

Minutes of a meeting of the **Policy Group** of the Purbeck District Council held in the Council Chamber, Westport House, Wareham on Wednesday 21 June 2017 at 7.00pm.

Present:-

Councillor Gary Suttle (Chairman)
Councillor Barry Quinn (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors Cherry Brooks, Laura Miller, Bill Pipe and Peter Webb

Also present: Councillors Mike Lovell, Bill Trite and Peter Wharf

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting: Fiona Brown, Housing Manager; Bridget Downton, General Manager – Planning and Community Services; Sue Joyce, General Manager – Resources; Steve Mackenzie, Chief Executive; Kirsty Riglar, Democratic and Electoral Services Manager; Benjamin Webb, Conservation and Design Officer and Richard Wilson, Environmental Design Manager.

(Note: These minutes have been prepared by officers as a record of the meeting and of any decisions reached. They are to be considered and confirmed at the next meeting of the Group).

10.17/18 **Apologies**

No apologies for absence were received.

11.17/18 **Urgent items**

The Chairman reported there were no urgent items.

12.17/18 **Public participation time**

Ms Colette Drayson of Langton Matravers requested an explanation of the difference between a Partial Review and full Review of the Purbeck Local Plan and sought an update on the development of a Second Homes Policy. She also urged the Council to address the definition of affordable rents, as 80% of market rent remained unaffordable for many local people. Additionally, as a member of the Board of the Langton Matravers Community Land Trust, she expressed her support for the proposals set out in the report relating to the Community Housing Fund on the agenda. The General Manager – Planning and Community Services explained that the independent review of the Local Plan Partial Review process had found that due to the wide range of aspects of the Plan which were being considered, it represented a full Review. The Council had therefore decided to use this description. She also explained that work was continuing on the Second Homes Policy and further information would be provided in due course. In relation to the definition of affordable rents, she reminded those present that this was set out in national government policy. Ms Drayson pointed out that this stated that affordable rents should be up to 80% and urged that any opportunity to reduce this locally should be taken.

Mr Barry Mayes, Chairman of the Board of the Langton Matravers Community Land Trust, addressed the Policy Group in relation to the Community Housing Fund. Whilst he welcomed the proposals set out in the report to be considered and commended the

work of the Wessex Community Land Trust Project to Members, he urged that opportunities for communities to apply for capital funding be brought forward and information on procedures be published as soon as possible. The Chief Executive welcomed these comments and explained the application process was currently being developed and proposals for capital funding would be brought forward at the earliest opportunity.

Mr Peter Bowyer of Studland referred to the references to the Purbeck Local Plan Review Advisory Group in the Forward Plan for Policy Group and Council meetings and asked whether the dates of meetings would be changed. He also asked whether there were plans to alter the composition of the Policy Group. Officers explained that the agenda and Forward Plan had been finalised before the decision was made by Council to abolish the Advisory Group and that the references would now be changed and items relating to the Local Plan Review would come to scheduled meetings of the Policy Group. The Chairman added that there were no plans to alter the composition of the Policy Group but all Members of the Council were welcome to attend meetings and any specialist advisors could be invited to meetings when appropriate. He added that Policy Group was a non-decision-making body and any decisions would be made by full Council.

Ms Josephine Parish of Corfe Castle addressed the Policy Group in relation to the Community Housing Fund, expressing her support for the proposals set out in the report and the need for the rents set for community-led affordable housing developments to be truly affordable for local people. She also asked the name of the company that had pulled out of the facilitation of the Local Plan Review local forums. The Chairman explained that this was being dealt with through a Freedom of Information request and that the future of the forums would be addressed at the next Council meeting.

13.17/18 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 May 2017 be taken as read, confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

14.17/18 **Declarations of Interest by Members**

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

15.17/18 **Forward Plan for Policy Group and Council meetings**

The Policy Group considered the current Forward Plan. It was noted that the references in the Forward Plan to the Local Plan Review Advisory Group would now be removed. The Chief Executive explained that the Local Plan Review would now be included within the Leader's portfolio as a corporate matter but other issues linked to this would be brought forward by the appropriate portfolio holder.

Resolved that the Forward Plan be received.

16.17/18 **Business rate relief**

The General Manager - Resources presented a report seeking support to recommend to Council delegation of the award of rate relief under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 to the General Manager – Resources. It also sought

support for the development of a county-wide discretionary relief scheme. She explained that, in the Spring Budget, the Chancellor announced a number of schemes to provide support to businesses faced with large increases in their rates bills following the 2017 revaluation. These schemes would rely on councils using their discretionary powers under Section 47 of the 1988 Act to award relief to qualifying businesses and for this to be fully reimbursed by the Government, up to a maximum amount awarded. However, due to the decision to call a snap general election on 8 June 2017, the Government deferred two of the three schemes. As it was possible that the newly formed Government may introduce the deferred schemes with an expectation that councils administer them promptly, it was proposed that the General Manager – Resources be given delegated authority, in certain circumstances, to enable the Council to respond quickly in awarding relief. This would therefore help the targeted businesses more promptly and support the local economy.

The Government had decided to proceed with its decision to grant local discretionary relief funds, making £300M available for this purpose. The Council's share of this funding was £217,000 in 2017/18, £106,000 in 2018/19, £43,000 in 2019/20 and £6,000 in 2020/21. Councils were required to develop schemes for their area in collaboration with major preceptors. It was proposed that officers work with the other local authorities in Dorset to develop a county-wide scheme and that this should take account of principles put forward by the Federation for Small Businesses.

In response to Member's questions, the General Manager – Resources explained that the proposed county-wide scheme would set out the priorities for granting relief to ensure that it was awarded to small businesses in most need, as it was acknowledged that the funding would be insufficient to meet all demand. She confirmed that the draft scheme would be brought back to Policy Group for consideration in due course. However, Members were reminded that some businesses already qualified for business rates relief.

Resolved that:

- (1) a report be submitted to Council recommending that where the Government introduces a new, or amendment to an existing, rate relief and asks councils to use their discretionary powers under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 to enact the relief, the General Manager – Resources has delegated authority to implement the relief under these powers, provided that:
 - (i) the changes are in the best interests of local businesses and the local economy; and
 - (ii) there is no detriment to local council tax payers;

and

- (2) the Revenues and Benefits Partnership Manager seeks to develop a pan Dorset Discretionary Fund Scheme, taking account of comments from the Federation for Small Businesses, and reports back to the Policy Group on the outcome.

17.17/18 Purbeck District Conservation Areas review

The Design and Conservation Officer presented a report seeking support to recommend to Council that the draft appraisals and boundary proposals prepared for the Morden and East Creech Conservation Areas be approved for formal adoption.

The draft boundary proposals and appraisals had been the subject of a period of formal public consultation; a summary of the comments received and the responses to these were appended to the report. The Environment Portfolio Holder expressed his support for the proposed amendments to the Conservation Areas and explained that no existing dwellings had been removed from the Areas.

In response to Members' questions, the Design and Conservation Officer explained that the Council was required to undertake periodic reviews of Conservation Areas and the appraisals and boundaries of the Morden and East Creech Areas had not previously been reviewed. It was considered that the proposed boundaries were robust and justified and that there was unlikely to be a need for further amendment in the future.

Resolved that a report be submitted to Council recommending that the appraisals and boundary proposals prepared for the Morden and East Creech Conservation Areas be adopted.

18.17/18 **Involving Councillors in planning enforcement**

The General Manager – Planning and Community Services presented a report reviewing the approach to involving Councillors in planning enforcement. This detailed the management information currently provided to Councillors and the current procedure for Councillors to request that the Planning Committee consider proposed planning enforcement action.

The Deputy Leader proposed that this review be included within the work of the Policy Development Panel established by the Policy Group at its last meeting to review the scheme of delegation in relation to planning matters. Members agreed that this was a sensible suggestion.

In response to a Member's question, the Chief Executive explained that nominations for the Members to participate in the Policy Development Panel would be sought at the next meeting of the Leaders' Forum.

Resolved that the Policy Development Panel established to review the scheme of delegation in relation to planning matters also review:

- (1) the current management information in relation to planning enforcement provided to Councillors; and
- (2) the current arrangements for Councillors to request that Planning Committee consider enforcement action.

19.17/18 **Community Housing Fund**

The Housing Manager presented a report proposing an approach for the allocation and spend of some of the Community Housing Fund grant of £910,456 that the Council received earlier in the year from the Department of Communities and Local Government. The aim of this grant was to enable local community groups to deliver affordable housing units of mixed tenure on sites which were likely to be of little interest to mainstream housebuilders in areas where the impact of second homes is particularly acute. The fund would enable revenue and capital funding and technical support to be provided to organisations or individuals undertaking or facilitating community-led

affordable housing projects. The report outlined the types of community-led housing which could be funded by this grant.

Members' attention was drawn to an application for grant funding received from Wessex Community Land Trust Project (Wessex CLT) to enable it to expand its service and provide technical support and expertise to emerging community-led affordable housing projects in Purbeck. It was proposed to give a grant to Wessex CLT of £43,000 over four years to increase its capacity.

The Housing Portfolio Holder expressed her support for the proposals set out in the report, acknowledging the excellent work of Wessex CLT in informing and advising communities and local authorities about the development of community-led affordable housing.

In response to a Member's question, the Housing Manager confirmed that, to date, 13 of the 19 local authorities in Dorset, Devon and Somerset in receipt of Community Housing Fund grant had agreed to provide a grant to Wessex CLT to enable it to expand its service.

In response to a question about the possibility of designating areas of community-led housing development through the Local Plan Review, the Chief Executive confirmed that the Planning Policy Manager was aware of this initiative and would look at what was possible.

Members welcomed the report, acknowledging that every opportunity should be taken to support the development of community-led affordable housing in Purbeck.

Resolved that a report be submitted to Council recommending:

- (1) approval of the proposals set out in paragraph 5.2.1 of the report for the use of the Community Housing Fund for revenue grants;
- (2) approval of Wessex Community Land Trust Project's application for a grant of £10,750 per year in 2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21, to increase its capacity to provide technical support and expertise to emerging community-led housing projects in Purbeck, subject to the completion of an agreement drafted in consultation with the Solicitor to the Council; and
- (3) half yearly update reports be submitted to the Audit and Governance Committee, setting out how the grant has been used, progress of the projects supported and where Wessex CLT has supported projects in Purbeck.

The meeting ended at 7.46pm.

Chairman