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North Devon Council
Brynsworthy Environment Centre
Barnstaple
North Devon EX31 3NP

K. Miles
Chief Executive.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Policy Development Committee will be held in the Barum Room - Brynsworthy on **THURSDAY, 9TH DECEMBER, 2021 at 6.30 pm.**

(NOTE: A location plan for the Brynsworthy Environment Centre is attached to the agenda front pages. From the 7 May 2021, the law requires all councils to hold formal meetings in person. The council is also ensuring that all venues used are Covid secure and that all appropriate measures are put in place. There are a limited number of spaces available for members of the public to attend. Please check the Council's website for the latest information regarding the arrangements that are in place and the requirement to book a place 2 working days prior to the meeting [Taking part in meetings \(northdevon.gov.uk\)](http://northdevon.gov.uk))

Members of the Policy Development Councillor D. Spear (Chair)
Committee

Councillors Campbell, Bulled, Hunt, Jenkins, Luggar, Mackie, Roome, Walker and York

AGENDA

- 6(c) Notes of the meeting held on 25th November 2021 (attached). (Pages 5 - 16)

If you have any enquiries about this agenda, please contact Corporate and Community Services, telephone 01271 388253

1.12.21



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2. The Chairman of the meeting has absolute discretion to stop or suspend recording if, in their opinion, continuing to do so would prejudice proceedings at the meeting or if the person recording is in breach of these rules.
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Brynsworthy Environment Centre (BEC), Roundswell,
Barnstaple, Devon, EX31 3NP.

Sat Nav postcode is EX31 3NS.

At the Roundswell roundabout take the exit onto the B3232, after about ½ mile take the first right, BEC is about ½ a mile on the right.

Drive into the site, visitors parking is in front of the main building on the left hand side.

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Informal Housing Panel second meeting with Members and stakeholders held on Thursday 25th November 2021

The Leader opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. He advised that whilst there was a lot of information to discuss that the aim was to keep the meeting to a two hour time frame.

The Chief Executive welcomed everyone and thanked stakeholders for their contributions to the first meeting. He added that officers had found the meeting very informative and appreciated the insights and knowledge that was shared.

He explained that the information gathered from the first meeting had been reviewed and from that the officers had developed a programme of actions, which would form recommendations and the basis of the Council's housing programme over the next few years. Within those recommendations there would be short term and long term aspirations. However, the Council need to be mindful in the management of expectations. He added that the Council accepted that housing was a key priority and that it linked with their health agenda and priorities and where action could not be taken at Council level they would lobby the government.

He explained that the format of the meeting would involve the Members debating the recommendations and then questions and representations by the stakeholders would follow.

Findings of first meeting held on 25th October 2021

The Head of Planning, Housing and Health welcomed everyone and provided an overview of the outcomes of the previous meeting, which were as follows:

- Rapid housing needs' assessment:
 - Step 1: 21st October, 2021 with our stakeholders. We identified the scale and nature of the housing problems impacting on our community.
 - Step 2: Today

He advised that officers would present recommendations on the most appropriate and cost-effective solutions.

Our methodology (1)

Officers had themed the issues that stakeholders had raised.

From this an analysis of the Council's housing needs' assessment was undertaken in four parts.

PART A: by population

1. Rough sleepers/street homeless.

2. At risk of/homelessness.
3. A new “vulnerable group”
 - People who are working, trapped in high cost privately rented accommodation.
 - Low income households.
 - Young people.
4. Socially marginalised people who were accommodated in poor quality shared houses.
5. Older people who may have disabilities and be isolated.
6. Lack of housing opportunities for people in/or seeking employment.

PART B: by place

1. General, relevant to the whole of North Devon:
 - i. Worsening affordability.
 - ii. Reduction in housing opportunity by:
 - (a) More in migration.
 - (b) Proliferation of holiday lets.
2. New threats to the sustainability of communities, e.g. two employers, recruit 20% of the working population in Ilfracombe, new members of staff struggling to find accommodation.
3. Work force deficits/challenges in critical public and private sectors, eg. Health, caused in part by the housing crisis.

PART C: by property type

1. Persistently poor standards of private/rented accommodation.
2. Social housing:
 - (a) A comparatively small supply.
 - (b) Relatively inefficient use of stock, 70% bed occupancy.
3. Empty home-wasted opportunity to help meet local housing needs.
4. Energy inefficient properties.

PART D: by process

1. Lack of North Devon Council's (NDC) efficiency in supporting the delivery of new housing.
2. The opportunity to increase supply via new Community Land Trusts was not being maximised.
3. The opportunity to increase supply by more modern construction techniques, was not being realised.

Our methodology (2)

The Council had now identified the following 10 recommendations as potentially appropriate and cost-effective solutions:

10 recommended housing programmes:

1. Empty Homes – Programme to be led by the Head of Planning, Housing and Health.
2. Housing company/strategic partnerships – greater support/more housing supply for economically active households. This programme would be led by the Head of Place, Property and Regeneration and the Senior Economic Development Officer.
3. Estate regeneration/whole town approach for Ilfracombe – preparation of detailed plans in advance of new funding streams. This programme would be led by the Head of Place, Property and Regeneration and the Senior Economic Development Officer.
4. Community Land Trusts (CLTs): Review
Reprioritise.
Urban models?

This programme to be led by the Service Lead for Housing Market Balance.

5. Planning viability assessments-maximising affordable housing. Programme to be led by the Head of Place, Property and Regeneration and the Service Manager for Place.
6. North Devon Council Development Management process efficiency. Programme to be led by the Service Manager for Place.
7. Home energy efficiency. Programme to be led by JW and WS.

8. Enhanced homelessness prevention. Programme to be led by the Service Lead - Housing Advice and Homelessness.
9. More suitable and cost effective temporary accommodation. Programme to be led by the Service Lead - Housing Advice and Homelessness.
10. Risk based inspection programmes for Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs). Programme to be led by the Head Planning, Housing and Health.

Our methodology (3)

Officers introduced each of the proposals for more detailed member scrutiny.

Table one: Response by property – Head of Planning, Housing and Health

- Empty homes – The Head of Planning, Housing and Health explained the format of each table within the 10 recommendation, which were each splits into seven categories, as follows:
 - Issues.
 - Existing services/interventions – What do we know about their quality, effectiveness and efficiency?
 - What should we do? – Strategic intent.
 - What should we do? – Services/Interventions.
 - Resources.
 - Expected housing gain?
 - Matters for escalation – Issues outside of the control of NDC.

As part of the resources required to deliver the objective, he advised that the service would require a full time Planning Enforcement officer from a reprioritisation of existing resources together with a full time Private Sector EHO at a cost of approximately £30k per year from the homelessness prevention grant.

He added that the new team would be in place and fully empowered by 31st March 2022 with a target of a minimum of 10 houses to be returned into use in year one.

The Leader thanked the Head of Planning, Housing and Health for the work that had been involved in developing this initiative to bring empty properties back into use and whilst the objective was not an easy one it was achievable.

Councillor Tucker thanked the Head of Planning, Housing and Health and acknowledged that there were a number of empty homes within the district. He suggested that it might be an appropriate course of action to liaise with the parish councils to seek valuable local information about empty properties.

Councillor Bushell sought clarification regarding the powers that the Council had at their disposal to bring empty homes back into use. He also requested further

clarification regarding as to how properties were currently unoccupied, whether or not the owners were paying Council Tax and what powers the Council could utilise if an owner was non-compliant.

In response, the Head of Planning, Housing and Health advised that the Council was able to utilise the powers to local authorities within the Housing Act 2004 by way of an empty dwelling management order. The notice enabled the Council to secure control of the property together with escalating interventions, which could result in enforcement.

In response to a question regarding empty properties within Council ownership, the Head of Planning, Housing and Health added that whilst he was not aware of any Council owned properties that were currently empty. He was happy to investigate further.

The Chief Executive added that he was unaware of any empty Council owned properties and advised that the housing stock portfolio was transferred to north Devon Homes over 20 years ago.

Mark Rostock, North Devon Homs advised that he was unaware of any empty properties within their management but that he was happy to discuss further after the meeting.

In response to a question regarding the figure of 10 planned empty homes to bring back into use. There was disappointment expressed by the stakeholders who felt that the Councils aspirations should be higher. They also questioned the methodology that the Council would employ.

The Head of Planning, Housing and Health recognised the importance of bringing empty homes back into use and the mechanisms that the Council could employ with the property owner to deliver their aspirations. He added that whilst the interventions were advisory to begin with the various steps of escalation would eventually result in action being taken by the Council. A policy would be produced to address the issue of empty homes. However, it would be unrealistic and misleading to aim too high within the first year and the Council was mindful to manage stakeholder's expectations.

In response to a question regarding the existence of a list of empty properties within the district, the Head of Planning, Housing and Health advised that the Council had a database from which the information could be extracted and that he was happy to provide this information following the meeting.

In response to a further question related to the resources required to assess all of the empty properties within the district, the Head of Planning, Housing and Health advised that the Council did not currently have the resources required to address all of the empty properties within the district. He added that the NDC was a small district Council and bringing all of the empty properties back into use was a fairly labour intensive process for which the Council may seek assistance from other organisations. Officers were mindful not to raise expectations. However, if they were able to return more properties back into use then they would.

The Head of Planning, Housing and Health advised that there were different time scales related to empty properties ranging from six months onwards. Information related to empty properties was held within the Council Tax database.

Mark Rostock – NDH advised that his organisation had worked with NDC in the past to bring empty properties back into use in Lynton and Ilfracombe adding that he would be happy to work with NDC on any future projects.

The Members raised the following points:

- In favour of bringing empty homes back into use and suggested consulting with experts regarding unclaimed estates.
- To address the lack of resources agreed that assistance from Parish Councils should be utilised.

The Head of Planning, Housing and Health thanked Members and Stakeholders for their contributions.

Table two: Response by strategic partnership – Head of Place, Property and Regeneration

- Strategic partnerships – economically active households. The Head of Place, Property and Regeneration explained that there was currently a significant shortfall in key worker accommodation, which made it challenging for organisations to recruit due to a lack available accommodation. She added that Housing enabling were also exploring Rent Plus. This theme would need to be delivered in partnership with public sector partners (key workers) and employers to map need and consider solutions. The Council would be looking to lobby government to extend the grant to deliver key worker accommodation together with affordable accommodation. She added that the definition of key worker was currently not very defined and required further explanation.

In response to a question regarding rent plus, the Service Lead for Housing Market Balance advised that rent plus had been operating since 2012 and operated all over the country. The requirements for rent plus fell under the 25% intermediate rent. She added that NDC had not delivered one yet as it hadn't met the requirements viability or location wise. In response to a further question, she advised that when residents moved into rent plus accommodation it freed up a third of social rented units and that the council would like to test houses lost in perpetuity.

In response to a question regarding the scope and timescales for the recommendation, the Head of Place, Property and Regeneration advised that in the first instance, the Council would assess the housing requirement in terms of short term, shared accommodation, ownership and rental. Once there was a delivery model in place, the Council would then be able to address the requirements.

In response to a further question regarding the Council undertaking a scoping exercise to assess the requirement for key worker accommodation verses the

number of empty properties. The Head of Place, Property and Regeneration advised that conversations of that nature had already commenced.

In response to a question regarding the identification and utilisation of NDC owned land for property development, the Head of Place, Property and Regeneration advised that there were plans to review land within NDC ownership. However, work had not yet begun on that element of the project.

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Council owned a number of pieces of land, some of which were close to NDH owned land. He added that the Council was looking to review all of its assets to see if it was possible to maximise benefits out of land within their ownership.

Chris Barraclough – Pickwell Foundation advised that they were going to be delivery eight units for NDC in 2022 working together in a private/public partnership. He added that the model that they were working to was to keep key worker properties within the ownership of NDC for 10-20 years.

In response to a question regarding a housing needs survey, the Head of Place, Property and Regeneration advised that the first piece of work to be undertaken would be the scoping paper.

Table three: Response by Place – Head of Place, Property and Regeneration

- Estate regeneration/whole town approach Ilfracombe – The Head of Place, Property and Regeneration advised that this recommendation focussed on the regeneration of estates with particular focus on Ilfracombe. There were already initiatives such as the Home, Health and Happy Futures programme. She added that resources and timeframes were dependent on external funding and that the Council was exploring the potential of Shared Prosperity Funds, which were available from 2022. She added that existing plans for the delivery of housing in Ilfracombe would enable 350 new homes to be delivered by 2030.

Mark Rostock – NDH welcomed the opportunity to work with NDC in in the delivery of properties in Ilfracombe.

Table four: Response by Affordable Housing – Service Lead Housing Market Balance

- Affordable Housing Supply via community-led housing models such as Community Land Trusts (CLTs) – The Service Lead Housing Market Balance advised that the Council would continue to focus on community led housing models by securing high levels of funding through the Community Housing Fund programme to support further communities that wished to secure affordable housing using a community-led housing model. The Council would also continue to lobby for further Central Community Housing Funding with realistic deadlines.

Mark Cann – North Devon Housing Crisis Group expressed his appreciation to the Council of their support regarding the Braunton Community Land Trust and their positive working relationship with the planning department.

The Service Lead Housing Market Balance advised that funds had be allocated for the first phase of the bids for the National Community Land Trust and that the Council were lobbying hard. She added that the final outcome would be a matter for the Member to consider and decide whether or not to allocate resources.

Councillor Wilkinson advised that Woolacombe was one of the CLTs at pre-application stage for 21 affordable units to regenerate the coastal village that is in decline due to the amount of holiday let properties. He added that the landowner was insistent that all of the dwellings were affordable rent not privately owned.

Table five: Response by Viability – Service Manager

- Planning Viability Assessments – The Service Manager advised that a review of the current Local Plan had commenced and that as part of the review officers would be reviewing the mechanisms to make it more robust. The Section 106 (S106) process would also form part of the review together with the lack of affordable housing allocation from developers.

The Members discussed the importance of S106 agreements in terms of their affordable housing allocation together with the urgency to review the process.

Alan Dykes - Tdk-Lambda added that developers often set a price on a plot of land and then employ every tool to try and reduce the number of affordable dwellings required on their site.

Mark Cann – North Devon Housing Crisis Group added that in his opinion allocation of 30% affordable dwellings was not enough and that the Council should challenge developers.

Table six: Response by Development Management process – Service Manager

- North Devon Council Development Management process efficiency – The Service Manager advised that there was currently unacceptable end to end times on planning applications, which was being impacted by the current resource issue and that the service would be looking to introduce a much more resilient structure. A new IT software system was now being use to develop planning applications and the system would be utilised to speed up the planning application process and that currently only 10% of its capabilities were being utilised. Process mapping would also be undertaken and would all be in place by March 2022.

Table seven: Response by fuel poverty – Service Lead – Home Adaptations, Improvements and Energy Efficiency

- Households living in fuel poverty – The Head of Planning, Housing and Health advised that positive progress had been made with six interventions focused

around increasing supply and reducing demand. He added that home energy efficiency was currently unnecessarily complex and that there were other inventions such as cavity installation. The Council would be looking to adopt a long term strategy for 2022/23 to deliver deep retrofits, which would require external expert assistance. The next iteration of the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) would run from 2022 to 2026 with an increase in value from £640m to £1bn per year.

Table eight: Response by Homelessness households - Service Lead - Housing Advice and Homelessness

- Homeless households - The Service Lead for Housing Advice and Homelessness advised that in 2021 the Council had 1791 approaches to the service. Of those cases 647 were able to be resolved with advice from the officers and the service was able to successfully prevent 497 households being homeless. By working with landlords the Council should be able to maximise their effectiveness of homeless prevention and relief services. As part of their strategic intent the Council should be looking to identify more sustainable solutions and provide support for longer if possible.

Interventions would include appraising the cost benefit of commissioning a specialist provider to deliver more sustainable solutions and consider the impact on families and children together with support of govern proposals to reform tenancy law.

The Members welcomed the enhanced provisions with landlords and tenancies.

The Chief Executive advised that there was little that the Council could do to influence landlords or stop them from utilising their properties fro AirB&B.

Concerns were raised by the stakeholders regarding the lack of powers to local Councils to stop private rental properties transferring to AirB&B.

The Chief Executive advised that a paper had been submitted to the North Devon MP to highlight the areas of concern together with the lack of legislation available to enable Councils to take action, which would form part of the Councils' lobbying of the government.

In response to a question regarding the utilisation of the Council Tax system for the owners of empty properties, the Head of Resources/Deputy Chief Executive advised that the longer a property was unoccupied the Council were able to levy additional charges upon the owner. He added that there was currently no legislation in place or power to charge on second homes.

Table nine: By homelessness households in temporary accommodation - Service Lead - Housing Advice and Homelessness

- Homelessness households in temporary accommodation - The Service Lead for Housing Advice and Homelessness advised that the Council currently had access to 18 self-contained temporary accommodation units and also utilised spot purchasing accommodation. She outlined the various units that were currently available to the Council and the numbers for which they could accommodate.

In response to a question she advised that the Council was mainly focussing on properties within the Barnstaple area but would look to other areas in the future.

Table 10: By population – Head of Planning, Housing and Health

- This recommendation focussed on those precariously housed in poor quality shared accommodation. This often included people who were socially marginalised due to physical or mental health together with criminal activity or addictions.

The Members discussed the outcomes of the meeting and acknowledged that whilst the Council was not able to deal with all issues at district level they should definitely continue to lobby government for the actions that were beyond their control. They also acknowledged that the current Local Plan was out of date and that government should be lobbied to allow for a more flexible system.

They agreed that the Head of Planning, Housing and Health and his team of officers had all worked extremely hard to produce the 10 streams of work.

The Members requested the following:

- That details of all pieces of land owned by NDC be circulated via email.
- That a copy of the presentation be made available to all stakeholders.

The Leader advised that the recommendations from the panel meeting would now proceed to the Policy Development Committee for consideration at its meeting on 9th December 2021.

The Chief Executive added that officers had made a genuine attempt to progress realistic objectives and welcomed the opportunity to constructively work with other partners/organisations and welcomed all suggestions. He explained that the Council would be lobbying government in relation to the housing crisis.

The Leader advised that as it was an informal meeting the Members were not able to take a formal vote but that the Council would progress the recommendations as soon as possible.

He thanked everyone for their input to the meeting and the officers for all of their hard work.

Meeting ended at 20.58.

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