

These minutes are draft subject to confirmation at the next meeting of the Housing sub-committee

Housing Sub-Committee

22 July 2019

Present: Councillor A Newman (Chair)
Councillors L Darke, John Hunter, E Leonard-
Parker, P McIntyre, P Oliver, A Percy, M
Reynolds, M Thirlaway, J Walker and M
Wilson

HO1/07/19 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Bell and F Weetman.

HO2/07/19 Substitute Members

Pursuant to the Council's constitution the following substitute member was appointed:

Councillor P Oliver for Councillor L Bell

HO3/07/19 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest reported.

HO4/07/19 Minutes

It was **agreed** that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

HO5/07/19 Affordable Homes Programme

The Sub-committee received a report which summarised the delivery of affordable homes in 2018/19 and updated on the plans for 2019/20. Since the inception of the Affordable Homes Programme in 2013, the total number of new affordable homes delivered stood at 1,430. To date during 2019/20, 50 new affordable homes had been delivered and plans were on target to deliver a total of 200 homes during the financial year. A breakdown of the delivery of the overall programme was provided in Appendix 1.

The report detailed the different delivery methods for providing affordable homes and where the contributions to the overall target were delivered. The Council had directly delivered 26 affordable homes in 2018/19, with 20 new build homes delivered at the site of the former Dudley and Weetslade Club and the conversion of the council building at Perth Gardens into 6 flats. The Council had already completed 22 new homes in 2019/20 on the former sites of Bonchester Court and Beadnell Court. The report detailed a number of Housing Revenue Account schemes that had been approved by Cabinet on 28th May 2019.

In relation to working with Registered Providers, it was noted that 10 affordable homes were delivered in 2018/19 including 6 new build homes at Glebe Crescent, Forest Hall and 4 at Western Terrace, Dudley.

In 2019/20, 13 new homes for clients with learning difficulties would be delivered by Home

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Housing at Charlton Court, Monkseaton. This was due to be completed in July 2019. The Authority was working with Bernicia to assess the feasibility of developing affordable homes at Castle Square in Backworth. The potential scheme would see Bernicia deliver 30 new affordable homes and improved open green space. The Sub-committee was informed that Registered Providers remained keen to develop homes in North Tyneside and were looking to source their own land in order to provide new homes.

In relation to empty homes, in 2018/19 the team dealt with issues relating to 25 long-term problematic empty homes, 4 of which were returned to use as affordable housing units. In addition over 860 owners were contacted directly to offer assistance in dealing with their empty homes, with assistance provided to the owners of 50 long term empty properties to help return them to occupation.

After successfully securing a grant commitment from Homes England of £0.347m, work continued to achieve the target of 10 properties for 2019-20. A total of 9 properties had been surveyed and instruction given to the Councils legal team to negotiate and enter into appropriate leases. Refurbishment was due to start on 2 properties in Park Road, Wallsend in August 2019. Opportunities were being explored to tackle rogue landlords and the Empty Homes Programme would continue to target the properties which had the greatest impact on communities within North Tyneside and which supported vulnerable housing markets.

The Sub-committee was informed that delivering affordable housing through planning obligations was central to meeting the need for affordable housing in the Borough. Section 106 Town and Country Planning Act 1991 Agreements were used by the Authority to secure up to 25% affordable housing on the majority of relevant sites (developments with 11 or more units). A total of 197 new affordable homes were delivered through S106 agreements in 2018/19 and in quarter 1 of 2019/20, 12 S106 affordable homes had been secured against a target of 124. The market for housing remained strong across North Tyneside and the delivery of affordable homes should increase once the strategic sites at Murton and Killingworth commenced development.

The report informed Members of the work of the North Tyneside Development Company in the delivery of affordable homes. It was noted that to increase the pace of delivery, the Company had pursued an acquisition strategy buying homes from the open market across the borough. This had been successful and the Company purchased 13 homes in 2018/19 bringing the total number of homes owned up to 35. The Company's Business Plan would see a further 15 homes purchased by 31st March 2020. So far in 2019/20 the Company had purchased 3 homes and had offers accepted on a further 3. These properties would all be for affordable rent.

The report highlighted that good progress had been made in delivering specialist homes through the Specialist Housing Project. Planning permission had been granted at Oswin Road, Forest Hall for two residential buildings comprising a total of 16 supported living apartments. The site would be developed by Mersten Limited for clients with mental health issues. Planning permission had also been granted for 32 specialist homes on land north west of Brierdene Way in Backworth.

The presenting officer informed the Sub-committee that the delivery of affordable homes continued to be a success in North Tyneside and the target of delivering 200 new homes in 2019/20 was on course. Confidence remained that the programme would deliver the target of 3,000 affordable homes by 2024. A member of the Sub-committee asked why the target for this year (2019/20) was lower than any other year in the programme and how the increased targets over the following 4 years would be delivered. It was explained that the number of homes delivered by volume builders was expected to be higher from 2020/21, so

this was reflected in the targets for that and subsequent years. It was noted that the Authority did not have ultimate control over the number of affordable homes built by volume builders, but that the targets were set in relation to developments that had planning permission.

Members of the Sub-committee asked for further clarification or further information to be provided in relation to the following:

- the number of affordable homes to be provided on a private development at the south end of Norham Road;
- parking considerations at the site of the 32 specialist homes north west of Brierdene Way;
- the number of Council homes delivered in the 10 years prior to the commencement of the affordable homes programme; and
- whether any discussions had been raised as to the possibilities of an increase in borrowing in order to accelerate the quantity of affordable homes being delivered.

The officer in attendance undertook to provide a written response to the Sub-committee on the above matters.

It was **agreed** to note the report.

HO6/07/19 Work Programme 2019/20

The Sub-committee received a report which presented Members with potential topics for inclusion in the 2019/20 work programme. As part of the process for establishing the 2019/20 Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme, suggestions had been sought for potential topics that the Sub-committee could look at. As in previous years, the focus of overview and scrutiny would be on policy development.

Following discussions with the Chair and Deputy Chair of Housing Sub-committee and senior offices, the following topics had been identified as possible areas for the Sub-committee to consider over the coming year:

- Sale of Council land
- Feedback from consultation on changes to the Lettings Policy
- Construction Project (with potential to focus on specific areas)
- Affordable Homes Programme
- Operation of the Trading Company

Members were given the opportunity to raise other topics relevant to the remit of the Sub-committee for inclusion in the work programme. Members were reminded that the remit of the Sub-committee continued to include the statutory duty to scrutinise crime and disorder matters. In consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Sub-committee, it had been determined that this duty would be undertaken via meetings with the Council's Community Safety Team and the Police and Crime Commissioner.

The report highlighted that the Sub-committee was able to establish a sub-group to carry out an in-depth investigation into a particular area. One suggestion had been put forward in relation to sofa surfing and hidden homelessness. The Chair invited members of the Sub-committee to put forward any suggestions they had. It was noted that a request had been submitted from a Councillor for the sub-committee to look at debt recovery, in relation to Council tax and rent arrears.

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It was suggested that it would be useful to look at tenancy agreements to see if they were working and if any improvements could be made from looking at examples from other authorities. This could be undertaken as an in-depth investigation and include looking at the practices of the enforcement team and prevention support that was in place for people struggling.

It was **agreed** to include the topics suggested in the work programme for 2019/20 and receive a future report in relation to the establishment of a sub-group to look at tenancy agreements.