

Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cabinet** held in the **Warren Room, Lewes House, 32 High Street, Lewes** on **Tuesday, 17 April 2012** at 2.30pm

Present:

Councillor A T Jones (Chair)

Councillors R Blackman, P L Franklin, R K Maskell, I A Nicholson, H J F Sheppard and A X Smith.

In Attendance:

Councillor S J Osborne (Chair of the Scrutiny Committee)
Ms D Tideswell (Tenants' Representative).

Apologies received:

Councillors J V S Page and R Robertson
Councillor J N MacCleary (Leader of the Opposition Party)
Mr B Piper (Tenants' Representative).

Minutes

156 The Provision of Affordable Housing in Rural Areas

The Cabinet considered Report No 63/12 relating to the provision of affordable housing in rural areas, appended to which was a Report that had been prepared by the Scrutiny Panel which had been established in order to investigate such issue.

In June 2011, the Scrutiny Committee had highlighted that the provision of affordable housing in rural areas was an important issue in the District. Statistics had demonstrated the level of income required to purchase a home in the District, which led to many members of the local community struggling to access the housing market.

A Scoping report had been taken to the Scrutiny Committee in September 2011, a copy of which was set out at Appendix B to the Panel's Report, and a Panel of five councillors had been established to explore the issue in more detail.

Members of the Panel had undertaken significant work in engaging with residents, stakeholders and other local authorities in order to identify the issues that local communities faced in respect of affordable housing in rural areas. The Panel worked closely with Action in Rural Sussex and the South Downs National Park Authority, in order to investigate the issue, and with Hastoe Housing Association, a provider of affordable housing in rural areas, which contributed to the Review. The work of the Review was undertaken against the background of the Localism Act which brought a package of options with regard to the delivery of housing.

The Panel's Report set out details of the methodology and community engagement issues that had been employed during the Review including a visit to Chichester District Council which had a high record in the delivery of affordable housing in rural areas.

The main findings of the Review were:

- That the provision of affordable housing in rural areas was a priority in the District;
- Closer working with the South Downs National Park Authority to examine the scope for new planning policies to deliver a higher percentage, and a lower threshold, for provision of affordable housing in new private sector housing developments, would be welcomed;
- That Parish Councils welcomed the opportunity to work closely with the Council on the provision of affordable housing within their Parishes; and
- That the Council should work flexibly and explore various options to deliver affordable housing in rural areas.

The Panel had agreed a menu of possible policy initiatives as a result of the Review, details of which were set out on pages 12 to 15 of its Report. It had also agreed four recommendations for Cabinet to consider, details of which were set out on page 4 of its Report.

Cabinet was invited to note that some of the recommendations would also be beneficial for urban areas. However, if the scope of the Report was extended to such areas in the District, it might raise different issues in the provision of affordable housing.

The Director of Planning and Environmental Services, and the Chair of the Scrutiny Panel, Councillor Osborne, gave Cabinet a presentation and answered Councillors questions on matters relating to the Panel's work and its Report including the reasons for the review and how it was undertaken; matters relating to meeting housing need in rural areas; and the Panel's conclusions and recommendations.

Resolved:

- 156.1 That the Scrutiny Panel which was established to investigate the provision of affordable housing in rural areas, as detailed in Report No 63/12, be thanked for its work and Report in respect thereof; CHLDS (R Allan)
- 156.2 That the Scrutiny Panel's recommendations, as set out in Report No 63/12, be received and noted;
- 156.3 That the Scrutiny Panel be requested to either: (a) extend the scope of its Report to cover urban areas of the District; or (b) prepare a separate, parallel, Report on affordable housing provision in urban CHLDS (R Allan)

areas at the earliest opportunity, so as to provide a comprehensive, District-wide approach;

156.4 That the Scrutiny Panel's Report, and the policy initiatives identified by the Panel, be considered as part of the body of evidence to the emerging Core Strategy and that those policy initiatives which are not found within the emerging Core Strategy, be put forward as part of the Council's Nexus programme; and

DPES

156.5 That it be agreed in principle, subject to a Report thereon being made to a future meeting of Cabinet, that part of the sum of £70,000, as set aside in the Revenue Equalisation and Asset Maintenance Reserve for the undertaking of a private sector housing needs review, be utilised to undertake a housing needs survey.

DPES/DF

Reasons for the Decisions:

To enable the Council to consider whether any changes to its existing policies are necessary in order to improve the delivery of affordable housing in rural areas of the District.

To consider whether a District-wide approach is necessary, so that resources available for affordable housing delivery are used as effectively as possible in both rural and urban areas.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

That, following consideration of the menu of possible policy initiatives, as listed on pages 12 to 15 of the Scrutiny Panel's Report, specific policy initiatives be prioritised as a means of delivering affordable housing in rural areas (Scrutiny Panel's recommendations).

That the officers be instructed to carry forward the priority initiatives referred to above as part of a detailed and costed Action Plan for implementation (Scrutiny Panel's recommendation).

That consideration be given as to whether the Council wishes to set a target for the delivery of affordable housing in rural areas (Scrutiny Panel's recommendation).

That appropriate performance indicators be identified for the priority initiatives, so that their effect on service delivery can be assessed, and then reported to Councillors (Officer's recommendation).