

MINUTES of a meeting of the POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on WEDNESDAY, 8 MARCH 2017

Present: Councillor M Specht (Chairman)

Councillors N Clarke, J Cotterill, T Eynon, J Geary, D Harrison, G Hault, V Richichi, A C Saffell and N Smith

In Attendance: Councillors R Johnson and J Legrys

Portfolio Holders: Councillors R D Bayliss and T J Pendleton

Officers: Mr C Brown, Mr P Collett, Mr A Hunkin, Mr G Jones, Mr J Richardson and Mrs R Wallace

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

27. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor N Clarke declared a non pecuniary interest in item 5 – Review of Small Grants as the Chairman of the Agar Nook Community Association which had received small grants in the past.

28. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

No questions were received.

29. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting on 11 January 2017.

It was moved by Councillor D Harrison, seconded by Councillor A C Saffell and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2017 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

30. REVIEW OF SMALL GRANTS

The Interim Director of Resources presented the report to Members and referred to the topic suggestion form at appendix one which detailed the item request in full. He suggested that the Policy Development Group receive an annual report that sets out the small grants awarded and that Members could select a manageable number of recipients to invite to a future meeting.

As the Community Services Portfolio Holder was unable to attend, Councillor N Smith addressed the meeting on her behalf. He explained that she was fully in support of the proposals as it was important to monitor the use of public money. He added that the Community Services Portfolio Holder had been informed recently that a group had not been truthful when applying for a grant and was now investigating with officers. As the topic had been raised by Councillor T Eynon, the Community Services Portfolio Holder was happy to have a discussion with her regarding the issues.

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Councillor T Eynon thanked the Community Services Portfolio Holder for the invitation. She was happy with the proposals but suggested that groups be informed about the possible invite to Committee on application so that they were aware of the process.

Councillor J Geary thanked Councillor T Eynon for raising the item for Member discussion. He expressed concerns that the meetings were time limited and speaking to the groups could take up a large part of the meeting, also that the possibility of being invited in to speak to Members may put off some applicants. The Interim Director of Resources believed that a restriction of 10 minutes for group presentations would be manageable within the current work plan.

In response to a question from Councillor J Geary, the Head of Community Services reported that there was approximately 40 small grants awarded each year.

Councillor D Harrison commented that at a past Audit and Governance Committee meeting, Members were made aware of how fragile some of the grant application processes were. He asked if the processes had been improved. The Head of Community Services stated that processes had been reviewed just under a year ago and the decision taken to streamline applications to encourage take up, however there were still due diligence checks for areas such as having bank accounts and constitutions.

By affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT:

- (a) A report be considered by the Policy Development Group annually setting out the small grants awarded throughout the year and a manageable number of grant recipients be considered for invitation to future meetings to discuss how the grant had been spent.
- (b) The annual report for small grants awarded in 2016/17 be considered at the next meeting of the Policy Development Group on 28 June 2017.

31. REVIEW OF HOUSING POLICIES

The Head of Housing presented the report to Members, explaining that policies were periodically reviewed and updated to provide officers with a framework for delegated decision making when delivering services. He then went through each of the four policies in turn.

Anti Social Behaviour Policy

Councillor J Geary referred to the management of complaints at section five of the policy and suggested that the timeframe specified should be '3 working days' rather than 'earliest possible time' as he believed it was too loose. It would also then be aligned with other timeframes specified within the policy. The Head of Housing was happy to put the change to Cabinet when the policy was considered.

Councillor N Smith asked what the process would be if a tenant was dissatisfied with the response from an officer and how it would be resolved. The Head of Housing stated that differences were often irreconcilable regarding the outcome but officers do all that they could. If a tenant was dissatisfied with how an issue had been handled then the corporate complaint process could be followed. He confirmed that the aim of the policy was to make it clear what could and could not be done.

In response to a question from Councillor D Harrison, the Head of Housing explained that as part of the sign up process, all new tenants were informed of their rights and

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responsibilities which included anti social behaviour. He also added that all new tenants had an introductory tenancy for the first twelve months which made it easier for the authority to evict them from the property if there were any significant problems.

Councillor N Clarke asked if concentrating resources on the more high profile cases, better results were expected and if so how the resolutions of the cases would be monitored. The Head of Housing commented that it was always challenging to monitor the outcomes of anti social behaviour cases as people could sometimes be left unsatisfied due to not receiving their desired outcome, which was often unrealistic, despite the officers doing all that they could legally do. The proposed policy meant that officers could be more specific about what could or could not be done and to listen to what people wanted to achieve, before offering realistic advice. He added that tenant satisfaction surveys would gauge how satisfied residents were with the anti social behaviour service, plus other tenant feedback would be monitored in order to learn and improve.

Tenancy Policy

In response to a question from Councillor J Geary, the Head of Housing advised that the appropriate support agencies referred to in section 3.5 of the report in relation to vulnerable tenants were a Nottingham Community HA Support Service as well as housing officers. There was also specialist support available from other agencies.

Councillor J Clarke referred to the major change coming to tenants regarding the introduction of fixed term tenancies, which would mean the loss of secure tenancies for a high number of people within his constituency. He asked if a report could be brought back to the committee once the government's guidance had been released in the autumn. The Director of Housing was happy to bring a further report on the subject to committee and commented that it would be interesting to see how much discretion the authority would have on the issue.

Compensation Policy

Councillor T Eynon found the language used confusing and it was not clear until later in the document that there was a standard set of payments applied to some issues. The Head of Housing agreed to look into the language used to ensure clarity.

Homeless Duty

Councillor J Geary suggested that the fourth paragraph under the background section of the policy relating to former arrangements under which private rented properties could be turned down in order to wait for a council property be re-written as it was very unclear.

Councillor N Clarke asked why the decent home standard was not referred to in the suitability of accommodation section of the policy. The Head of Housing explained that there was a lot more to the decent home standard than was needed for this policy but it had not yet been thought necessary to roll it out nationally to the private sectors. Therefore the policy mirrored the decent home standard to a certain extent without actually making reference to it. Councillor J Clarke stated that he just wanted reassurances that people would be given a decent standard of home. The Head of Housing assured Members that officers do all they can to ensure a decent standard of home and there were checks in place. He also reminded Members that tenants would not be paying the local authority rent in these cases, it would be paid to the private landlord, as the authority was just discharging its homelessness duty.

In response to a question from Councillor M Specht, the Head of Housing explained that tenants who were entitled to benefits in these instances would apply in the usual way and once housing benefit was received the rent would need to be passed on to the landlord themselves. These changes in who the benefit was paid to were a result of the soon to be introduced universal credit.

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In response to a question from Councillor N Smith, the Head of Housing explained that the rent was set by the landlord and as there was a limit on the amount of housing benefit that could be claimed, the tenant would have to make up the difference if the rent was above the benefit received.

It was moved by Councillor J Geary, seconded by Councillor D Harrison and

RESOLVED THAT:

Comments provided by the Committee be considered by Cabinet when discussing the report at its meeting on 25 April 2017.

32. DRAFT SAFER NORTH WEST COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY 2017-20

The Head of Community Services presented the report to Members, highlighting the three themes for 2017-20 of the Safer North West Community Safety Partnership detailed at paragraph 2.3.

The Stronger and Safer Communities Team Manager went through the three proposed priority areas for the action plan from the strategic assessment as detailed at paragraph 3.1.

The Community Safety Team Leader presented the draft Safer North West ASB Action Plan 2017/18 as circulated at the meeting.

Councillor D Harrison referred to the increase in crime rates for violence against persons and expressed concerns as he felt that issues were not being addressed, especially in Ashby Town Centre. He was saddened that there was nothing within the report which inspired him to feel safer. The Stronger and Safer Communities Team Leader stated that the high risk rating by harm scores was the reason that the partnership was tackling this particular area of crime and it was important to react quickly to protect the communities. He accepted Councillor D Harrison's comments and assured him that good work was being done in this particular area and he was hopeful that a difference would be seen in the next 12 months.

Councillor J Geary questioned the contradicting comments that crime rates had fallen when the matrix within the report indicated that they had increased. The Stronger and Safer Communities Team Manager explained that overall crime rates had decreased even though in some individual areas there had been an increase.

Councillor J Geary asked how officers were planning on engaging within communities as stated in the report. The Stronger and Safer Communities Team Manager commented that it was an area he was working to improve as he also wanted to include feedback from young people. He explained that the Community Focus Team engaged with the community in a number of ways and another channel of engagement was the regular Parish Liaison meetings.

It was moved by Councillor M Specht, seconded by Councillor J Geary and

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be noted.

33. HOW LEICESTERSHIRE'S ROADS, PAVEMENTS AND VERGES COULD BE MANAGED IN THE FUTURE - LCC CONSULTATION

The Head of Community Services presented the report and referred Members to the questionnaire attached at appendix one.

Councillor N Smith commented that an advantage of the economic depression was that the sides of the roads were no longer maintained and that had encouraged wildlife which was great to see.

Councillor T Eynon agreed with Councillor N Smith and was pleased that Hugglescote Parish Council had taken over some parts of highway maintenance. She was disappointed with the proposals for dealing with potholes as she did not believe that Parish Council's would want to do it, she felt it was a backwards step.

Councillor J Geary believed that the current state of the highways in the district was appalling. He commented that the road gully pot drainage was not working correctly as grass was often growing from them and even a tree from one that he was aware of. This lack of drainage caused flooding and in turn was dangerous for road users. He summed up the strategy as a 'joke' and that all credibility had been lost in his opinion following the consultation on Snibston Discovery Park. He strongly believed that the highways were being neglected.

Councillor D Harrison commented that he was a member of the Highways Forum and the perception of the public was that they were relatively happy with the highways. He stated that unfortunately there was less money available for highway maintenance and the priority was to get the best out of the money there was.

Councillor N Smith raised concerns with the proposals for Parish Council's to deal with potholes as care was needed with regards to liability in the event of highway accidents.

Councillor N Clarke commented that as he worked for a utility company he was aware that particular qualifications were required for the filling of potholes and the standard required by the Council was high, therefore he did not believe that it should be the responsibility of the Parish Councils.

It was moved by Councillor J Cotterill, seconded by Councillor D Harrison and

RESOLVED THAT:

Comments made by committee be provided to the Portfolio Holder when considering the consultation document in responding to Leicestershire County Council.

34. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION IN THE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The Interim Director of Resources informed Members that the Director of Public Health had released his 2016 annual report and he was available to attend the next meeting to present on it.

The Chairman asked for the yet to be considered item on the work plan entitled 'Update Report for Section 106 Contributions for Health' to be presented at the next meeting.

RESOLVED THAT:

- a) The following items be placed on the work plan:

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- (i) Small Grants Annual Report 2016/17
 - (ii) Director of Public Health Annual Report 2016
 - (iii) Government Guidance on Fixed Term Tenancies
- b) The report currently on the work plan entitled 'Update report for Section 106 Contributions for Health' to be considered at the next meeting.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7.40 pm