

Housing & Health Advisory Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 4 June 2024 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Harrison (Chairman)

Cllr. Perry Cole (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Bulford, Camp, Clack, G. Darrington, Edwards-Winsler, Gustard, Hudson, Manston and Scott

Cllr. P. Darrington was also present.

1. Appointment of Chairman

Resolved: That Cllr Harrison be appointed as Chairman of the Housing and Health Advisory Committee 2024/2025.

(Cllr Harrison in the Chair).

2. Appointment of Vice Chairman

Resolved: That Cllr Perry Cole be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Housing and Health Advisory Committee for the year 2024-2025.

3. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the Meeting of the Advisory Committee held on 23 January 2024 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4. Declarations of Interest

No additional declarations of interest were made.

5. Actions from Previous Meetings

There were none.

6. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder advised that the new health centre, in Edenbridge had been well received by residents and users. Quercus Housing had purchased eight new units at the Stangrove Estate and two at Solefields which would be provide affordable housing in the District.

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The Landlord's Forum had taken place and it was a very successful evening with existing and prospective landlords in attendance. It was hoped that a number of new properties would be coming forward from the private sector.

The Portfolio Holder was leading on early discussions with a company called, Two Generations, which matches people who live alone (typically older people or those with disabilities) and have a spare room, with younger people who can provide an overnight presence, companionship and some help with household chores. Safeguarding considerations were addressed through the application process. He advised that these conversations were still in early stages, but would also support wellbeing needs.

New funding had been received from the Dartford Gravesham and Swanley, Health and Care Partnership, and more details would be shared with how the funding would be used to address health needs in the northern parishes of the District.

7. Referrals from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none.

8. Sevenoaks District Health & Wellbeing Action Plan 2024/25

The Health and Communities Manager presented their report which set out the actions that would be undertaken to deliver the health targets. The Action plan had a focus on improving the overall health of residents (both physical and mental). The action plan set out Partnership activity aimed at addressing the priorities. It was a multi-agency document and was monitored on a quarterly basis to ensure that actions were on target and were helping to meet the identified success measures.

Members discussed the report and asked for clarification regarding some of the acronyms used within the report.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet to approve the Sevenoaks District Health & Wellbeing Partnership Action Plan 2024-2025, subject to clarification of the acronyms.

9. Housing Allocation Policy Review

The Head of Housing presented the report for the draft Housing Allocation Policy 2024-2027 which had been revised following the feedback from the recent consultation. She thanked the Portfolio Holder and Deputy Portfolio Holder for their

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support in the development of the revised Policy and Members for their involvement in the consultation and feedback.

As a Local Housing Authority, the Council had a statutory duty to publish a Housing Allocations Policy for assessing and prioritising applications for social housing to determine who can join the housing register and the criteria to determine the priority banding of each application, and how to make bids through the Kent HomeChoice.

Making changes to the Housing Allocations Policy required a period of consultation and the report set out the results of the consultation. The Housing Allocations Policy had been amended to reflect the changes and the draft was attached at Appendix 1.

The proposed changes would ensure that the Policy made the most effective use of the social housing that became available. The supply of social homes was limited. Members were provided with the number of people on the housing register and its comparison to previous years. Currently, there were 977 on the housing register. On average for this financial year there were only 13 lets of per month, a reduction from 16 from the last financial year coming forward from Registered Providers.

The Officer summarised the changes to the Bands and the bidding requirements and highlighted that the suspension period from the Housing Register would reduce from 12 months to 6 months.

Members discussed the report with a particular focus on 'suitable accommodation', and whether this included consideration for location of schools, work and support networks. Members were advised that the Policy set out what was considered when deciding if accommodation offered was suitable. The Council operated a Choice Based system and applicants chose which properties to bid on unless the applicant had been placed on autobid. Members were reminded that the banding system would ensure that those with the highest, immediate need for homes were given that option first.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet,

- a) the feedback from the consultation exercise, be noted.
- b) the revised draft of the Housing Allocations Policy 2024-2027, be considered; and
- c) subject to the inclusion of the definition of 'suitable accommodation' the draft of the Housing Allocation Policy 2023 - 2027, be considered for adoption at Full Council on 25 July 2024.

10. Housing Standards in the Private Rented Sector

The Head of Housing presented the report which provided an update on the Housing Standards within the Private Sector and the work of the Private Sector Housing Team.

The Private Sector Housing Team worked with tenants, landlords and internal and external providers to bring about a variety of improvements to private rented properties to meet standards. They provide guidance and assistance in the first instance and carried out enforcement action in line with current legislation, and the Council's Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy where necessary.

Members discussed the report. In response to questions, Members were advised that all issues raised had been resolved at the informal stage working with tenants and landlords where necessary. The Chief Officer, People and Places advised that as part of the Council's approach to making every contact count, the initial conversations could then highlight other issues to which the Council would work with wider agency partners where necessary. In response to a question regarding Disabled Facility Grants, the additional information would be circulated.

Action: For Head of Housing to provide information on Disabled Facility Grants, including the amount available through the grants, and examples of grants provided.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

11. Rural Exceptions and Local Needs Housing

The Head of Housing presented the report which provided an overview of the definition of rural exceptions and local needs housing. It set out within Appendix A the designated protected areas. Rural Exceptions Housing Schemes were small developments of normally less than 10 homes built in response to an independently assessed evidence need and in a location where planning would not normally be permitted. The homes would be for local people in perpetuity to enable them to stay in their community, maintaining the networks they had built in the area.

Members were advised that funds were required to continue with the Rural and Community Housing Enabling (RACE) service beyond April 2025. RACE was an independent service that worked with communities and Parish Councils to identify where action needs to be taken to meet the local housing needs.

Members discussed the report. In response to a question regarding the number of units in West Kingsdown, Members were advised that survey had deemed that there was a higher need and this was able to be delivered by the housing provider.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

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12. Work Plan

The work plan was noted with the following additions:

Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 1 year on update

Health and wellbeing Strategy quarter 4 monitoring

Future item: Empty Homes.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.18 pm

CHAIRMAN