

Housing Working Party

**Minutes of a meeting held in the Telscombe Room, Southover House,
Southover Road, Lewes, BN7 1AB, on 4 April 2019 at 3.00pm**

Present:

Councillor Sharon Davy (Chair)

Councillors Mike Chartier, Johnny Denis, Steve Saunders, Richard Turner and Susan Murray

Officers in attendance:

Leighton Rowe (HEDP Development Project Manager)
Rebecca Wynn (Senior Specialist Advisor – Private Housing)
Gary Hall (Head of Homes First)
Jennifer Norman (Committee Officer)

Also in attendance:

Debbie Twitchen, Chair of Tenants of Lewes District
John Langley, Vice-Chair of Tenants of Lewes District

12 Chair on election

Resolved:

That Councillor Davy be elected Chair for the duration of the meeting.

13 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2018 were submitted and approved, and the Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

14 Apologies for absence/declaration of substitute councillors/declarations of interest

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor Ruth O’Keeffe MBE. Councillor Murray declared she was acting as substitute for Councillor O’Keeffe for the duration of the meeting.

15 Properties in the development pipeline and sustainability in new homes

The Working Party received a verbal update by the HEDP Development Project Manager in respect of projects in the housing development pipeline across Lewes District.

Discussion included:

- How outside contractors were procured. The Development Project Manager explained that procurement of many new capital projects was done through Clear Sustainable Futures. AECOM and Robertson Capital Projects came together with the Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Borough Council approximately two years ago to introduce a partnership in order to deliver sustainable developments within the District and Borough respectively. Currently there was a list of approved contractors ranging from large to small companies.
- If there was any requirement for local companies to be used in the first instance when delivering sustainable developments within the District. The Development Project Manager clarified that approved contractors were chosen on a number of factors including cost, but that he would ask for someone else to come back to the Working Party with a fuller briefing.
- The Development Project Manager confirmed that the Council was attempting to deliver sustainable developments with tangible targets and features, and that the Council had a checklist of targets that would measure the achievements of each scheme.
- The Working Party requested that an officer report be written regarding how contractors were procured, how sustainable developments were being delivered within the District, and other aspects as they related to the Development Projects. The Development Project Manager confirmed that further information would be provided to better inform the Working Party of how procuring contracts would work.
- The Head of Commercial Business or another nominated officer be invited to a future meeting of the Housing Working Party. Officers confirmed that they would extend an invitation.
- The Chair of Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD) highlighted how important it was to use as many sustainability measures as possible going forward and how the issue should be protected. The Project Development Manager clarified that a checklist was used when choosing a contractor, which formed part of the employer's requirement.

- An event scheduled to be held in June at Eastbourne Borough Council to promote building with natural and other sustainable materials. The Development Project Manager confirmed that he would liaise with the Head of Commercial Business to distribute literature to the Working Party prior to the event.

Resolved:

1. That the content of the verbal update be noted;
2. That the Head of Commercial Business be invited to a future meeting of the Housing Working Party; and
3. That further information regarding how contractors were procured, sustainable developments were being delivered within the District, and other aspects as they related to the Development Project be brought to a future meeting of the Housing Working Party.

16 Homes First

The Working Party received a presentation by the Head of Homes First (HHF) which gave an overview of Homes First and included challenges the Council faced, some of the Council's local responses and other areas detailed in the presentation. A hard copy of the presentation was distributed to all those present at the meeting and was published on the website as part of the agenda.

The Working Party requested that a tour was organised of council areas, including tower blocks, for incoming Members of the Housing Working Party. The HHF confirmed that this could be arranged.

The Working Party queried what stock, if any, was held by Brighton Housing Trust. The HHF agreed that he would look into the matter and report back.

The Working Party queried how people could get involved in the local inclusion programme, STEPS. The HHF responded that he would have a programme leaflet scanned and sent to the Working Party following the meeting.

The Working party queried whether it would be possible for the Council to host a forum for landlords due to new legislation and the issues surrounding homelessness. Officers responded that they would look into the issue and report back to the Working Party.

Resolved:

That the contents of the presentation be noted.

17 Private Sector Housing team

The Working Party received a presentation by the Senior Specialist Advisor (Private Housing) which provided an update on housing needs and standards across Lewes District.

The Senior Specialist Advisor (Private Housing) highlighted various changes that had occurred in relation to housing needs and standards since the Working Party's last meeting in October 2018:

- The new Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Policy had been submitted to and approved by Cabinet;
- The maximum DFG a household within the District could receive would be increased from £30k to £50k;
- There would be a £8k threshold before a means test was needed or if an adaptation included only one prescribed item. The Council would pay £8k worth of adaptations before a means test was initiated. In addition, a list of items referred to as 'the magic list' detailed adaptations which were now included before a means test was initiated;
- There were four additional aspects added to the DFG Policy which included home location, hardship DFG, feasibility assistance and hospital discharge grants; and
- The previous DFG Policy did not include financial assistance for private rented tenants. As part of the new policy, private landlords would now receive up to £2k to make rental properties more suitable.

Members requested, and Officers agreed, that a copy of the new DFG Policy along with 'the magic list' be distributed to the Working Party before its next meeting.

The Senior Specialist Advisor (Private Housing) informed the Working Party that as a result of the new DFG Policy, the Council was able to approve adaptations for an additional 12 families and that the Council had received positive letters of feedback from the families involved.

The Working Party thanked the Senior Specialist Advisor for all of her hard work.

Resolved:

That the contents of the presentation be noted.

18 Date of next meeting

Resolved:

That the next meeting of the Housing Working Party will be held due course after the May 2019 elections, on a date later to be agreed in consultation with the Chair, the Head of Homes First and the Committee Officer.

The meeting ended at 5.15pm.

Councillor Sharon Davy (Chair on election)