

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Response by the Cabinet to Findings and Recommendations of Affordable Housing Working Group

Meeting/Date: Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Communities and Customers) – 5th January 2016

Executive Portfolio: Councillor D B Dew (Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Housing) and Councillor D M Tysoe (Executive Member for Customer Services)

Report by: Councillor J Ablewhite (Executive Leader and Chairman of the Cabinet)

Ward(s) affected: All

Executive Summary:

To provide a formal response following a series of recommendations submitted to the Cabinet by the Affordable Housing Working Group.

Recommendation(s):

That the Panel receive and consider the response as detailed in Appendix 1.

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1. WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT/PURPOSE?

- 1.1 At its meeting on 19th November 2015 the Cabinet received a report from the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-being) inviting the Cabinet to consider and respond to the findings and final recommendations of the Affordable Housing Working Group.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide a formal response to the recommendations submitted to the Cabinet.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Working Group was established in March 2014 by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-being) Panel to initially investigate the policies and procedures of Registered Providers. In July/August 2014 the Group's remit was amended to undertake a study on affordable housing.
- 2.2 At the last meeting of the Working Group it was agreed that a final report and recommendations should be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-being). This was considered at the meeting on 3rd November 2015.
- 2.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-being) endorsed the Group's findings and recommendations and requested that the Cabinet consider and respond to these.
- 2.4 At its meeting on 19th November 2015 the Cabinet considered the findings and final recommendations of the Affordable Housing Working Group.
- 2.5 The Chairman of the Affordable Housing Working Group, Councillor R Fuller, presented the Group's report to the Cabinet on 19th November 2015.

3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS

- 3.1 The Affordable Housing Working Group recommended that the Cabinet consider and respond to the following recommendations:

That during the development of the Housing Strategy for 2016-19 and the Local Plan to 2036:

- The Council should actively promote the provision of affordable housing on exceptions sites to Town and Parish Councils;
- Where a Parish Council does not support an exceptions site, the Council should continue to fulfil its duty to meet identified affordable housing need;
- A systematic assessment should be carried out of all land to identify potential sites for affordable housing to then be matched to needs (strategic housing land availability assessment); and
- The threshold for developments on which on-site affordable housing can be sought should be lowered from 15 to 10 dwellings.

- 3.2 The recommendations of the Affordable Housing Working Group were fully considered and endorsed by the Cabinet. The Cabinet's response is set out in Appendix 1.
- 3.3 As a result of the discussions the Cabinet also resolved that the Council should take legal advice to explore the options to protect local houses for local

people on rural development schemes through, amongst other things, covenants, joint ventures and charitable mechanisms.

4. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN

- 4.1 Affordable housing contributes to the strategic priority of “Enabling sustainable growth” by improving the supply of new and affordable housing to meet future needs and to the strategic priority of “Working with our communities”.

5. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 5.1 In accordance with the Council’s Constitution the Cabinet is required to publish a response to the report and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

6. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

- 6.1 Appendix 1 - Response by the Cabinet to Findings and Recommendations of the Affordable Housing Working Group

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Affordable Housing Working Group Papers

Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-being) Meeting - 3rd November 2015 – Minute No. 46:

<http://moderngov.huntsdc.gov.uk:8070/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=10103&MId=5695&Ver=4>

Cabinet Meeting – 19th November 2015 – Minute No. 51:

<http://moderngov.huntsdc.gov.uk:8070/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=256&MId=5682&Ver=4>

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Response by the Cabinet to Findings and Recommendations of the Affordable Housing Working Group

The Cabinet endorsed the following recommendations made by the Affordable Housing Working Group, that during the development of the Housing Strategy for 2016-19 and the Local Plan to 2036:

- the Council should actively promote the provision of affordable housing on exceptions sites to Town and Parish Councils;
- where a Parish Council does not support an exceptions site, the Council should continue to fulfil its duty to meet identified affordable housing need;
- a systematic assessment should be carried out of all land to identify potential sites for affordable housing to then be matched to needs (strategic housing land availability assessment); and
- the threshold for developments on which on-site affordable housing can be sought should be lowered from 15 to 10 dwellings.

It was noted that there had been incidences where a Town or Parish Council had not supported an affordable development on an exceptions site which had resulted in the non-delivery of affordable housing. The Cabinet agreed that early engagement with Town and Parish Councils was essential to prevent misinformation, to gain their support and to prevent pressure groups forming. It was hoped that Ward Members would assist in this role. However, in the event that a Town or Parish Council did not support a viable exceptions site, the Cabinet endorsed the view that the Council should take decisions that were in the best interests of the area and should fulfil its duty to meet identified affordable housing need.

The Cabinet agreed that a systematic assessment should be conducted of all land to identify potential sites for affordable housing which could then be matched to needs and noted that the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment was a significant task.

The Working Group had considered Government initiatives and their impact on the supply of new affordable housing. The policy target of 40% affordable housing still applied to all developments but there was the potential for negotiation where this was not viable. The Cabinet noted that 40% affordable housing was being achieved on smaller developments.

The Working Group had been informed that the Council could seek affordable housing contributions where there was a clear case of disaggregation of the site, whereby a developer intended to build on separate parts of a larger site over a long period. The Council's current threshold was 15 homes on urban sites due to previous Government policy. The Cabinet supported the Working Group's recommendation that the threshold for developments on which on-site affordable housing could be sought should be lowered from 15 to 10 dwelling.

Whilst referring to Community Land Trusts, the Cabinet noted that the Working Group had been provided with examples of Community Land Trusts in various areas, including in East Cambridgeshire. The Cabinet concurred with the opinion of the Working Group that the Council should not devote this level of resource to encouraging Community Land Trusts in Huntingdonshire but considered that they should be recognised, amongst the potential tools available to local communities for delivering affordable housing.

It was also noted amongst the Cabinet that there was a need to prevent and allay fears that affordable housing on rural exception sites developed on charitable land could be purchased by a person without a local connection.

The Cabinet accepted that there was a will and appetite to deliver affordable housing but land owners would not offer land for minimal financial gain. Therefore the Council needed to consider what it could do to enable the development of dwellings that were affordable to allow local people of all ages to remain living in their preferred location. In endorsing the recommendations made by the Affordable Housing Working Group, the Cabinet also resolved that the Council should take legal advice to explore options to protect local houses for local people on rural development schemes through, the amongst other things, covenants, joint ventures and charitable mechanisms.

The Cabinet expressed congratulations to the Working Group for the comprehensive report and also wished to formally acknowledge each individual Member of the Affordable Housing Working Group for their valuable contribution as follows:

Councillor R Fuller; S Van De Kerkhove; P Kadewere; R Farrer; P Bucknell and former Councillor I Curtis.