



**Lewes District Council**

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## **Scrutiny Panel – Provision of Affordable Housing in Rural Areas**

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Panel – Provision of Affordable Housing in Rural Areas** held in the **Warren Room, Lewes House, 32 High Street, Lewes** on **Monday 31 October 2011 at 10:00am**

**Present:**

Councillors S J Osborne (Chair), S J Gauntlett, E C Merry and E E J Russell

**Officers Attending:**

R Allan, Scrutiny and Committee Officer

L Frost, Director of Planning and Environmental Services

L Rowe, Housing Policy and Development Manager

### **Minutes**

#### **1 Election of Chair**

Resolved:

- 1.1** That Councillor S J Osborne be elected Chair of the Scrutiny Panel – Provision of Affordable Housing in Rural Areas.

#### **2 Provision of Affordable Housing in Rural Areas**

The Panel considered the Provision of Affordable Housing Scoping Report. The Director of Planning and Environmental Services advised that he could make changes to the Report if required.

The Chair commented that the affordability of rents should be included within the Report as rents in rural area had risen, as well as other costs such as fuel prices.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Housing Policy and Development Manager advised the Panel that the term "affordable" in relation to housing could be deceptive but, as applied to this Review, it related solely to shared ownership and social housing. The Panel added that it was important to ensure that the housing needs of residents of all ages were considered as part of this Review.

The Panel queried the date on the Council's Housing Strategy which was dated 2009 and whether a more recent version had been produced. The Housing Policy and Development Manager advised that the Council's Housing Strategy was currently being reviewed and that he would ensure

the Panel was informed of any relevant changes to the new Strategy.

The Scrutiny and Committee Officer circulated a list of useful statistics on housing in Lewes District to Councillors, a copy of which is contained in the Minute Book. In response to a Councillor's question, the Director of Planning and Environmental Services advised that the census data was from 2001 and any updated census data was not available at present. However, he would be able to provide the Panel with some updated statistics from other agencies if they wished. The Housing Policy and Development Manager added that the data from Shelter was inaccurate and that the Panel could be provided with the correct statistics at their next meeting. Councillor Gauntlett offered his assistance in cross-checking any data to ensure its accuracy.

The Panel discussed the scope of the Review and commented that the use of a focus group to gain the views of those members of the community who were not current residents of new housing schemes, but had a housing need, could be included within the scope. It commented that the Citizen's Forum could be used to enlist members for this focus group.

The Director of Planning and Environmental Services explained that he had recently met representatives from the Homes and Communities Agency which specialised in affordable housing in rural areas. The Panel agreed that it would be useful for a representative from this agency to be invited to a future meeting of the Review.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Director of Planning and Environmental Services advised that the current percentage of affordable housing within new developments was 25%. He added that if a housing developer claimed to be unable to reach the 25% target for affordable housing due to viability of the development, the Council could ask the developer to undertake a viability assessment, which was then subject to independent vetting before a decision was made on the planning application. He explained that further viability work is currently being undertaken for the Local Development Framework, which could be brought to a future meeting of the Panel. He advised that, in some recent developments, more than 25% had been made available as affordable housing when units had not sold. The Housing Policy and Development Manager added that it was important that sustainability was considered and that an area should not be flooded with more housing than was required.

The Panel expressed its concern regarding the shortfall of affordable housing in rural areas. It added that in urban areas, multiple occupancy housing was a common occurrence but that had not occurred as frequently in rural areas. The Housing Policy and Development Manager added that some work had been undertaken to assess the best use of the housing stock in the District, but it was not specific to rural areas.

The Housing Policy and Development Manager took the Panel through the

types of affordable housing that could be developed in rural areas. He explained that affordable housing was categorised as either exception sites or homes delivered as part of the developer contribution,, and commented on the difference between the types. He added that there had been some successful exception schemes already built throughout the District.

The Director of Planning and Environmental Services explained how the Government's new Community Right to Build scheme could work within the District. He added that it was important to note that this was not restricted to housing and still had to take account of technical issues, such as access and flooding. The Housing Policy and Development Manager commented that the Community Land Trust Scheme was also an option available for the Panel to consider. Community Land Trusts were organisations that developed housing or other assets at permanently affordable levels for long-term community benefit. The Director of Planning and Environmental Services also added that this model had been used in other areas and could cover more than one parish. The Panel commented that it would be useful to know which areas had the potential for future schemes so as to establish which scheme could work well for the District.

The Panel commented that a possible hurdle to the provision of affordable homes in rural areas was the rise in rent levels. The Housing Policy and Development Manager explained that it was likely that the rise in rent levels would continue as newer housing developments charged higher rents due to the reduction in grant funding.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Housing Policy and Development Manager advised that the Council had approached landowners within the District and enquired whether their land could be used for the development of housing. The Director of Planning and Environmental Services added that there was a need for housing in villages.

The Scrutiny and Committee Officer circulated a draft list of potential stakeholders who could be consulted as part of the Review, a copy of which is contained in the Minute Book. The Panel suggested that Plumpton College, doctor's surgeries in rural locations, RDH Services, Shelter and landowners should be added to the list.

The Chair asked the Panel to consider whether this Review could co-opt members with particular expertise in this area. The Director of Planning and Environmental Services advised that specialist knowledge could be brought to the Review from representatives from the South Downs National Park Authority and Action in Rural Sussex.

The Scrutiny and Committee Officer circulated two draft questionnaires for the Panel to consider, copies of which are contained in the Minute Book. The draft questionnaires would be sent to residents and stakeholders in order to obtain their views on the provision of affordable housing in rural areas, along with an invitation to future meetings of the Review. The

Housing Policy and Development Manager commented that the questionnaires did not cover those organisations or businesses who were not direct stakeholders in the provision of affordable housing in rural areas, but could be affected by this issue. The Panel agreed that a third questionnaire could be written to reach those members of the community.

Resolved:

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| <b>2.1</b> | That the Scoping Report of the Provision of Affordable Housing in Rural Areas Scrutiny Review, as set out in Appendix A, be approved subject to the inclusion of the affordability of rents and the use of a stakeholder focus group;                     | S&CO           |
| <b>2.2</b> | That the draft questionnaires for stakeholders and residents be agreed and distributed to the relevant organisations on the stakeholders list;  | S&CO           |
| <b>2.3</b> | That the draft list of stakeholders be agreed, subject to the inclusion of Plumpton College, doctor's surgeries in rural locations, RDH Services, Shelter and landowners;   | S&CO           |
| <b>2.4</b> | That the Director of Planning and Environmental Services be requested to co-opt representatives from the South Downs National Park Authority and Action in Rural Sussex to join the Scrutiny Panel;   | DPES           |
| <b>2.5</b> | That the Housing Policy and Development Manager be requested to provide Councillors with updated statistics to replace the incorrect data from Shelter;   | HP&DM          |
| <b>2.6</b> | That the Director of Planning and Environmental Services be requested to invite a representative from the Homes and Communities Agency to a future meeting of the Panel; and  | DPES           |
| <b>2.7</b> | That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to draft a questionnaire, in consultation with the Housing Policy and Development Manager, to distribute to organisations who may be affected by the provision of affordable housing in rural areas. | S&CO/<br>HP&DM |

**3 Date of Next Meeting**

Resolved:

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| <b>3.1</b> | That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to arrange the next meeting of the Scrutiny Panel – Provision of Affordable Housing in Rural Areas to be held on either 24 or 26 January 2012, subject to the co-opted members availability; | S&CO |
| <b>3.2</b> | That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to arrange a site visit of the Scrutiny Panel – Provision of Affordable Housing in Rural Areas to be held on either 28, 30 November or 7 December  | S&CO |

- 2011, subject to East Hampshire District Council's availability; and
- 3.3** That the final meeting of the Scrutiny Panel – Provision of Affordable Housing in Rural Areas to held on 14 February 2012 in a venue to be notified by the Scrutiny and Committee Officer.

S&CO/All  
to note

The meeting ended at 11.55am

S J Osborne  
Chair