

SPECIAL STRATEGIC HOUSING PANEL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 8 DECEMBER 2011 at 9:30am

Present: Councillors George Clements (Chairman); Alan Jacob; Sam Pollen; Peter Stephenson and Paul Whalley.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jon Downie and Reg Heathcote

Officers: Laurie Priebe, Housing Services Manager; Kate Skillicorn, Housing Research & Policy Officer and Clive Willoughby, Member Services Technical Support Officer.

SH 26/11 Minutes

RESOLVED - That the Minutes of the meetings held on 18 October 2011 and 15 November 2011 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

SH 27/11 Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

None.

SH 28/11 Outcomes from Special Meeting of the Strategic Housing Panel on 15 November 2011

The Housing Services Manager provided Members with a verbal update following the special meeting of this panel held on 15 November 2011.

It was highlighted that the relevant section of the Localism Act has yet to have an effective from date specified. Once known there will be twelve months in which to implement the changes.

With regard Social Housing Finance, Members and Officers both felt the input from the social housing providers had been very useful. It was stated that the 2012/13 Copeland Housing Strategy was being worked on and will be brought at the earliest opportunity to a future meeting of this Panel.

It was also stated that a special meeting of the strategic Housing Panel would be arranged for January 2012 to review Choice Based Lettings.

RESOLVED – That the verbal update be received.

SH 29/11 Cumbria Housing Strategy

The Panel considered a draft report on the Cumbria Housing Strategy 2011-2015.

The significance of the Cumbria Housing Strategy was emphasised in that it provides a framework within which Copeland, our partners and neighbours seek to attract investment and collaborate to improve housing conditions for our communities Cumbria-wide and within the Borough.

Also by engaging with the Cumbria Housing Group and Housing Strategy Copeland is well placed to argue the case for investment in the Borough by the HCA, developers and Partners, some of whom operate across Cumbria and the wider North West.

During the discussion that followed, Members stated that they felt this was a good document and thanked the Officers who had worked on it.

RESOLVED – That the Cumbria Housing Strategy 2011-2015 report be accepted and recommended to Executive for their endorsement.

SH 30/11 A Housing Strategy for England

The Housing Services Manager introduced to the Panel, for information, the Executive Summary of “Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy For England” and advised Members that the full document was available in the Members Room.

The section of the report stating areas where the Government is taking immediate action to get the housing market moving was highlighted and includes:

- Supporting a new build indemnity scheme led by the Home Builders Federation and Council of Mortgage Lenders to provide up to 95% loan to value mortgages for new build properties in England, backed by a Housebuilder Indemnity Fund.
- Consulting on a proposal to allow reconsideration of those planning obligations agreed prior to April 2010 where development is stalled.
- The establishment of a £500 million Growing Places Fund which will support infrastructure that unblocks housing and economic growth.
- Launching a £400 million ‘Get Britain Building’ Investment Fund.
- Freeing up public sector land with capacity to deliver up to 100,000 new homes with Build Now, Pay Later deals.
- Supporting and encouraging more individuals to build their own homes through a Custom Homes programme

RESOLVED – That the Housing Strategy for England report be noted.

SH 31/11 The Green Deal & Energy Company Obligation

The Housing Services Manager introduced to the Panel, the Executive Summary of “The Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation” consultation document. Members were again advised that the full document was available in the Members Room.

During the discussion that followed, Members generally felt this was a good document and were keen to support it.

It was stated that the consultation period expired in January 2012 and therefore, due to the tight timescales, it was suggested that a small group be established to respond to the consultation and report back to the Strategic Housing Panel.

It was suggested that the group consist of Councillor George Clements (Strategic Housing Panel Chairman), Councillor Alan Holliday (Portfolio Holder), Tom Barlow (Cumbrian Warmer Homes Project) and Officers Laurie Priebe, Julie Betteridge, Kate Skillicorn and Rachel Osborn.

RESOLVED – That

- a) the overview of the Green Deal & Energy Company Obligation be received, and
- b) a small group comprising of Councillor George Clements (Strategic Housing Panel Chairman), Councillor Alan Holliday (Portfolio Holder), Tom Barlow (Cumbrian Warmer Homes Project) and Officers Laurie Priebe, Julie Betteridge, Kate Skillicorn and Rachel Osborn, be set up to respond to the consultation.

SH 32/11 Bringing Empty Homes back into use: HCA bidding guidance

The Panel considered the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) document “Bringing Empty Homes back into use Bidding Guidance” and were further updated by the Housing Strategy Manager following an HCA briefing held on 6 December 2011.

During the discussion that followed, Members asked for figures relating to the number of homeless families in Copeland in 2011. These were not available at the meeting and would be provided to Members by the Housing Strategy team.

Members also asked for further information regarding the ‘Homesteading Scheme’, where residents (or future residents) contribute their labour in exchange for a reduced rent or (in a shared ownership scheme) an increase in the share they own in the property. At this time further information was not available.

At this point, it was made clear who would be eligible to bid for funding and that the Assessment Criteria would be: Value for Money; Meeting local priorities; Equality & Diversity; Deliverability and Build Standards. It was noted that no money would be provided up front, all monies would be paid on completion.

It was noted that the three main Housing Associations in Copeland had been invited to share their thoughts with the Housing Services Manager and would be encouraged to bid before the deadline of noon on 23 January 2012.

It was stated that there are currently approximately 700 empty homes in Copeland in the private sector and that a report on this would be brought to the next meeting of this Panel.

The Housing Services Manager stated that he was also chasing other providers/Cumbrian authorities for their Empty Homes policy and this would be a topic for the February meeting of this Panel.

RESOLVED – That Bringing Empty Homes back into use: HCA bidding guidance report be noted.

SH 33/11 Supporting People Update

The Housing Services Manager provided a verbal update on Supporting People and advised that a written report would follow. This would be circulated to all Members and would include a basic overview for new Members of the Panel.

It was suggested that a Special Strategic Housing Panel meeting be arranged to discuss this subject.

RESOLVED – That the Supporting People update be noted.

The meeting closed at 12.05pm

Chairman

Date