

**NORTH DEVON COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of Policy Development Committee held at Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Thursday, 9th December, 2021 at 6.30 pm

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor D. Spear (Chair)

Councillors Campbell, Bulled, Jenkins, Mackie, Walker and York

Officers:

Chief Executive and Head of Planning, Housing and Health.

Also Present:

Councillor L. Spear.

**33. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hunt, Luggar and Roome.

**34. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18TH NOVEMBER 2021 (ATTACHED).**

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

There were no declarations of interest announced.

**36. INFORMAL HOUSING PANEL.**

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Planning, Housing and Health (circulated previously) regarding the outcomes and recommendations from the two informal meetings of the Policy Development Committee, which were held on 21<sup>st</sup> October and 25<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

The Head of Planning, Housing and Health gave a presentation to the Committee providing a recap of the process that was undertaken at the two informal panel meetings held in October and November 2021.

He explained that as part of the stakeholder consultation meetings each representative was invited to address the informal panel and that it was a very effective process, which enabled the officers to gain extensive knowledge of their local community's housing needs.

Following these meetings, officers discussed the points raised and developed 10 recommendations, which were categorised under various housing needs with a view to delivering the most appropriate and cost effective solutions.

He explained that following their analysis of their housing needs assessment, the process was split into four parts:

- Part A: by population.
- Part B: by place.
- Part C: by property type.
- Part D: by process.

Officers then identified the following 10 recommendations as potentially appropriate and cost-effective solutions six of the recommendations related to increasing supply and four related to reducing demand:

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 the Lead Planning Officer (South) and the Service Lead – Home Adaptations, Improvements and Energy Efficiency.
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.

He added that each of the recommendations directly responded to the requirements of the stakeholders from both meetings. He added that in addition to the 10 recommendations, officers had also identified a further two recommendations, which were:

- Providing support to rough sleepers.
- Meeting the site and support needs for gypsies, Travellers and van dwellers.

He explained that the process had highlighted the opportunity that the Council had to make representations to the government, and this meeting provided a further opportunity to support the recommendations, which had already being made to government by the Chief Executive and Leader of North Devon Council.

He added that as officers he and his team felt that the exercise had been very positive in building relationships with stakeholders.

The Chair thanked the Head of Planning, Housing and Health together with his team for their hard work in developing the recommendations adding that he welcomed the recommendations.

The Head of Planning, Housing and Health advised that decisions would need to be taken in relation to the resources required to undertake and deliver the recommendations.

He explained that there were various grants, which could be utilised to support the implementation of these proposals, one of which was the Homelessness Prevention grant and funding which was available for the Ilfracombe area to support the development of new housing.

Following the presentation, the Chief Executive and the Head of Planning, Housing and Health provided answers to Members questions:

- The payment of Universal Credit was government policy and directed that all payments be made to the tenant as opposed to the landlord.
- The potential for utilisation of Council owned land for housing development was incorporated as part of recommendation two, which referred to the

collaboration of partners and the consideration of our own land and assets within that. The Head of Planning, Housing and Health added that the wording of recommendation two could be amended to make the reference to Council owned land more exclusive. He further added that there was a requirement to provide further clarification with the intention and emphasis being on improving standards and increasing supply.

- The Chief Executive explained that paragraph 4.4 of the report highlighted the requirement to lobby government and that historically when the Council has highlighted a requirement for property the public had come forward to offer accommodation.
- The Council had received generous funding from the government to provide loans to landlords/homeowners to support improvements. There was now an opportunity to be more targeted and sophisticated in the Council's approach when providing loan assistance in the future.
- A budget plans workshop would be held on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2021, which would be presenting six different areas of work for the Council, one of which was housing. If the Members were happy then they would be adopted by Full Council in the New Year. There was also a project management system in place to support the delivery of work.
- There was an issue with the lack of an accredited list of contractors for the public to ensure that work undertaken would be to a suitable and appropriate standard. The Committee was advised that the government had recently introduced fully accredited quality standards for all contractors and the Council would only work with contractors who were fully accredited.

The Committee discussed the importance of the various proposals for discussion at the Budget Plans workshop on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2021 and the opportunity to change things for the future. They also discussed the development of the new Local Plan and the importance of getting it right in terms of viability procedures together with the current lack of resources to deal with viability issues. There was also discussions around the resources within the planning process together with the importance of a community led planning process.

The Leader expressed his delight at how well the hybrid process had worked for the meeting allowing himself and other Members to join the meeting virtually. He added that he was supportive of all of the recommendations contained within the report and questioned the Council's involvement in the development of key worker properties. He also requested clarification regarding initiatives which the Council could employ to facilitate residents to downsize from larger unoccupied properties.

The Chief Executive responded and advised that recommendation two related to assessing the needs for key worker accommodation and that the Council was very conscious of the issues currently facing key workers and the lack of appropriate accommodation within the North Devon area. In terms of viability and being more robust in its process, this was alluded to in recommendation five. However, this was a difficult area to address in terms of government guidance but there was more that could be done, which could include lobbying government as the current guidance was slightly skewed to favour the developer over the Local Authority. He added that one way to impact upon the viability issues would be to counter the companies which

were specifically established to challenge viability on behalf of the developers. There was also a community thread required to engage with local communities and enable the acceptance of development within the right location.

In response to a question regarding the definition of “key worker” the Head of Planning, Housing and Health advised that it was a generic term, which historically was considered as public sector. However, the term now existed in both public and private employment.

In response to a question regarding the release of land at an affordable price to be utilised for Community Land Trusts (CLTs), the Chief Executive advised that it could be included within the recommendation and the Head of Planning, Housing and Health advised that he would look into the inclusion of the request.

In response to a further question regarding an incentive to allocate land for CLTs, the Chief Executive advised that there was a requirement to establish communications with the National Trust and the Church of England to enable a dialogue of similar working practices.

The Head of Planning, Housing and Health advised that from an officer perspective he was very positive that the recommendations being put to the Committee addressed the expressed needs of the stakeholders.

He added that through engagement with stakeholders positive partnerships had been created, which would enable future working and bring added benefits to the Council.

The Chief Executive added that the proposed interventions were not about subsidised accommodation and properties would be charged at the market rate.

Recognising that positive change required both financial support and a joined up approach with Government, the council would continue to escalate concerns. The council would raise issues via the Devon Leaders/Chief Executives Group and directly with Government.

The following representations had already been made:

- (a) it was imperative that the current business rate criteria allowing a property to be valued for business rates based on the number of days that it was available for rent should change, as recommended by the HMT Tax Policies and Consultations Spring 2021 report;
- (b) consideration should be given to allowing councils to set higher rates of council tax on second homes;
- (c) powers should be given to councils to enable them to take action where use as a short term let caused issues, including making changes to the Town and Country Planning Act to make clear that a change from permanent residential use to short term let was a material change of use;

- (d) a system for licensing and regulating short term lets should be introduced;
- (e) whilst new housing was needed, there needed to be recognition that it was not be the only answer. At some stage, the flow of homes into the second home and short term letting market needed to be constrained;
- (f) In order to increase the supply of properties suitable for use by housing authorities, consideration should be given to inducing landlords to make their properties available such as grants etc. or regulating the market so that landlords were required to make their properties available to local people prior to being used as short term lets; and
- (g) remove any barriers to local planning authorities that wished to introduce policies requiring all new builds to be main residences etc.
- (h) that the government review the payment of Universal Credit, which was currently paid directly to the tenant in favour of the previous system where payment was made directly to the landlord.

RESOLVED:

That the Council:

- (a) (bring more empty homes back into use;
- (b) provide more housing for people who were working in North Devon or wanted to move there for work and explore options to utilise Council owned land for that purpose;
- (c) develop a place-based approach for providing more housing options for people in Ilfracombe;
- (d) use Community land Trusts to boost supply of affordable housing;
- (e) reduce the 'loss' of affordable housing due to viability challenges;
- (f) improve efficiency in dealing with planning applications;
- (g) improve home energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty;
- (h) enhance the council's homelessness prevention services;
- (i) provide more suitable and affordable temporary accommodation;
- (j) improve standards in shared rented accommodation and provide opportunity to people who were socially marginalised; and
- (k) endorsed the recommendations made to the government, as detailed in paragraph 4.4 of the report.

**37. WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22.**

RESOLVED, that the work programme be noted.

Chair

The meeting ended at 8.11 pm

NOTE: These minutes will be confirmed as a correct record at the next meeting of the Committee.