

Report to	-	Cabinet
Date	-	30 July 2018
Report of the	-	Executive Director
Subject	-	Final Recommendations of the Housing Issues Task and Finish Group

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 23 July 2018, considered a report on the Final Recommendations of the Housing Issues Task and Finish Group. The recommendations and minute arising is reproduced below.

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That

- 1) A Housing and Homelessness Strategy be developed which includes the following actions in respect of reducing homelessness:
 - a. Consider establishing a regular local multi partner homelessness forum to develop and deliver the homelessness strategy.
 - b. Engage with partners to reduce costs by preventing duplication of services.
 - c. Establish protocols and procedures with social landlords and letting agents operating in Rother.
 - d. Consult on options for additional homelessness prevention measures, to include setting up and managing a social lettings agency and securing access to more private rented properties through closer partnerships with local landlords.
 - e. Work with the voluntary sector to explore options for creating a street homelessness centre/hub in Bexhill, with outreach available to rural areas of Rother.
 - f. Update the criteria for Discretionary Housing Payment by April 2019 to better reflect the needs of households affected by welfare reforms.
 - g. Develop a communications plan, to include training, to ensure front line officers, partners and Members are aware of the support available.
- 2) A Housing and Homelessness Strategy be developed, as per recommendation 1, which includes the following actions in respect of affordable housing delivery:
 - a. Create a delivery vehicle or vehicles such as a Local Housing Company and/or public/private partnerships with the following objectives:
 - To acquire emergency and temporary accommodation through the purchase of accommodation for conversion or delivering new build temporary accommodation; and

- purchasing accommodation for those in housing need – ‘street purchases’ for market or to meet temporary accommodation needs.
- b. Purchasing and developing ‘stalled’ sites that are vital to the delivery of affordable housing through negotiation or Compulsory Purchase Orders where other options have failed (see also recommendation 3e below).
 - c. Strengthen partnership working with Registered Providers by expanding the number of preferred partners to work with and developing a joint framework/protocol agreement incorporating streamlined planning processes with realistic timeframes and clear guidance notes.
 - d. Working with Registered Providers to explore the opportunity of introducing affordable warmth methods and modern and innovative methods of construction, for example timber framed kits, for all affordable housing developments.
 - e. Continue supporting and working with Action in Rural Sussex, Parish and Town Councils and community groups in identifying suitable sites and delivering community led housing.
- 3) Measures to ensure a sufficient, continuous supply of housing land be promoted, which includes the following actions:
- a. Giving priority to completing the Development and Site Allocations Plan and the production of Neighbourhood Plans, taking account of revised National Planning Policy Framework.
 - b. An early review of the Local Plan (Core Strategy) be prioritised, taking account of revised National Planning Policy Framework especially given Government’s likely expectation of substantially more housing.
 - c. Consideration be given to allowing exception site planning policy to allow for an element of market housing to cross subsidise where viability is an issue, taking account of revised National Planning Policy Framework.
 - d. Identification of more “small site” development opportunities, including for custom and self-build housing, possibly working with smaller developers within a public/private partnership.
 - e. ‘Unblocking’ of sites where physical infrastructure and/or ownership factors present a major constraint to development including by:
 - working to find strategic drainage, utilities and digital broadband solutions to support major developments, working with utility companies and respective developers;
 - seeking financial support from Homes England and other Central Government growth funds;
 - working proactively to bring forward development on sites where the Council has a landholding interest;
 - proactively negotiating with developers and landowners to bring forward key development sites; and

- consideration, as a last resort, of pursuing Compulsory Purchase Orders, being mindful of local sensitivities.
- f. Continuing to invest in strategically important infrastructure projects that boost the market attractiveness of places where growth is planned, potentially including, for example, the development of GP surgeries.
 - g. Promoting higher water efficiency standards through the Local Plan as well as exploring the opportunity of introducing 'recycled water' within planning applications, subject to consistency with national requirements and viability considerations.
 - h. Promoting higher standards of energy efficiency in new homes through future planning policy and guidance and working with developers.
 - i. Introduce and deliver a Landowners Forum, to take place once every two years, to encourage communication and promote housing development.
 - j. Prepare a housing delivery "Action Plan" in response to the new Housing Delivery Test and taking full account of the above, in light of revised National Planning Policy Framework.

OSC18/13. **FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HOUSING ISSUES TASK AND FINISH GROUP**
(5.1)

Following a presentation in November 2017 by Opinion Research Services on findings from Rother's Strategic Housing Research Project and a Housing Overview report, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) agreed that a Housing Issues Task and Finish Group (HIT&FG) be set up to consider the following subject areas:

- land supply issues / development options;
- affordable and social housing delivery;
- homelessness; and
- managing the impact of welfare reforms.

Members of the HIT&FG had received and considered officer reports and heard presentations from relevant external organisations, which detailed the issues and provided scope for discussion, before agreement was reached in terms of recommendations going forward.

The circumstances which had led to the housing issues were summarised in terms of high demand (for houses and housing services) and low supply (lack of suitable and affordable housing).

Three areas of work were proposed in order to reduce homelessness, with each setting out a number of actions leading to the recommendations.

After some discussion, the following points were noted:

- The amended National Planning Policy Framework due imminently would have implications on the Local Plan and future planning policy.
- Concealed homelessness (ie those that the Council were not always aware of who were 'sofa-surfing', or grown up children living at home, unable to access housing of their own) were as much of a problem as those individuals living on the streets.
- Members wished to acknowledge the good work of the Housing Department, in particular in identifying temporary accommodation for rough sleepers, which was not always accepted.
- The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing, Welfare and Equalities confirmed that during the severe weather earlier in the year, the Council's Housing officers made contact with all those sleeping rough in Bexhill to offer temporary accommodation. It was the Council's policy that where temporary accommodation was offered, if the person was unable to get to the accommodation the Council organised and paid for a taxi to ensure they are able to access the accommodation.
- Land owners should be encouraged to release land for building.
- Members requested an additional recommendation to promote the higher efficiency of buildings and it was agreed that officers would provide an appropriate form of words.
- The Committee wished to pass on their thanks to the Chairman, all members of the HIT&FG and all officers involved in developing the final recommendations.

(Councillors J.J. Carroll, Earl, Elford, Ganly, Osborne and Mrs G.P. Johnson each declared a personal interest as a landlord and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the room during the consideration thereof).

(Overview and Scrutiny Agenda Item 5.1)

Dr Anthony Leonard
Executive Director