

**Minutes of the Adult, Community and Housing Services Scrutiny
Committee**

**Wednesday, 18th February, 2015 at 6.00 p.m.
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley**

Present:

Councillor M Hanif (Chair)
Councillors R Body, I Cooper, A Goddard, Z Islam, J Martin, D Perks, K Turner,
D Tyler and D Vickers.

Officers:

M Williams Chief Officer (Corporate and Customer Services), (Lead Officer to the Committee), R Sims Interim Chief Officer (Housing), S Evans Head of Service – Housing Options, A Leigh Head of Service (Housing Strategy and Development) and H Rowley, Team Manager – Homelessness and Housing Advice – (All Directorate of Environment, Economy and Housing) and K Buckle (Democratic Services Officer) – (Directorate of Resources and Transformation).

31 **Apology for Absence**

An Apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor R James.

32 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillors R Body and K Turner declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item No. 7 – The Homelessness Service as a YMCA Host caring for homeless teenagers and as the Landlord of properties within the Dudley Borough respectively.

33 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19th January, 2015, be approved as a correct record and signed.

34 **Public Forum**

There were no issues raised under this agenda item heading.

Opening Remarks of the Chair

The Chair referred to an Introduction Note that had been circulated to Members of the Committee advising that at a previous meeting the Committee had considered the Borough's housing strategy, when a number of issues arose one of which was unmet housing demand/need and it had been identified that almost 750 new affordable homes were required per annum over the preceding 13 years in order to meet demand.

The Chair referred to a number of national reports and reviews that had been published during the last few months and the general view that as a nation there was a need to build more homes.

The Chair advised that the intention of the meeting was to consider two reports that had been published, the Elphicke – House Report commissioned by the Government and the Lyons Review commissioned by the Leader of the Opposition. It was noted that both called for more housing and set out a series of recommendations, for a range of organisations to adopt, including national and local government and both documents were likely to have significant implications for the Council and the development of the Council's Housing Strategy.

The Elphicke-House Report and Lyons Review

A report of the Strategic Director of Environment, Economy and Housing was submitted on the Elphicke – House and the Lyons Review concerning housing delivery.

In presenting the report submitted, the Head of Housing Strategy and Development outlined the report submitted by powerpoint presentation, with Members asking questions and making suggestions throughout the presentation.

The Head of Housing Strategy and Development referred to the background of both reviews advising of the number of new builds required nationally and the number of new builds in the Dudley Borough with details of those new builds which were affordable housing. The predicted 2 million shortage of affordable housing by 2020 was referred to. The impact this would have on affordability given rising house prices and rents and the impact on the national economy and prospects for growth were noted.

It was stated that the Elphicke-House Review was led by Natalie Elphicke and Councillor Keith House with the purpose of reviewing the role that local authorities could play in increasing the supply of housing across all tenures in their local areas and was reported back to Government in January, 2015.

It was noted that the key recommendation was that Councils should change from being statutory providers to being housing delivery enablers which

Included being responsible for making development happen in their area rather than assessing housing need and determining planning permission with Councils creating a house building culture and using their position, powers, skills and resources to benefit their communities.

The Elphicke-House review believed that Councils could drive appropriate housing delivery through differing strands and these were outlined to the Committee.

The Head of Housing Strategy and Development referred to the Lyons Housing Review which had identified a need for concentrated Government action to encourage a step change in the building of new homes and the need to provide local communities through their local councils with the power to ensure that homes are appropriate to their needs together with a need to attract new entrants into house building and supporting small/medium enterprise house builders.

It was noted that the key similarities of both reviews included, the vision of increased housing provision, the enhanced role for local authorities, support for small builders, attracting new entrants into the market, new delivery models and increasing the levels of Housing Revenue Account borrowing.

The Head of Housing Strategy and Development referred to the key differences of both reviews and advised that the Council had already used a number of the ways identified in the Elphicke-House report to improve viability for development including releasing land for development particularly garage sites and a disused care home; undertaking a review of assets to identify land for potential development, working with corporate colleagues through the Local Enterprise plan in order to identify sites for disposal; creating additional borrowing capacity, part of which was being utilised to build on the former Dudley Guest Hospital site with the exploration of a number of recommendations of the Lyons Review including the provision of Local Authority mortgages, Local Enterprise Plan funding to deal with remediation opportunities and to use small/medium enterprise builders in new housing provision.

During the presentation the Head of Housing Strategy and Development responded to Member's questions as follows:-

- That work had been conducted with a number of Developers in relation to deferred payment schemes in order to prevent work wait times on further developments and the provision of discounted land to registered providers continued to be investigated. However discussions with Officers and senior decision makers were required in relation to more radical approaches to the provision of affordable housing in order to appraise the risks associated to developments to reach conclusions regarding the provision of affordable housing;

- Engagement continued with a whole range of stakeholders and registered providers in order to establish the requirements of communities and meeting their needs.
- The Council were in the process of conducting a review of their Housing Local Investment Plan;
- That the last Housing Conference involved a range of stakeholders and resulted in Officers continuing to conduct work on a range of investment priorities;
- That a bid had been submitted in order to develop a housing zone in the Dudley Borough with a specific element being a modular build and that the outcome of the bid would become known shortly. That funding from the Government's Housing and Communities Agency would bring developments forward in timescales through cash flow in order to meet housing needs in the short term.
- That affordable housing was that which was let at a rate of 80% of market rents, rented to those in housing need and would also include shared ownership housing where the Housing Association continued to retain a share in the housing.
- In order to meet existing housing needs approximately 748 new homes would have to be built per annum;
- It was expected that the target of 220 affordable homes would be achieved during the current financial year with the completion of the development in Lime Gardens, Cradley and also the provision of housing at Saltbrook Place which would provide supported housing for homeless people;
- It was acknowledged that there were difficulties with development schemes within the Dudley Borough due to the remediation work that was required in order to ensure that schemes were viable and that funding streams were being investigated for remediation work on brown field sites. That, discussions were ongoing with the Homes and Communities Agency with a view to making business premises available for homes within communities due to the legacy of the land within the Dudley Borough. It was recognised that developers were developing outside the Dudley Borough, in areas where there were more greenfield sites.
- That there were concerns regarding remediation work impacting on the affordable housing element of developments;
- That Land Availability Assessments assisted in identifying a number of sites for development both in public and private ownership;

For clarification purposes the Interim Chief Officer (Housing) advised that the provision of 220 affordable homes referred to above had in the main been delivered through Housing Associations and built with a range of partners. It was stated that for a number of years the Council had been restricted in relation to new builds, however it had now been recognised that Local Authorities could make a real contribution to affordable housing and this would positively impact upon the future provision of council housing.

In relation to the provision of affordable housing Members made suggestions as follows:-

- That time was of the essence in relation to new builds;
- There was a need to engage with companies who provided building materials for housing together with the need to commission recycling building materials for new builds and the requirement for a system that was fit for purpose in order to encourage developers to build in the Dudley Borough;
- The exploration of the possibility of developers providing the affordable housing allocation within one community rather than across several developments in order to alleviate issues of remedial costs on industrial land.

Following further discussions it was

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report submitted, on the Elphicke – House and Lyons Review concerning housing delivery together with Members comments, be noted.
- (2) That a further report on Housing Delivery within the Dudley Borough be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee in the next municipal year.

37. **The Homelessness Service**

A report of the Strategic Director of Environment, Economy and Housing was submitted on the operational delivery of the Council's Homelessness Service.

The Chair introduced the report referring to the Committee's initial consideration of the Borough's Housing Strategy when one of the key issues for Members was how the needs of young people were being met and the report on the Homelessness Service in part dealt with service response to the needs of young people who found themselves homeless. In addition the report also detailed information as to how the Council responded to all citizens of the Dudley Borough who were threatened with homelessness or were homeless.

It was noted that the report highlighted some of the positive messages in the Dudley Borough, however it also outlined challenges during the critical period whilst the Dudley Borough responded to the increasing pressures of austerity.

In presenting the report submitted, the Head of Service – Housing Options referred to the powerpoint presentation slides together with the predicted figures for the year 2014/15 for homelessness decisions and outcomes that had been circulated to Members at the meeting.

The Head of Service – Housing Options advised that operational performance exceeded targets, families and young people were well provided for and that early help was of paramount importance. It was noted that there had been an increase in rough sleeping and those who were ineligible to receive help through the homelessness service.

Forecasted figures were provided in relation to those who were entitled to a limited service, those who were entitled to a full duty however there was no local connection, those who were entitled to a full duty and the number of cases where homelessness had been prevented.

In relation to preventing homelessness it was noted that this included keeping someone in their home or finding them another before they became homeless and that should the customer approach the service as soon as their home was at risk and their requirements were reasonable, the service could almost always prevent homelessness.

The Head of Service – Housing Options referred to the full duty acceptances which included relationship breakdown both violent and non violent, termination of Assured Shorthold Tenancies, parental exclusion, the end of asylum seeker accommodation and mortgage arrears. It was stated that priority need would be given to those with dependent children, those who were vulnerable and those who were victims of flood, fire and violence.

Percentages of those accessing the service in relation to ethnicity were noted together with details of the reasons for priority need and the ages of those who were entitled to a full duty.

The Head of Service – Housing Options referred to the temporary accommodation that was available and when it may be allocated.

It was reported that approximately 55% of people approaching the service were not statutorily homeless and that approximately 15% were homeless but not in priority need and of those the majority were male. That over half were attributed to family exclusion or relationship breakdown, some could be assisted via the waiting list or “No Wait” homes and that many were difficult to assist due to their previous housing history.

The Head of Service – Housing Options referred to the opening of Saltbrook Place in March, 2015 which would provide both en-suite accommodation and one bedroom flats and would greatly improve facilities for single homelessness groups.

The Head of Service – Housing Options referred to work with partners in relation to homelessness which included work with young offenders, providing outreach and personal packages to rough sleepers, mortgage arrears and debt prevention work with the Citizens Advice Bureau, hospital discharge, prison release and a probation housing scheme, private sector housing plus additional work with, for example, housing management, housing support services and substance misuse.

Details in relation to accessing the service were provided including the provision of an emergency out of hours service and hospital discharge via Housing Occupational Therapy.

Building on work going forward was outlined together with achieving new goals including entering the programme in order to achieve the Gold Standard Accreditation.

Arising from the presentation and in response to Members questions the Head of Service – Housing Option responded as follows:-

- In relation to those families that were ineligible to receive assistance from the homelessness service, it was unlawful to rent a property to, for example, a person in the UK from a country inside or outside the European Economic area who does not have recourse to public funds on entry. However if a family were homeless and a duty arose under the Childrens Act it would be possible to rent accommodation to Children's Services in order for them to accommodate the family temporarily and as economically as possible;
- The Homelessness and Housing Advice Service were part of multi agency Panels, with Officers attending the Domestic Abuse Forum and having links in place with the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference, discussing high risk victims with a view to helping them receive resources and the service were also involved with the Police on a day to day basis in relation to those who were homeless and in need of support and/or a place of safety;
- Those who had served in the armed forces could qualify for housing on a priority need should they have a local connection or a previous local connection;
- In relation to those with mental health issues, the Homelessness Service worked closely with Adult, Social Care and all staff were trained in recognising mental health problems with the Service also receiving advice from the team of Occupational Therapists within Housing Services;
- Given the range of temporary accommodation there had not been an issue with non provision when a duty arose, however should this occur in the future, the risk to secure accommodation would be assessed and should the person be vulnerable or at risk, temporary accommodation outside the Borough would be an option;

- That a funding bid had been made to the Government to finance improving a range of secure units for those who had suffered domestic abuse;
- The new Midland Heart development in Saltbrook Place would provide both en-suite emergency accommodation and one bedroom flats which would improve facilities for single homeless people;
- Help in the form of rent bonds and rent advances were provided by the service in order to assist customers access private accommodation where appropriate;
- Details of the homelessness service were publicised on the Council's website. West Midlands Police and hospitals also signpost homeless people to the service.

Councillor Tyler referred to the Triage Service that was operated by the Police whereby those who were homeless with mental health issues would be taken to a place of safety.

Councillor Cooper recommended that further work be undertaken in relation to BME households and particularly those who were under 25 and this was noted by the Head of Service – Housing Options.

The Head of Service – Housing Options undertook to provide the Chair with details of the parts of the Dudley Borough where homeless BME households had been identified.

Councillor D Perks stated that he had constituents who required “no wait properties” however he had been advised that these were unavailable and he had telephoned Dudley Council Plus to express his concerns and had been advised to contact Council Housing Officers and he wished this to be noted.

The Head of Service – Housing Options undertook to provide Councillor Body with details of whether a reconnections service was being provided to a particular ineligible homeless person who he had recommended to the service.

The Chair and Members thanked Officers for the progress made with the Homelessness and Housing Advice Service and the dedication of the Officers involved with the Service.

Resolved

That the information contained in report submitted, on the Homelessness Service together with Members comments be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.30 p.m.

CHAIR

ACHS/41