

Housing and Public Protection Policy Development Advisory Group
27 MARCH 2017

Present: Councillors: Philip Circus (Chairman), Andrew Baldwin, Alan Britten, Matthew French, Nigel Jupp, Paul Marshall, Mike Morgan, Jim Sanson and David Skipp

Apologies: Councillors: Toni Bradnum and Ben Staines

Also Present:

16 **TO APPROVE THE NOTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Group approved the notes of the meeting held on 17th November 2016.

17 **FOOD HYGIENE RATING SCHEME - COST RECOVERY FOR REQUESTED RE-INSPECTIONS**

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager attended the meeting to inform Members of the proposal to implement a charge for requested Food Hygiene Rating Scheme re-inspections.

Food Standard Agency (FSA) laid down a national scheme to rate the food hygiene of premises, if a business did not receive a top rating it could request a re-evaluation for a higher rating to be obtained. The FSA had recently reconsidered its position on not charging for re-evaluations and it had advised that in future local authorities could recover costs for the re-inspections.

The officers in Environmental Health had calculated costs of re-inspections at a flat rate of £145.00 and were looking to implement these charges from 3rd April 2017.

This did not included cases where a business had appealed against its first rating.

There was currently no power to enforce a business to display its food hygiene rating, but this might change in the future.

There were approximately 10-12 re-inspections carried out by Environmental Health Officers at Horsham each year.

Under the new provisions, the FSA stated that re-inspections should be carried out within three months of the first inspection, but before a re-inspection would be carried out by officers, the business would need to demonstrate that improvements had been made.

The rating of a business was based on many elements, including management, staff training and food management plans.

Some Members questioned whether the proposed rate was too low, but this figure had been based on cost calculations, i.e. officer's time, the FSA only permitted the local authority to cover costs under the charging scheme and not to make a profit.

Members discussed whether there should be any exemptions to the charges, i.e. charities. But it was agreed that all businesses providing food should adhere to the standards and a low rating would be cause for concern in any situation, therefore there should not be any exceptions.

Overall the Group supported the proposal to implement the charges for re-inspections and the Group agreed that the Cabinet Member should write to the Secretary of State and to the local MPs to express their support to bring forward the proposals to enforce the legal requirement for businesses to display their food hygiene rating.

18 **HOUSING WHITE PAPER - "FIXING OUR BROKEN HOUSING MARKET"**

The Director of Community Services attended the meeting to discuss the Housing White Paper – "Fixing our broken housing market" from a housing perspective.

There were two main aspects of the White Paper, planning and housing, but it was mainly driven by changes to the planning system. It was recognised that there was a significant deficit between the supply and demand of affordable housing. It was felt that the White Paper did not provide many solutions to aid the Council in discharging its statutory housing duties (homelessness and the Housing register), but it did emphasise the need for more houses to be built in order to help close the gap.

The Director of Community Services provided Members with a brief overview and some statistics detailed in the Paper.

Affordability was a key issue; this was particularly a problem in the South East, with local housing in the district costing between 10 to 14 times more than the average salary. Due to a very limited private rented sector, local rents were pitched very high.

According to the Paper there was plenty of available land in the country, only 11% of the country had been built upon. There were proposals to introduce transparency around land ownership i.e. to provide reasons associated with plots of land and why they had not been built on, this would aid sites to be quickly identified along with reasons as what was stopping sites coming forward for development. The idea being discussions could happen with land owners to

bring forward or unblock issues e.g. Lack of infrastructure, land contamination etc.

The White Paper also raised elements such as:

- Introducing longer tenancy agreements by, extending these to three years in order to provide protection to families.
- Changing the definition of affordable housing: To include a range of low-cost housing opportunities for those aspiring to own a home, including starter homes. And to introduce a household income eligibility cap of £80,000 (£90,000 for London) on starter homes.
- Charges on second homes though Community Housing Fund Payments.
- Encouraging LAs to introduce new housing ventures e.g. Local housing companies which could deliver forms of affordable housing, although the Government had confirmed that if products feel like, and look like social housing then Right to buy policies would apply.
- New powers for Councils to deal with the worst landlords..
- Continuing a crackdown on empty homes which re-enforced measures already set out in the Councils 'Empty Homes Strategy'.
- Exploring further how to remove the barriers to help older people to move at the right time.
- Do more to prevent homelessness by supporting households at risk before they reach crisis point and will increase the obligations upon Council to help all homeless households – by pushing through the Homelessness Reduction Bill.

The Council's Housing Needs Survey was considered vital evidence base for the officers to assess the needs of the housing in the District.

The Group noted that the White Paper would not have much of an impact on the Council from a statutory housing perspective; it would not have much impact on reducing the number of people on the Council's housing register or those in temporary accommodation. Although some of the planning tools referred to in the White Paper might bring forward more schemes which could include affordable housing and unblock sites in the future.

There was some S106 commuted sums money available that could be used to buy accommodation and recently this had been used to purchase temporary accommodation (x17 units) by way of a new build in Bishopric, which would be used to reduce the number of homeless sent to Bed and Breakfast.

The Director of Community Services was asked to provide figures on the number of affordable housing units that had been delivered over the last two years.

The Cabinet Member was due to attend a 'think tank' meeting to discuss the Paper, he would meet with the Director separately ahead of the meeting.

The meeting closed at 6.50 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN