



Lewes District Council

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Scrutiny Panel – Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Panel – Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas** held in the **Warren Room, Lewes House, 32 High Street, Lewes** on **Wednesday 12 September 2012 at 10:00am**

Present:

Councillors S J Osborne (Chair), P F Gardiner, J V Harris, I A Nicholson, E E J Russell and J Stockdale

Officers Attending:

R Allan, Scrutiny and Committee Officer
L Frost, Director of Planning and Environmental Services
L Rowe, Housing Policy and Development Manager

In attendance:

Councillor T Jones

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 Urban Areas.

2 Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas

The Director of Planning and Environmental Services took the Committee through the draft scope for the Review, and advised that he could make changes to the Report if required. He explained that the scope followed a similar template to the Scoping Report for the Scrutiny Review on rural housing, with changes made where necessary that reflected the distinct character of the urban areas of the District.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Director of Planning and Environmental Services advised how the levels of affordable housing within new developments were set, and highlighted that the Council had already been working flexibly with developers on levels of affordable housing. He added that as the Council had this flexibility built in, it was important to remain with the current level of required affordable housing. The Director of Planning and Environmental Services advised that it would also be important to consider the changes in the benefits structure as part of this

Review.

The Housing Policy and Development Manager explained that there had been a reduction in central Government grants in respect of affordable housing which may have led to a fall in the delivery of affordable housing within the District. He advised that it may be useful for a representative of the Guinness Partnership Housing Association to attend a future meeting of the Panel.

The Scrutiny and Committee Officer drew the Panel's attention to the two draft questionnaires for consideration. She advised that the Panel could hold evidence days with facilitated focus groups for roundtable discussion. This was in contrast to the rural housing review, which had been structured like a committee meeting. This would make the meeting more informal and less intimidating for members of the public. The Panel agreed and suggested that the Review held two evidence days, one in Lewes and one on the coastal strip of the District.

Councillors felt that it was important that any materials distributed as part of the Review contained a clear definition of what affordable housing was and a shortened version of the scope of the Review to ensure that the evidence days did not create false expectations for members of the public, as the public may wish to discuss other issues concerning housing that were outside the remit of this Review. The Housing Policy and Development Manager agreed that it was important that the Review was focussed and suggested that the letter that was sent to consultees had a clear, plain english definition of all terms. The Panel suggested that the Town and Parish Conference 2012 would be an excellent opportunity to engage Town Councils on this Review.

The Panel agreed that it was vital to ensure that the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) was fully included as part of this Review, and the Cabinet Member for Planning agreed to liaise with the Authority to provide appropriate nominations. The Chair proposed that members of the SDNPA could be co-opted onto the Panel.

The Director of Planning and Environmental Services advised that it was important to examine the resources required in order to increase the level of affordable housing in the District. The Housing Policy and Development Manager added that Wealden District Council had set up a group to examine affordable housing, and that it may be useful to contact them as part of this Review.

The Panel highlighted the importance of the consideration of transport issues as part of this Review, and that it would be useful to have more information on transport as part of the background information.

The Director of Planning and Environmental Services explained to Councillors how useful the visit to Chichester District Council in the previous Review in the Provision of Affordable Housing in Rural Areas had been. He

added that it would be important to visit a suitable authority as part of this Review.

The Scrutiny and Committee Officer drew the Panel's attention to the draft list of potential stakeholders who could be consulted as part of the Review. The Panel suggested that Lewes Prison, Age UK, Friends of Lewes, local churches and East Sussex County Council's Transport Department should be added to the list. The Chair added that it may be useful to circulate the list of potential stakeholders to all Councillors for suggestions of other useful groups to add to the list. She added that it was important that the relevant Ward Councillors were invited to meetings in their ward.

The Chair of the Panel thanked Councillor Tom Jones for his attendance at the meeting, and re-iterated the importance of a continued dialogue with Cabinet Members throughout the Review. The Director of Planning and Environmental Services added that it was important that the Review concluded with a workable series of recommendations to Cabinet.

Resolved:

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| 2.1 | That the Scoping Report of the Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas Scrutiny Review be approved; | S&CO |
| 2.2 | That the relevant officers be thanked for an excellent Scoping Report for the Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas Scrutiny Review; | S&CO |
| 2.3 | That the draft list of stakeholders be agreed, subject to the inclusion of Lewes Prison, Age UK, Friends of Lewes, local churches and East Sussex County Council's Transport Department; | S&CO |
| 2.4 | That the draft questionnaires for stakeholders and residents be agreed and that the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to distribute the questionnaires to the relevant organisations on the stakeholders list; | S&CO |
| 2.5 | That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to circulate the draft list of stakeholders to all Councillors for suggestions of additional relevant stakeholders; | S&CO |
| 2.6 | That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to liaise with the Cabinet Member for Planning to invite a relevant member from the South Downs National Park Authority to a future meeting of the Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas Scrutiny Panel; | S&CO |
| 2.7 | That the Housing Policy and Development Manager be requested to invite a representative from the Guinness Partnership Housing Association to a future meeting of the Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas Scrutiny Panel; | HP&DM |

2.8	That the Housing Policy and Development Manager be requested to provide a clear description of affordable housing to members of the public taking part in the Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas Scrutiny Review;	HP&DM
2.9	That the Director of Planning and Environmental Services be requested to ensure that information on the Provision of Affordable Housing in Rural Areas Scrutiny Review and the Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas Scrutiny Review are included as part of the Town and Parish Conference 2012; and	DPES
2.10	That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to invite the relevant Ward Councillor to a meeting of the Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas Scrutiny Panel if held in their ward.	S&CO
3	Date of Next Meeting	
	<u>Resolved:</u>	
3.1	That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to arrange two meetings of the Scrutiny Panel – Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas to be held on 19 and 28 November 2012 in a venue to be notified by the Scrutiny and Committee Officer; and	S&CO
3.2	That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to inform the relevant Cabinet Members of the dates of the next two meetings of the Scrutiny Panel – Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas.	S&CO

The meeting ended at 11.30am

S J Osborne
Chair