

Minutes

Policy Review Committee

- Venue: Committee Room 2
- Date: 26 July 2011
- Present: Councillor M Jordan (Chair), Councillor Mrs E Metcalfe, Councillor R Musgrave, Councillor I Nutt, Councillor R Packham, Councillor I Reynolds and Councillor R Sweeting
- Apologies for Absence: Councillor Mrs M Davis and Councillor Mrs A Spetch
- Also Present: Councillor C Metcalfe
- Officers Present: Julia Jennison, Policy Officer; Vanessa Crane, Housing Officer; Karen Iveson, Executive Director and Richard Besley, Democratic Services

5. Minutes

RESOLVED:

To receive and approve the minutes of the Policy Review Committee held on 23 June 2011 and they are signed by the Chair.

6. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

7. Chair's Address to the Policy Review Committee

The Chair welcomed councillors to their second meeting and the last in the Civic Centre. He thanked Councillor Metcalfe and invited officers for attending. The Chair also congratulated Cllr Musgrave and Mrs Musgrave on the birth of their daughter.

8. Report PR/11/3 – Choice Based Lettings (Tenancy Allocation Policy), Work Programme Item

Policy Officer, Julia Jennison, informed the Committee of the new policy for Housing Allocation based on Choice Based Lettings.

The Policy has been introduced across North Yorkshire and has been adopted by most of the Councils in North Yorkshire in a shared partnership, offering the same opportunities to prospective tenants on housing waiting lists across the county.

Although local connection is still taken into account across the partnership area, and tenant applications may be subject to individual local S106 agreements, the scheme gives the scope for someone in the county with mobility difficulties to move closer to their place of work, for example.

However since introduced in late June, only 1 applicant has moved into Selby from outside the partnership area, 1 from within the partnership area, and the rest of successful applicants have all been from the Selby district.

Last year 7% of lettings went to tenants from outside the Selby district, and this has been set as our baseline. Across the partnership, if any district finds an increase of 5% or more on their base position, lettings would be able to be restricted for a time to local (district) applicants only. Lettings will be monitored to ensure this is implemented if necessary.

The Policy has done away with the old “points scored” system, which disadvantaged those on low scores, Choice Based lettings offers those applicants a better chance, as they will be able to assess their chances in areas of lower demand.

The Partnership publishes a list each week of available properties that the public may apply for, provided they match certain needs criteria, similar to choosing a property to rent in the private sector.

Using an online web system, applicants may “bid” for up to three properties each week. The advantage of the system is that bidder gets instant feedback on how their bid has fared. There is also the opportunity to bid by telephone, by text and by paper coupon.

Bids are banded with those (few) categorised as falling in an emergency band being prioritised.

Further issues considered as tie breakers in allocating properties, in this order:

- Band
- Local connection
- Occupation

- Debt history
- Time on list

The Policy Officer notified the Committee that the number of people on ('Selby') waiting list was now approximately 1,800. This is down from 3,000 when the new policy was introduced. Although a countywide figure was unavailable, that trend is repeated across North Yorkshire as applicants accept that they may not have sufficient housing need to be successful.

The Policy applies not just to council properties across North Yorkshire, but to Housing Association properties too, where Associations have joined the partnership, offering additional opportunities for those on low income.

Councillor Reynolds asked where S106 agreements applied or where applicants wished to remain local was there a register or was the system monitored.

The Policy Officer confirmed that advertisements for properties where a local connection applies, will clearly state this, and will only be offered to applicants who meet the criteria. As now, if an applicant with a specific local connection cannot be found, the area would be extended to neighbouring parishes where suitable in accordance with the terms of the S106.

Although a web-based system, bidders may bid by phone or by coupon and an advice line is available with officers and local partners able to offer support and advice. Alternatively, applicants can call into Access Selby for help or advice, and local support providers have been briefed about the scheme.

Councillor Packham was concerned that communities may shun the development of additional social housing if they felt that properties may not go to local people or support local needs.

The Policy Officer agreed that Choice based Letting won't help that perception but confirmed that provided local/parish needs had been identified, and that suitable applicants did bid for properties, lettings would not need to go outside the local area.

RESOLVED:

To receive and note the report.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

The Committee ensures the contribution of Policy Review is effective in supporting service improvement and delivery against district wide and Council priorities.

9. Report PR/11/4 – Car Park Fees, Work Programme Item

Executive member, Councillor Metcalfe, outlined the report that had been passed to Policy Review for scrutiny, providing background to the processes behind the periodic reviews introduced by a previous Best Value study. The Current policy is to conduct reviews bi-annually.

The last review was undertaken in 2008 and it as decided last year that fees should be frozen due the economic climate.

It was felt that this review now needed to be undertaken as there was a financial gap to close and that the increases were the minimum sought.

The review continues the policy of discouraging extended stays in sort stay car parks by increasing the longer parking rate greater than the short stay rate.

The increases in long stay car parks would not be so great encouraging people to park outside of the town centre.

The new fees for the hourly rate is substantially less than neighbouring authorities reflecting good value for the people of the district.

Councillor Nutt proposed a suggestion to the Executive that they consider a cessation of charges in the four weeks leading up to Christmas to ease costs to the public and boost trade to shops/stores.

This was seconded by Councillor Sweeting.

When asked about the review not considering Tadcaster and Sherburn, Councillor Metcalfe confirmed that Best Value study had delayed the levy of charges in Tadcaster until and upgrade of the central car park could be completed and that re-development had been blocked by legal challenge and is subject to a High Court hearing late this year. It was felt that parking facilities in Sherburn small and inappropriate to install charges.

Councillor Metcalfe confirmed that consultation would be extended to statutory stakeholders/partners such as Chamber of Trade, etc.

It was suggested that the Central CEF be used.

Councillor Metcalfe was asked what made up the overall costs that needed to be covered.

These included:

- Staff costs
- Collections costs
- Maintenance costs
- Energy costs

He confirmed that the Council were looking at parking machines powered by solar cells and more efficient CCTV as ways to reduce energy costs.

RESOLVED:

To receive and note the report.

To send to the Executive two suggestions as part of the consultation.

- 1. That the Council remove car park charges in the four weeks leading up to Christmas.**
- 2. That the central CEF be used as a way of engaging the community in the consultation relating to the Car Park Fees and Charges Review.**

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

The Committee ensures the contribution of Policy Review is effective in supporting service improvement and delivery against district wide and Council priorities.

10. Report PR/11/2 – Corporate Plan, Work Programme Item

The Executive Director presented the report to receive comments referring to the Corporate Plan consultation.

The committee discussed the effectiveness of the CEFs and were concerned to ensure they engage effectively with the community and that they provide a focus for public agencies to work together. The committee supported the Executive's proposals to develop wider community and partner engagement and felt that there was a role for district councillors in driving this agenda.

Councillors felt that CEFs may be something to consider at future meetings and the Executive Director would take the Committee's comments back to the CEF coordinator.

In conclusion the Chair considered how to drive CEFs forward and agreed to speak with Executive member, Councillor Metcalfe.

The Executive Director was asked about working with partners to secure economic recovery and explained that the Corporate Plan looked at promoting the District and at job creation and improving employment opportunities.

The Chair referred to a scheme where a major supermarket chain is undertaking a major refurbishment of its Pontefract store and is committing to working with the community to secure jobs for the long term

unemployed and would wish to see similar plans with new enterprises in our communities.

Under the 'Living Well' big thing, the committee supported the development of leisure activities in rural communities.

On the matter of transport provision the committee supported the proposals to work with partners to improve community transport facilities.

RESOLVED:

To receive and note the report and comments on the Corporate plan to be feedback to the Executive.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

The Committee ensures the contribution of Policy Review is effective in supporting service improvement and delivery against district wide and Council priorities.

11. Policy Review Committee Work Programme

With the committee's interest in ensuring the effectiveness of the CEFs, it was agreed to place Community Engagement Forums onto the Work Programme for the next scheduled meeting.

The Executive Director was asked to invite members from the CEF team to report to the meeting on 1 November.

To accommodate the item in a busy agenda it was also agreed to move Enforcement Policy back to 24 January 2012.

The meeting closed at 6:44pm