

## **STRATEGIC HOUSING PANEL**

### **MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 10 JUNE 2014 AT 2:00pm**

Present: Councillors Lena Hogg (Chairman); Geoff Garrity; Reg Heathcote and Peter Stephenson.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor John Bowman, Alan Jacob and Paul Whalley.

Officers: Debbie Cochrane, Housing Services Manager and Clive Willoughby, Member Services Technical Support Officer.

Julie Betteridge, Head of Customer and Community Services (for Items 8, 9, 10 & 11)

#### **SH 01/14 Minutes**

**RESOLVED** - That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2014 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

#### **SH 02/14 Appointment of Deputy Chairman**

It was moved by Councillor Lena Hogg, duly seconded and

**RESOLVED** – that Councillor Peter Stephenson be appointed Deputy Chairman of this Panel for the current municipal year.

#### **SH 03/14 Appointment to Outside Bodies**

It was proposed and

**RESOLVED** – that Councillors Lena Hogg and Alan Jacob be appointed to the Home Steering Group.

Councillor Lena Hogg was also appointed as Homelessness Champion.

#### **SH 04/14 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Peter Stephenson declared a non-pecuniary interest in all Agenda items which referred to Home Group due to being a Home Group tenant.

#### **SH 05/14 Discretionary Housing Payment Outcomes**

The Housing Services Manager provided Members with an overview of the Discretionary Housing Payments scheme which exists to deal with situations where normal Housing Benefit does not cover all the rent due or to allow claimants to reduce the amount of their rental liability.

The Panel was advised that Council was awarded £93,263 from Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for the year 2013/14 to allocate to tenants under the Discretionary Housing Payments scheme and that this fund was held by the Revenue and Benefits team to whom applications are made direct.

During the year 2013/14, there were 367 successful awards and 196 refusals. The refusals were mainly because the claimant was considered to have sufficient income to pay any rent shortfall or because they did not supply sufficient evidence for an award to be made.

It was noted that for 2014/15, the DCLG award for Discretionary Housing Payments had increased to £171,911 and it was anticipated that the full amount would be spent.

During the discussion that followed, Members enquired if the administration of these payments would be better sited within the Housing Department and Councillor Geoff Garrity , as Executive Member for Community Planning, was asked to investigate and report back to this Panel.

**RESOLVED** – That

- a) The report be noted, and
- b) Councillor Geoff Garrity , as Executive Member for Community Planning, be asked to investigate the possible re-siting of the administration of Discretionary Housing Payments within the Housing Department and report back to this Panel.

#### **SH 06/14 Universal Credit and Rented Housing**

The Housing Services Manager provided Members with a brief overview of how Universal Credit will affect tenants in social rented housing and the providers of social rented housing with the anticipated introduction of Universal Credit in Copeland later this year.

Particular attention was drawn to the fact that Claimants would be paid monthly in arrears.

It was also stated that a number of projects are already underway with various partners including Home Group, Citizens Advice Bureau and Credit Union.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be noted.

#### **SH 07/14 Strategic Housing Market Assessment Refresh 2014**

The Head of Customer and Community Services advised Members that the Council undertook a full borough-wide housing survey in 2009/10 and published its Strategic Housing Market Assessment based on the survey evidence in 2010.

A refresh of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment is required every 4-5 years.

It was proposed that a refresh be undertaken in 2014 and commission some specific research to enable evidence and more detailed understanding of the temporary housing needs arising from the increased nuclear sector activity including planning for new build.

The refresh would be undertaken from June to October 2014 and would include Updating baseline housing needs and affordable housing requirements; Reviewing the general strategic housing market context and emerging issues; and Stakeholder consultation with partners and using existing partnership routes specifically the Copeland Housing Partnership and the Copeland Partnership framework.

Members were advised that draft reports from these activities would be presented to the Strategic Housing Panel on 9 September 2014, before finalising the final draft refreshed Strategic Housing Market Assessment document.

It was therefore suggested that Chris Hoban, Senior Planning Policy Officer, be invited to that meeting.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be noted.

#### **SH 08/14 Service Plan**

The Housing Services Manager provided Members with an overview of the Housing Services - Service Plan 2014.

Members were reminded of the five key elements which comprise the strategic housing role, being:-

- Assess and plan for the current and future housing needs of the local population across all tenures.
- Make the best use of existing housing stock.
- Plan and facilitate new supply.
- Plan and commission housing support services which link homes and housing support.
- Work in partnership to secure effective housing and neighbourhood management on an on-going basis.

The customer profile was then outlined followed by the Housing team's achievements for the year 2013/14 and the service objectives for 2014/15.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be noted.

**SH 09/14 Performance Monitoring Report**

Members received a report informing them of the Housing Department’s operational activity during the year 2013/14, including Disabled facilities Grants; unfit Housing; Empty Properties; Immigration Inspections; Overcrowding; Developing the Landlord Forum; Homeless Applications; Housing Advice, Rent Deposits; Homeless Prevention and Domestic Violence.

With regard Housing Advice, there were 479 requests made, which was an increase on the previous year.

There were 29 rent deposits provided during 2013/14.

The number of full homeless applications taken decreased to 68, compared with 184 in the previous year.

There were 152 referrals for Disabled Facilities Grants. Of these, the majority are owner occupiers. This is the third consecutive year applications have increased.

35 inspections of Unfit Properties were undertaken, which was a small reduction on the previous year.

During the discussion that followed, Members asked if Home Group’s survey of housing stock regarding disabled facilities could be made available and the Housing Services Manager suggested a report on this be brought to a future meeting of this Panel.

Members also suggested that the information provided in this report be put in table form and included in the Performance Indicators.

The Strategic Housing Panel passed on their thanks to all members of the Housing Department for their hard work.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 3:30pm

Chairman .....

Date .....