave the council open to a legal or Ombudsman challenge • be clear and transparent with applicants. <p>It was therefore agreed that we would continue to nominate successful applicants eligible under our allocations scheme to the Registered Provider. However it was accepted that applicants would also be assessed by the RP, using additional criteria in accordance with their own allocations policy, before accepting the nomination.</p>	

6.4	Local connections	
6.5	It was agreed that the current local connections criteria needed to be firmed up in terms of employment and family connections. It was considered that the definition of adult and child need to be determined in the policy.	
6.6	In respect of zero hours contracts, it was accepted it can be difficult to provide evidence of hours worked as proper payslips are not always issued to employees. It was agreed that applicants should try to provide evidence about hours worked but if they are unable to do so we will try to assist them with their application as best we can.	
6.7	<p>Armed forces personnel who are either currently serving, or who have served within the last 5 years, are exempt from the local connection criteria under housing legislation. ENC had already agreed to widen the definition of armed forces personnel from the government's definition to include members of the Royal Naval Reserve, the Territorial Army and the Royal Airforce Reserve where there has been active service of at least one year within the last 5 years. War widow(er)s of the personnel are also exempt</p> <p>ENC have signed the armed forces covenant and it was therefore felt unnecessary to make the forces provisions available to people who had served more than 5 years ago. It was however agreed to include civil partners in the criteria as well as widow(er)s.</p>	
6.8	<p>Right to move</p> <p>In 2015 the government introduced the Right to Move Regulations which allow existing social housing tenants to be allocated social housing in another LA area for work related reasons, provided that such a move will alleviate hardship.</p> <p>It was agreed that applicants accepted under Right to Move criteria should be placed in Band 2 unless their circumstances dictate a higher band in accordance with the allocations policy.</p> <p>The government guidance strongly encourages LAs to set a quota of 1% of properties that it expects to allocate under the Right to Move. However, as we only let approximately 375 properties per annum, this would only equate to 4 properties. In addition, we already accept applicants with a job or an offer of a job in the district. Direct nominations under a quota system would only remove the applicant's ability to choose which properties to bid for. Members therefore agreed that there is no need for a quota.</p> <p><i>SN and TB left meeting at 3.30pm</i></p>	

6.9	<p>Rural Housing</p> <p>Affordable housing in the villages principally comprises of former ENC stock which was transferred to Spire Homes or Rockingham Forest Housing Association. Some villages also have small developments that have been undertaken by a variety of Housing Associations on exception sites outside the village envelope.</p> <p>Details of the local connections required to be considered for these homes is contained in S106 legal agreements and the criteria are different from the District local connection criteria. Having two different policies for village properties (particularly where the properties may be on the same street) can create confusion for applicants, the Parish Council and indeed for both Housing Association and ENC staff.</p> <p>It was agreed that a section on Rural Housing would be included in the housing allocations policy, explaining that some rural properties may be subject to S106 criteria that are different from the District policy. Rural exception site applicants will be placed in Band X and will only be able to place bids on properties advertised in the particular village where they have the local connection.</p>	
7	Risk Review	
7.1	No further risks were identified	
8	Any other business	
8.1	<p>PB raised a concern about a possible duplication of the work of the Welfare Reform Sub-committee. However, it was not felt this was the case. HPWP members were advised of Welfare Reforms for information only, to enable them to consider any impact on decisions they made.</p> <p>CC advised that progress is being made with the Grenson's building in Rushden. An RP is interested in developing 14 x 2 bedroom flats. CC will bring a paper about the proposals to P&R Committee in September.</p>	CC
9	Next Meetings	
9.1	<p>It was agreed that future meetings should be held every 6 weeks.</p> <p>The next meeting will be held on 7 September at 2pm in the Kasen Room</p> <p>Future meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 October • 7 December 	
9.2	The meeting concluded at 3.50pm.	