

# MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2012 10.00 AM



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## GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Kelham Cooke  
Councillor Charmaine Morgan  
Councillor John Nicholson (Chairman)

Councillor Mrs Jean Taylor  
Councillor Jeff Thompson (Vice-  
Chairman)  
Councillor Raymond Wooten

## PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Councillor Teri Bryant (Portfolio Holder:  
Good Housing)

## OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Bob Adams  
Councillor Rosemary Woolley

## OFFICERS

Strategic Director (Tracey Blackwell)  
Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods (Ian Richardson)  
Housing Options Team Leader (May Read)  
Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer (Carol Drury)  
Principal Democracy Officer (Jo Toomey)

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## 45. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Griffin and Councillor Smith, the Green, Health and Arts Portfolio Holder.

## 46. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

No interests were disclosed.

## 47. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 22 NOVEMBER 2012

The action notes from the meeting held on 22 November 2012 were noted subject to the following amendments:

- Action note 36 (residents' parking scheme – Stamford): to amend the

second sentence to read: *“The information was initially released on the Council’s website without forewarning local town councillors.”*

- Action note 36 (residents’ parking scheme – Stamford): to amend the final sentence to read: *“Officers noted that the preferred method of communication with Stamford Town Councillors would have been via Stamford Town Council.”*
- Action note 37: to add the following note: *“Councillor Bryant noted the excellent presentation in response to the question submitted to council and added that he felt the referral of questions to PDGs was valuable as it allowed full consideration of issues raised.*
- Action note 38 (Localisation of Council Tax Benefit - council tax support scheme): to amend the first sentence to read: *“Some concern was expressed about the impact of the proposed scheme on low income families whether they were in work or not, and whether the consultation provided sufficient opportunity for members of the public to raise their concerns.”*

#### **48. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING/FEEDBACK FROM THE EXECUTIVE**

The Property Development Manager gave a brief update on car parking and residents’ parking schemes:

- The PDG’s recommendation to change the wording in the car parking strategy in respect of access to on-street parking for those enjoying the night-time economy offer in Grantham had been completed.
- Cabinet approved the Car Parking Strategy at its meeting on 3 December 2012. Copies of the final strategy would be circulated to all PDG members for information.
- Arrangements were in place to progress proposals for residents’ parking schemes in Stamford. As an interim arrangement an on-street waiver had been put in place, which the county council based on the scale of charges for district council car parks.
- Joint consultation would be undertaken by the county and district council to streamline the process of getting a Traffic Regulation Order for the designated zones.
- It had been determined that any residents’ parking schemes in the district would run on a cost-recovery basis and fees would be set accordingly.
- Any areas across the district that were highlighted as parking trouble spots could be referred through the parking partnership to request targeted enforcement.

#### **49. HOUSING PROGRAMME OF WORK**

The Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods introduced the Housing Programme of Work. Since the PDG’s last meeting consultation events with external stakeholders and the Council’s Community Focus Forum had been undertaken.

The programme comprised four elements: the Tenancy Strategy, Housing Strategy, Allocations Policy and Tenancy Policy.

The Localism Act required that, as a strategic housing authority, the Council adopt and publish a Tenancy Strategy by 15 January 2012. The draft document would be submitted to Cabinet for decision on 7 January 2012. The PDG would have the opportunity to consider other aspects of the Programme of Work at its meeting on 10 January 2012. The Tenancy Strategy would cover all social housing providers within the district. A key component on which the PDG was asked to make recommendations was the inclusion of flexible tenure and whether it was a broad principle the Council should include in its strategy. Councillors noted that such a statement included in the overarching Tenancy Strategy would not have to form part of the council's own Tenancy Policy. In acknowledging that housing providers could decide to adopt flexible tenure regardless of the council's strategy statement, Members were also asked to recommend provisions for the review of tenancies.

Mr Richardson gave examples of uptake in other areas. Flexible tenure was used for housing provision in New South Wales, Australia where 99% of tenancies were extended because income thresholds were not breached. One housing association operating in South Kesteven had chosen not to introduce flexible tenure, while another who ran housing stock on behalf of a neighbouring authority had opted to apply it on a limited basis.

Feedback from stakeholder consultation did not identify advantages for the tenant, however there were potential benefits for prospective tenants. Officers reported that these would not be evident until the end of the first fixed-term tenancy.

PDG members were given the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the approach that would be taken in the Council's Tenancy Strategy. Prior to putting any question to officers Cllr Morgan declared an interest as she had previously been in the employment of Nottingham Community Housing Association.

- Regardless of the type of tenancy, enforcement action could be taken against any tenant who breached the conditions of their tenancy agreement. If it chose, the PDG could recommend that tenancy conduct was taken into account when fixed-term tenancies were reviewed.
- If fixed term tenancies were introduced, reviews would need to be carried out 6 months before the expiration of the tenancy. If a decision was taken that a tenant had sufficient income to afford alternative accommodation then that tenant's circumstances changed, they would be able to request a review of that decision
- Councillors were advised in response to a question about the impact of such a policy on specific groups such as single-parent families and families with children, that it was possible to exempt particular groups
- The Council would develop its own specific Tenancy Policy, which it was

anticipated would be adopted in February/March 2013. Before its implementation, the Council would need to produce revised policy documents and procedural arrangements, and ensure staff received appropriate training.

- Any landlord introducing fixed-term tenancies would need to consider the criteria for reviewing those tenancies. Councillors noted that if income was one of the criteria the landlord would need to stipulate whether it was based on the income of the tenant or the household.
- If the Council decided to introduce fixed-term tenancies, it would only apply to new tenants beyond the date the policy became effective.
- Benefits of fixed-term tenancies included more flexible use of the housing stock in face of high levels of demand. Disadvantages of flexible tenure included increased administrative demands, it created a disincentive which prevented people investing in their property or neighbourhood, changes to benefits and welfare reform, and loss of security.
- Available housing needed to meet housing need; Councillors felt that there was a shortage of one and two-bedroom properties. It was suggested this shortage extended to landlords in the private rented sector
- The Council would have the opportunity to build additional housing; it would need to determine whether to build them directly or commission a registered social landlord to build on their behalf (supplemented by external funding) with the council retaining nomination rights
- Tenants could not sub-let their properties but, with the consent of their landlord, they could take in lodgers.
- When a fixed-term tenure comes to an end, the landlord has a responsibility to provide appropriate advice and assistance to tenants who no longer meet the criteria.
- One Councillor stated that providing housing went beyond providing accommodation to providing a home. It was also noted that having left, there were circumstances in which children returned to the family home.
- Reference was made to incentive schemes that would encourage tenants in under-occupied properties to move to more suitably sized accommodation when it was available, these could include meeting removal costs or providing assistance with the transition of utilities. The Portfolio Holder noted that financial implications of this were unclear.
- If flexible tenure was introduced, tenants who did want to downsize when dependents left home would retain their secure tenancies.

A majority of PDG members agreed that a paragraph should be included in the draft Tenancy Strategy that stated that the Council supported the use of fixed-term tenancies. Supporters stated that this was because the document was strategic, covering all landlords in the district and including it gave them the opportunity to determine the approach that best suited them. The two members who did not agree with its inclusion in the strategy stated that they did not support the principle of fixed-term tenancies.

*Councillors suspended their consideration of this item to receive an update on residents' parking schemes (noted under action note number 48).*

Having agreed that a statement should be included in the strategy that supported the principle of fixed-term tenancies, Councillors considered those areas against which they felt fixed-term tenancies should be reviewed:

- Income and capital – Councillors suggested that an individual's assets should be taken into account in addition to their income
- Housing need and vulnerability – Councillors felt factors including age and health. This would also cover victims of domestic abuse
- Community contribution – this could cover people who volunteer providing a service in their local area. Councillors did not feel this should be included in the criteria on which a review would be based
- Tenancy conduct – Members felt that the conduct of an individual during their tenancy should be taken into account. Councillors recommended that taking account of tenancy conduct was preferable to behaviour, which was broader.

***Recommendation***

***That the Council's Tenancy Strategy should include a statement in support of fixed-term tenancies and the following considerations listed for the review of fixed-term tenancies:***

- ***Income and capital***
- ***Housing need and vulnerability***
- ***Tenancy conduct***

**50. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting was closed at 12:09pm