

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCRUTINY COMMISSION FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES
HELD IN THE
BOURGES & VIERSEN ROOMS, TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH
ON 1 SEPTEMBER 2014**

Present: Councillors Stokes, Murphy, Harrington, Okonkowski and J fox.

Officers in

Attendance: Adrian Chapman Assistant Director for Communities and Targeted Services
Anne Keogh Housing and Strategic Planning Manager
Dania Castagliuolo Governance Officer

1. Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meetings Held on 7 July 2014

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2014, were approved as an accurate record.

4. Housing in Rural Communities

At the last meeting of the Scrutiny Commission for Rural Communities which was held on 7 July 2014, Members agreed that they would like the following item to be brought to a future meeting:

- To scrutinise the effectiveness of the Council's Housing Strategy, Social Housing Allocations Policy and relevant planning with a view to enabling young families to remain living in the rural community.

The report was introduced by the Housing and Strategic Planning Manager to provide the Commission with information on the Council's Housing Strategy and Social Housing Allocations Policy to enable Members to consider how these may enable young individuals to and families to remain living in the rural community.

The Commission was asked to consider and scrutinise the information presented within the report, and to make any recommendations or suggestions to officers with a view to enabling young individuals and families to remain living in the rural community.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Members queried whether the 97 applicants on the housing register referred to in the report at 5.2.6 related to the whole of the rural community in Peterborough, or if it referred to just one village. *The Housing and Strategic Planning Manager informed Members that this figure related to the rural community citywide.*

- Members commented that the cost of housing in rural communities was considerably higher than in urban areas and queried whether this was taken in to account with people on benefits. *Members were advised that benefit claimants renting from the private sector in a rural area would receive the same Local Housing Allowance (LHA) payment rates (relevant to the property size) as benefit claimants in the rest of the city, despite the potential for higher market rent levels in some villages. This may result in a shortfall between the LHA received and the rent charged. Benefit claimants in affordable housing receive Housing Benefit which is not subject to the same restrictions as LHA and therefore if the claimant is not under-occupying or subject to any other restrictions they should get their full rent paid on an affordable property in a rural location, even if the rent is higher than for a comparable property in another part of the city’.*
- Members queried whether new builds developed for a rural exception site would consist solely of affordable housing or if private housing would be included in these projects. *Members were informed that the national requirement for projects could now be mixed tenure. It could be considered, in order to make a site more sustainable, to have some market on the site even if it was just one or two market units. This could prove more attractive to villagers and housing associations. Peterborough was yet to develop a rural exception site. At present the stated policy for Peterborough was 100% affordable.*
- Members commented that sometimes RAF Wittering could produce a blip in housing need and Peterborough would need to be mindful of this as it was now a busy time for them.
- Members queried whether agricultural tenancies were still a priority and if not could this be reflected in the Housing Allocations Policy. *The Assistant Director for Communities and Targeted Services informed Members that there was no specific provision for agricultural tenancies, they would be subject to the same statutory tests for homelessness as non-agricultural tenancies. Any request for preference of rural needs within the Housing Allocations Policy would need to go back to the Social Landlords for consideration as the policy was agreed by them.*
- Members commented that there would always be a struggle with this subject as the logistics and infrastructure of rural areas did not fit in well with social housing.

ACTION AGREED

The Commission agreed for the Housing and Strategic Planning Manager to check that the Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Guidance had measures in place to protect rural land when considering new developments.

5. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The Commission received the latest version of the Council’s Forward Plan of Key Decisions, which contained key decisions that the Leader of the Council anticipated the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members would make during the course of the forthcoming month. Members were invited to comment on the Plan and, where appropriate, identify any relevant areas for inclusion in the Commission’s work programme.

ACTION AGREED

The Commission noted the latest version of the Council’s Forward Plan of Key Decision and requested further information on the Care and Repair Framework Agreement.

6. Work Programme

Members considered the Commission’s Work Programme for 2014/15 and discussed possible items for inclusion.

AGREED ACTION

Members noted the work programme and agreed for the following items to be added to the Work Programme:

- The Flood Risk Strategy and Emergency Planning
- Libraries and Community Centres (with rural consideration)

7. Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for Monday 20 October 2014.

The meeting began at 7.00pm and ended at 7.55pm

CHAIRMAN

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