

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Telscombe Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes** on **Thursday 23 October 2014** at **10.00am**

Present:

Councillors S J Osborne (Chair), P F Gardiner, S J Gauntlett, J M Harrison-Hicks, C R O’Keeffe, and I J White

Officers Present:

R Allan, Scrutiny and Committee Officer
L Rowe, Housing Policy and Development Manager
E Sheath, Head of Strategic Policy

In attendance:

Councillor P L Franklin
Councillor A T Jones

Minutes

26 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

27 Apologies

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors J V Harris, E E J Russell and J Stockdale.

28 Urgent Items

The Chair advised that she had agreed, in accordance with Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, that the Membership of the Scrutiny Committee be considered as a matter of urgency in order that the Committee could take its decisions based on the most recent information which was available.

29 Membership of the Scrutiny Committee

The Chair advised that Councillor D R Edmunds had tendered her resignation as a member of the Scrutiny Committee and, as Leader of the UKIP Group at the Council, had gifted her seat to a member of the Conservative Group. The Scrutiny and Committee Officer explained that a nomination for the vacant seat was currently being sought.

Resolved:

- 29.1** That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to update all members of the Scrutiny Committee with the name of the Councillor who had been nominated for the vacant seat on the Committee.

SCO

30 The Provision of Rural and Urban Housing – Update Report

The Committee considered Report No 152/14 which updated the Committee on the recommendations from the Scrutiny Reviews concerning the provision of rural and urban housing in the District.

The Housing Policy and Development Manager took the Committee through the Report. He explained that during 2011/12, a Panel of the Scrutiny Committee had undertaken a Scrutiny Review to examine the provision of affordable housing in rural areas. This review was extended in 2012/13 to the urban areas of the District. Both reports listed a series of recommendations, all of which were agreed by Cabinet.

The Committee considered the list of recommendations, as set out in Appendix A to the Report, and noted the progress that had been made. The Housing Policy and Development Manager advised that an assessment of affordable housing need had been undertaken across the District. He added that no individual Parish Housing Needs Surveys had been completed as further consultation work carried out since the Scrutiny Review had shown limited value in carrying them out across the District. He explained that the primary reason for this was that data provided through localised surveys had provided snapshot data that would become out of date in areas where there was no prospect that an affordable housing development would come forward within 5 years, as is the case in the majority of rural parishes. He further added that money had been put aside for work concerning housing needs in the District if required. The Head of Strategic Policy clarified to Councillors that this money could be used by Parishes to undertake housing needs surveys as part of their neighbourhood planning, but that other funding avenues should also be explored. The Housing Policy and Development Manager clarified that current housing statistics being used by the Council were also based on housing waiting lists.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Scrutiny and Committee Officer confirmed that the Protocol between the District and Parish Councils had been agreed by the Scrutiny Committee at a previous meeting, but had not been formally adopted by the Council.

The Committee questioned the number of agreed recommendations that had not been progressed due to the lack of officer capacity within the Council. The Head of Strategic Policy advised that other work had taken priority, but that the Council was still keen to progress the recommendations from the Reviews. He added that the Council could look to appoint a suitable officer to progress the recommendations, and that there was a potential budget, as part of the sum of money that Cabinet had previously set aside for implementation of the recommendations (and particularly Housing Needs Surveys), that could fund such a post if Cabinet members were in agreement.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Housing Policy and Development Manager explained that work had been undertaken to help bring empty houses back into use, but that there had been a low take-up on this due to market conditions, therefore the project had been closed down. He clarified that empty houses data was still being monitored.

The Head of Strategic Policy advised Councillors that work would be undertaken to publicise the issues arising from the lack of affordable housing in rural areas. He added that this work would be undertaken alongside colleagues in other departments of the Council, such as the Communications Team. The Committee suggested that the recent work in Plumpton, concerning the delivery of an affordable housing exception scheme, could be used as a good press story.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Housing Policy and Development Manager explained that a project had been presented to the Nexus Board which explored the financial viability of self-funded community schemes to provide social housing for the "downsizing elderly" and the "18-35s". He added that an update on this subject could be provided to members of the Committee if required.

The Head of Strategic Policy took the Committee through the recommendations that related to the urban housing scrutiny review. He explained that this work better fitted in with current priority projects being undertaken by the Council, and that as part of the work on the Core Strategy, a trajectory of projected new affordable housing completions for the District had been prepared.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Head of Strategic Policy explained that the target for affordable housing, as suggested as part of the urban housing review, had not been adopted as part of the Joint Core Strategy with the National Park Authority. He clarified how the Government's plans for minimum thresholds of schemes that could secure affordable housing could affect the projected number of new affordable homes in the District.

Resolved:

30.1 That the Housing Policy and Development Manager be requested to table the Parish Council Protocol document for agreement at an

HP&DM

	appropriate meeting of the Cabinet;	
30.2	That the Head of Strategic Policy, in consultation with the Lead Members for Strategy & Development and Service Delivery, be requested to identify appropriate resources and budget for the appointment of a fixed term contract to progress the recommendations from the urban and rural housing scrutiny reviews;	HSP
30.3	That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to work with the Communications Team to publicise the recent work on affordable housing in Plumpton;	SCO
30.4	That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to schedule a further update on the provision of affordable housing at a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in Spring 2015;	SCO
30.5	That the Housing Policy and Development Manager be requested to update all members of the Scrutiny Committee via email on the project concerning the exploration of the financial viability of self-funded community schemes to provide social housing for the “downsizing elderly” and the “18-35s”;	HP&DM
30.6	That the Head of Strategic Policy be requested to circulate a weblink to all members of the Scrutiny Committee with further information on the trajectory of affordable housing figures for the District;	HSP
30.7	That the Housing Policy and Development Manager be requested to update all members of the Scrutiny Committee via email on the self-build project at Lewes District Council; and	HP&DM
30.8	That a vote of thanks be accorded to officers for their excellent work on the provision of affordable housing in the District.	SCO
31	Date of Next Meeting	
	<u>Resolved:</u>	
31.1	That the next scheduled meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to be held on Thursday 13 November 2014 at 10.00am in the Telscombe Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes be noted.	All to note

The meeting ended at 11.20am

S J Osborne
Chair