

DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING BOARD

MINUTES of the meeting of the Strategic Housing Board held on Wednesday 10 July 2019.

PRESENT: Councillor David J Mote (Chairman)
Councillor Jeremy A Kite MBE (Vice-Chairman) present for items 1-5
Councillor Mrs Ann D Allen MBE
Councillor Kelly Grehan

Dartford Borough Council Officers:-

Peter Dosad	–	Head of Housing
Marie Gerald	–	Housing Solutions and Private Sector Manager
Sheri Green	–	Strategic Director (External Services)
Jackie Pye	–	Housing Policy Manager
Teresa Ryszkowska	–	Head of Regeneration

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chairman welcomed Members to the inaugural meeting of the Board.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

4. REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

There were no references from other committees.

5. STRATEGIC HOUSING BOARD TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Leader of the Council explained the background to the creation of the Strategic Housing Board. During the previous term of office there had been a Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing who had been very active and effective. The Council's Housing Service had evolved into a high quality, high performing and innovative service but there were wider housing issues that the Council needed to understand and address and this was why it had been decided to create the Strategic Housing Board to take this important work forward with drive and vision. The Board was tasked with looking at the national housing economy, gathering information on the market,

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demographics and needs of different groups of society and identifying opportunities and methods for meeting these needs. The Board should seek to be innovative and challenging and seek to lead the way in exploring new opportunities for the Council to impact on the national picture. The Board would need to gain an in depth insight of the housing market, local, regional and national demographics and the needs and expectations of the various groups in society and of those supplying the housing market, including developers and financial institutions. Officers of the Council had great expertise in managing the Council's housing service but it was likely that the Board would have to seek outside expert opinion on these wider matters, of which the Council had little direct knowledge, engaging with developers, banks, housing associations, RSL's, residents and community groups etc. The Board would need to be bold and honest in approaching this work so that it could obtain an accurate understanding of the strategic housing economy, how the Council could intervene directly and how it could stimulate and inform the work of Government and partner organisations.

In view of the importance and strategic nature of this work the Board would have sight of some information that would normally go directly to the Cabinet and the Leader asked Members to respect this and to deal with this information sensitively and appropriately.

The Chairman thanked the Leader of the Council for providing further clarity on the role of the Board and looked forward to the challenges ahead.

RESOLVED:

That the Terms of Reference for the Strategic Housing Board, which had been agreed at the Annual Council meeting on 22nd May 2019, be noted.

6. DARTFORD'S HOUSING CONTEXT

The Head of Regeneration presented a report which provided an overview of the local housing profile for Dartford in the context of national and regional housing trends. Housing supply, tenure, cost and affordability were considered along with the differing requirements of specific groups within the population. Information in the report was largely sourced from a study being undertaken by HDH Planning and Development entitled 'Dartford and Ebbsfleet Housing Needs Assessment' which had not yet been completed and the information therefore should be considered to be draft. She reminded Members that although the projections were based on past trends they were still only projections. From this it was clear that Dartford had a dynamic housing market with a lot of new housing, rising purchase and rental costs but that the trends were broadly in line with what was happening in neighbouring areas. There was high demand for new housing to buy or rent but Dartford had a very high 'household formation rate' of 1.8% compared to the national average (1.4%), possibly because the average age of families in Dartford was younger. There was a lot of growth being generated from within the Borough and not just because of people coming into Dartford from other areas. The study would be used to support the preparation of the new Local Plan which

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was expected to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for examination in late 2020. The Board was invited to contribute to work on the preparation of the Plan by way of the work on housing that it intended to carry out and its' comments and direction on policy matters would be passed on to the Local Plan Leaders Advisory Group for consideration.

It was noted that there were a number of influences at work that could be driving trends locally such as the Ebbsfleet Garden City and Grammar School effect attracting younger families and the fact that Dartford railway station was the hub for 3 main train lines with direct access to London and Kent. There were also factors blocking the release of larger properties by those looking to downsize because the high cost of smaller properties in the borough provided a disincentive.

The Head of Regeneration explained that the Council could look to influence the mix of housing types through the Local Plan and highlighted the significant gap that existed between market entry rents and market entry purchase prices. This indicated that there could be potential demand for part-ownership products and other forms of assisted home purchase. There were a range of products available including Intermediate Rent/Rent-to-Buy, Shared Ownership, Shared Equity and Starter Homes/discount home ownership and these could be explored in greater detail at future meetings. The Chairman felt that it would be important to speak to providers of these products to identify their requirements when making these available to home-buyers, the levels of deposit they required, the level of repayments and their attitude towards risk in making investment decisions and whether the Council could do anything to influence their attitude towards lending risk. It was also noted that there were some products which now counted towards a person's rent payment history when determining their credit rating. The Head of Regeneration suggested that it would be good to explore some of these products with providers.

Whilst recognising that home ownership was an important aspiration it was also important to recognise the importance of the private rented sector and the multi-layered nature of housing demand. The report also highlighted the future requirements of diverse groups within the population and specifically older persons; people with disabilities; family households; essential local/key workers and younger people and recognised that within these categories there were many sub-sets and overlaps.

The Chairman felt that it was important for the Board to identify the different categories of customer and different offerings and products. It was important to understand areas that could be influenced in the short term but also where actions could be taken to generate appropriate change in the future. The Board had to identify what it could do to influence the local housing economy, the ways that it could influence it and what leverage the Council could use to encourage future partners to help create home ownership opportunities for existing Dartford residents.

The Head of Regeneration suggested that it might be possible to set parameters within the Local Plan to, for example, set aside some of the

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affordable housing element for key workers and that it could be worth engaging with developers and RSL's to see whether this was something they might be willing to work toward. It could also be possible to require a percentage of new homes to be built to the full 'lifetime homes', or as it was now known 'M4(2)', specification making them more adaptable for those with disabilities or age-related issues.

The Chairman welcomed the report which he said was comprehensive and informative, providing a good starting point for the Board's work.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report on Dartford's Housing Profile and Context be noted.

7. DRAFT HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY - JULY 2019

The Head of Housing introduced a report which detailed the outcome of the latest review of the Housing Allocations' Policy which had been originally adopted by the Council on 18th March 2013 as the Council's framework for the allocation and management of the future allocation of properties. All housing authorities are required to have a Housing Allocations' Policy setting out how social housing properties would be allocated to eligible applicants in housing need. The policy had subsequently been reviewed in 2014 and 2018. Because of legislative change and changes made in the light of practical experience the policy was kept under review and was a living, evolving document. In order to ensure a consistent approach the latest review of the policy had been undertaken and amendments made, where appropriate, to reflect operational changes (including working practices) following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, and the new policy met the requirements of current legislation. The report detailed the proposed changes to the Housing Allocations' Policy and the general layout had also been revised to ensure ease of understanding, clarity and transparency.

The Chairman welcomed the report and said that it was right for the policy to evolve and change where needed and to have sufficient flexibility to carry this though. The Housing service had proved itself to be responsive and innovative and the hub to counter homelessness that had been put in place was ground-breaking. It was noted that Dartford's homelessness prevention rate of 78% was the highest across Kent. It was also recognised that Dartford had some additional pressures due to its proximity to London and the attraction of the area to London authorities seeking accommodation for their residents and the Council's needs to balance this with its own responsibilities to Dartford residents. A Member asked whether Dartford had considered promoting the 'Better Landlord Standard' but was told that 90% of the landlords used by the Council were 'regulars' and whilst the Council encouraged high standards there was little real incentive for landlords to move to that standard due to the high level of demand for housing.

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RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be noted.

8. **DRAFT HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2019-2023**

The Head of Housing explained that the Government had introduced a requirement for local authorities to adopt a Rough Sleeper Strategy by December 2019 and Dartford intended to achieve this by integrating this into the existing Homelessness Strategy. The report detailed changes to the existing Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023 and the proposed Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2023 which would be considered for approval by the Cabinet on 25 July 2019. The Housing Act 1996 and the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 placed a duty on local housing authorities to provide advice and assistance to homeless people and people threatened with homelessness in their areas. In order to ensure that a strategic approach was taken towards the Council's delivery of homelessness advice and assistance by the Housing Solutions Team, the Housing Service carries out a review of homelessness and produces a Homelessness Strategy every five years as required under the Homelessness Act 2002. The existing strategy had therefore been updated to comply with the new legislation and changes in operational measures to meet the statutory requirement to publish a strategy for tackling rough sleeping. Although rough sleeping in the Borough was comparatively low, there were estimated to be 12 people sleeping rough at the time of the last rough sleeper count in 2018, it was recognised that rough sleeping could have a distressing and detrimental impact on people and the Council's aim was to reduce the levels of rough sleeping in the borough as far as possible. The aim of the Strategy was to 'proactively prevent homelessness and rough sleeping through strong partnership working, and to provide an inclusive and accessible service to all'.

The Strategy contained 4 strategic objectives to make this a reality:

- **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE ONE - PREVENTION & RELIEF**
To prevent and relieve homelessness and rough sleeping wherever possible in line with the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA 2017) and the Government's National Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018;
- **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE TWO – ACCOMMODATION**
To provide a range of accommodation for homeless households, making innovative use of solutions in the private sector;
- **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE THREE - PARTNERSHIP WORKING**
To work with local organisations to provide a coordinated approach to tackling and preventing homelessness; and
- **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE FOUR – MONITORING**
To keep up to date with homelessness trends, customer satisfaction, Government policy, legislation and good practice.

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The proposed Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2023 detailed the list of achievements from actions referred to in the previous Strategy and set out new actions to be delivered up to 2021. Progress would continue to be monitored by the multi-agency Dartford Homeless Strategy and Rough Sleeper Implementation Group (HSIG) formed under the last Strategy with the continuing aim that partner organisations should come together to drive implementation of the new Strategy for 2019-2023.

The Board recognised the uncertainties about future funding and noted that many of the actions required had already been carried out and work undertaken with partners to promote awareness of the tools available to prevent homelessness and the support available.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be noted.

9. FUTURE WORK PLAN AND NEXT STEPS

It was agreed that a Work Plan should be developed for review at each future Board meeting. The Strategic Director (External Services), the Head of Housing and the Head of Regeneration would agree a draft Work Plan with the Chairman for consideration at the next meeting in October and identify some specific items to report to that meeting. The Board would input to the Leaders' Advisory Group on the Local Plan as appropriate. Items for future consideration might include financial and housing products available to home buyers, as well as innovative schemes that the Council could access. Suppliers of such products might be invited to future meetings.

It was agreed that, unless a specific response or report was required, the work of the Strategic Housing Board would be reported to Cabinet by placing minutes of the Board's meetings on the Cabinet agenda once they had been agreed by the Chairman.

The meeting closed at 3.25 pm

Councillor D Mote
CHAIRMAN