

**SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 22<sup>nd</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2009**

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT & REVIEW 2009/10: APPROACH TO THE REVIEW**

**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 seek agreement from members in relation to the final terms of reference for this year's Policy Review – Access to Housing.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 At its meeting on 15th June, 2009 following discussions at the recent Scrutiny Conference the Committee considered a variety of possibilities for the policy review and decided to look at the access to housing in the city. An initial scoping document providing several options for detailed focus was presented to the Committee on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2009 and looking at access to housing in Sunderland was agreed as the focus. This report adds structure to the review and further focuses the subject area to look at the various ways local people access housing in the city and how this can be streamlined.

**3. Title of the Review**

- 3.1 The title of the review is suggested as 'Waiting for a House: Access to Housing in Sunderland'.

**4. Objectives of the Review**

- 4.1 To provide a national and local context to the availability of housing in the City;
- 4.2 To consider the current ways by which people access social housing in the City;
- 4.3 To identify and highlight the issues relating to how people access housing in the City;
- 4.4 To look at what services are available to support people to access housing;
- 4.5 To investigate how the Council and its partners work together;
- 4.6 To look at the potential impact of Choice Based Lettings on how people access housing;

- 4.7 To ensure that a single route in to housing is attained so that improved customer outcomes are achieved;
- 4.8 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.

## **5. Consultation for the Review**

- 5.1 Research activities over the coming months will be co-ordinated by this Committee's Scrutiny Officer in consultation with the relevant directorate staff. To assist in this, a small working party will meet on a regular basis outside of the Committee to bring forward relevant ideas and ensure all relevant issues are considered and brought to Members' attention. Every effort will be made to involve Members in the research. Although alternative opportunities may present themselves during the review, data collection techniques may include a combination of the following:

- Desktop research
- Use of secondary research e.g. surveys
- Evidence presented by key stakeholders
- Evidence from members of the public at meetings or focus groups
- Site visits
- Questionnaires
- Expert Witness evidence

- 5.2 The review will gather evidence from a variety of sources. The main evidence will come from information provided by council officers and external partners likely to include, though not exhaustive, the following:

- Cabinet Member with Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Communities, Prosperous City and Responsive Services
- Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services
- Director of City Services
- Head of Housing
- Representatives from Chief Executives including economic regeneration & employment
- Key Stakeholders (e.g. Gentoo, Housing Associations, Registered Social Landlords)
- Regional Development Agency
- Homes and Communities Agency
- Local residents;
- Representatives of minority communities of interest; and
- Ward Councillors.

## **6. Scope of the Review**

- 6.1 The review will consider, as part of the review process, the following issues related to access to housing:

- Who are the key stakeholders in social housing in Sunderland?
- What is the current experience of people looking to access social housing?
- What are the current allocations policies in use across the city and how do these work?
- What advice is available to people looking for housing and how is this signposted?
- What is the current supply and demand for housing across the city?
- What is the role of Private Sector Landlords in housing provision and how does this compliment social housing?
- What are the barriers to accessing housing in the city? Do these barriers change depending on circumstances?
- How do key partners work together and what barriers exist to effective access to housing?
- What are Choice Based Lettings and how would this work in Sunderland?
- How would a Choice Based Lettings scheme improve access to housing across the city?
- How can a single route into housing be achieved?
- What policies and practices are working successfully in other local authority areas and what can Sunderland learn from these?

6.2 As the review investigation develops Members may decide to reduce or widen the remit of the review to ensure that the findings are both robust and based on the evidence and research gathered.

## **7. Timescales**

7.1 Also attached for Members information is a draft timetable for the policy review which outlines the various activities and evidence gathering that will be undertaken throughout the review process. The timetable forms the basis of the review process and allows members to see the range of activities and methodologies to be employed during the evidence gathering stage. The timetable is subject to amendment and throughout the review process members will be provided with an up-to-date timetable reflecting any changes.

7.2 Members of the review committee will be invited to attend the various focus groups and visits that are to be undertaken as part of the policy review, and will be kept informed of all review activities as and when they are arranged.

## **8. Policy Review Working Group**

8.1 It is suggested that the majority of the work is conducted through the establishment of a policy review working group, which would conduct the key evidence gathering aspects of the review. It is envisaged that this working group would report on progress to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee on a regular basis. This will have the benefits of;

- being able to progress quicker outside the confines of the formal meeting
- not slowing down business in formal meetings
- allowing for greater investigation of issues by members.

## **9. Recommendations**

- 9.1 That the committee agrees the title of the review as 'Waiting for a House: Access to Housing in Sunderland.'
- 9.2 That Members of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee discuss and agree the outline aims, objectives and scope for the review.
- 9.3 That Members also give consideration to the suggestion of establishing a working group and also to the membership of such a working group in order to progress the policy review work outlined.

### **Background Papers**

- Corporate Improvement Plan – City of Sunderland Council

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