

POLICY DEVELOPMENT & REVIEW 2009/10: SCOPE

LINK TO WORK PROGRAMME: POLICY DEVELOPMENT & REVIEW

Report of the Chief Executive

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: SP1: Prosperous City; P5: Attractive and Inclusive City

CORPORATE PRIORITIES: CIO1: Delivering Customer Focused Services, CIO4: Improving Partnership Working to Deliver 'One City'.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to put forward proposals and seek agreement from Members in relation to the forthcoming policy review into Access to Housing.

2. Background Information

- 2.1 The Annual Scrutiny Conference was held at the Stadium of Light on 11th June 2009 and at the Sustainable Communities breakout session a number of viable policy review proposals were formulated for discussion by Members of the committee. At its meeting on 15th June 2009 following discussions regarding the work programme the Committee considered the possibility of a study into access to housing in the city.
- 2.2 In Sunderland the increase in house prices and the reduction of social housing, (by 10,000 units in the last 10 years, mainly due to Right to Buy and clearance), has led to imbalances in several housing market areas. Affordability and a range of housing that meets people's needs and aspirations are key issues facing many households across Sunderland, not least newly forming households, who are finding in some instances prevailing market prices too high and a lack of available mortgage finance to enable them to purchase a property. Sunderland has considerably higher levels of semi detached and terraced housing than other types of housing in the city. It has been identified, through past surveys, that there is a real need to increase the choice of housing on offer and also the need to increase the supply of affordable housing across the city.
- 2.3 Whilst supply of housing is an issue it must be acknowledged that any new supply will take many years to come to fruition and therefore the key driver for the review would be looking at how people access the housing that we already have, focussing mainly on social housing, and ensuring that access to it is as clear and equitable as it can be so that the best outcomes for customers are achieved.
- 2.4 A brief snapshot of the national and local picture in relation to housing and more specifically social housing are provided for Members' information and throughout the course of the review process further information and evidence around these themes will be provided.

National Context:

- (a) An estimated 5 million people will be on social housing waiting lists by 2010 – a million more than in 2008.
- (b) Almost 100,000 households were homeless in England in 2007 – almost twice as many as in 1997.
- (c) At the end of March 2009, 64,000 homeless households in England were living in temporary local authority accommodation, 49,030 of these households had dependent children.
- (d) There are currently more than 750,000 empty homes in England made up of surplus flats built for buy-to-let landlords, failed private rented properties and homes left empty pending delayed regeneration schemes.
- (e) In 2006-07, 554,000 households in England were overcrowded.
- (f) In 2007, black and ethnic minorities represented just under a quarter of all households found to be homeless in England.

Local Context:

- (a) The number of households in Sunderland is expected to rise to 137,000 by 2029.
- (b) There are over 20,000 people on housing waiting lists in Sunderland.
- (c) At the end of March 2009 there were 17 households in Sunderland living in temporary accommodation, 8 of whom had dependent children – this is a decrease from 29 households living in temporary accommodation in 2008
- (d) 217 people were accepted as homeless in 2008/09 a decrease from 433 in 2007/08.
- (e) 673 people were prevented from becoming homeless in 2008/09 an increase from 363 in 2007/08.
- (f) There are currently more than 5,000 empty properties in Sunderland, 2390 of which in the private sector have been empty more than 6 months.

The current system by which people access social housing is flawed and doesn't focus on the customer per se. It is:

- Confusing for customers;
- Has duplication within it;
- Access and nomination arrangements are multi-stranded;
- Exclusion policies are not standardised;
- It is seen as not fair;
- Not transparent;

- Lack of choice;
- Inconsistent;
- Does not manage customer expectations.

3. The Scrutiny Review Process

3.1 Scrutiny reviews will carry out a number of stages in undertaking and completing a review. The stages broadly are:

Stage 1 Scope	The initial stage of the review identifies the background, issues, potential outcomes and timetable for the review.
Stage 2 Investigate	The Committee gathers evidence using a variety of tools and techniques and arranges visits where appropriate.
Stage 3 Analyse	The key trends and issues are highlighted from the evidence gathered by the Committee.
Stage 4 Clarify	The Committee discusses and identifies the principal messages of the review from the work undertaken.
Stage 5 Recommend	The Committee formulates and agrees realistic recommendations.
Stage 6 Report	Draft and final reports are prepared based on the evidence, findings and recommendations.
Stage 7 Monitor	The Committee monitors recommendations on a regularly agreed basis.

4. Overall Aim of the Scrutiny Policy Review

4.1 To investigate current practices and policies across the city in relation to the way in which people access housing in Sunderland and suggest ways in which improvements could be made.

5. Proposed Terms of Reference for the Scrutiny Policy Review

5.1 The following Terms of Reference for the policy review are proposed:-

- To provide a national and local context to the availability of housing in the City;
- To consider the current ways by which people access social housing in the City;
- To identify and highlight the issues relating to how people access housing in the City;

- (d) To look at what services are available to support people to access housing;
- (e) To investigate how the Council and its partners work together;
- (f) To look at the potential impact of Choice Based Lettings on how people access housing;
- (g) To ensure that a single route in to housing is attained so that improved customer outcomes are achieved;
- (h) To consider examples of best practice and innovative provision from local authorities and other key stakeholders across the country in relation to access to housing.

6. Potential Areas of Enquiry and Sources of Evidence

- 6.1 Members of the Scrutiny Committee can request a range of evidential and comparative information throughout the Scrutiny review.
- 6.2 In undertaking this policy review there is the potential for the investigation to cross-cut into the work of one or more of the other scrutiny committees and it may require some joint working arrangements to be established during the course of the review process.
- 6.4 The Scrutiny Committee can invite a variety of people, key stakeholders and interested parties to attend in order that a balanced and focused range of recommendations can be formulated. A list of potential witnesses, though not exhaustive, is included for Members information:
 - (a) Cabinet Member with Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Communities
 - (b) Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services
 - (c) Director of City Services
 - (d) Head of Housing
 - (e) Representatives from Chief Executives including economic regeneration & employment
 - (f) Key Stakeholders (e.g. Gentoo, Housing Associations, Registered Social Landlords)
 - (g) Local residents;
 - (h) Representatives of minority communities of interest; and
 - (i) Ward Councillors.

Work is already ongoing with Elected Members and partners and the work done to date will be factored in to any future work done by the Committee.

6.5 The Committee may also wish to refer to a variety of documentary / internet sources, key suggestions are as highlighted below:-

- (a) Sunderland...for a better future - The Sunderland Strategy 2008 – 2025. Sunderland City Council (2008).
- (b) Housing for the Future – A Housing Strategy for Sunderland 2006 – 2011. Sunderland City Council (2006).
- (c) Housing for the Future – Action Plan. Sunderland City Council (2006).
- (d) Communities and Local Government website
- (e) Homes for the Future: The Housing Green Paper. (2007)
- (f) Housing and Regeneration Act 2008
- (g) Building Britain's Future. HM Government.

7. Proposed Timetable of the Scrutiny Policy Review

7.2 Detailed below is the proposed timetable for the policy review to be undertaken, which may be changed at any stage:-

22 September 2009	Setting the Scene for the Review
20 October 2009	Evidence to be determined
17 November 2009	Evidence to be determined
15 December 2009	Evidence to be determined
19 January 2010	Evidence to be determined
16 February 2010	Consideration of Draft Report
16 March 2010	Consideration of Final Draft Report

7.3 The evidence for the review can be obtained using a variety of techniques that could include the following;

- (a) Surveys/Questionnaires
- (b) Site Visits
- (c) Expert Jury
- (d) Desktop Research

- (e) Public Event Day
- (f) Focus Groups.

8. Scrutiny Budget

- 8.1 The Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee has a delegated budget of £10,000 which can assist Members in key aspects of their policy review work. The budget allows the Committee to go on site visits, conduct surveys, commission research, call expert witnesses and hold public events as part of the ongoing evidence gathering process of the policy review. Consideration will need to be given, throughout the policy review, to any potential funding implications required to aid Members in their enquiry.

9. Community Engagement / Diversity and Equality

- 9.1 Community engagement plays a crucial role in the Scrutiny process and paragraph 6.4 details who the Committee could involve. However, thought will need to be given to the structure in the way that the Committee wishes to encourage those views.
- 9.2 In addition, equality and diversity issues have been considered in the background research for this review under the Equality Standards for Local Government. As such the views of local diversity groups will be sought throughout the inquiry where felt appropriate and time allows.

10. Recommendation

- 10.1 Members are recommended to discuss and agree the scope of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee's policy review for 2009/10 as outlined in the report.

Background Papers

- Sunderland...for a better future - The Sunderland Strategy 2008 – 2025. Sunderland City Council

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