

DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING BOARD

MINUTES of the meeting of the Strategic Housing Board held on Wednesday 14 October 2020.

PRESENT: Councillor David J Mote (Chairman)
Councillor Jeremy A Kite MBE (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Ann D Allen MBE
Councillor Kelly Grehan (Substitute Member)

ABSENT: Councillor Tom A Maddison

Dartford Borough Council Officers:-

Sheri Green	– Strategic Director (External Services)
Peter Dosad	– Head of Housing Services
Jackie Pye	– Housing Policy and Development Manager
Alan Twyman	– Democratic Services Manager

28. CHANGE OF MEMBERSHIP AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chairman informed the Board that, following the meeting of the General Assembly of the Council on Monday 12 October 2020, Councillor Maddison had replaced Councillor Grehan as a Board member. However Councillor Maddison was unable to attend the meeting and sent his apologies and Councillor Grehan was attending as his substitute.

There were no further apologies.

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

30. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC HOUSING BOARD HELD ON 29 JANUARY 2020 AND MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman noted that the last meeting had discussed its response to the Kent County Council (KCC) Select Committee call for evidence on Affordable Housing and asked whether there had been any feedback from KCC as to what action they had taken as a result of the responses they had received. The Vice-Chairman reported that KCC had held a meeting to consider how to take this forward but that they needed to focus on authorities that were not as proactive as Dartford in providing affordable housing.

The Chairman also informed Members that the Dartford Housing Mosaic had been available for review at the last scheduled meeting of the Board in April but that that meeting had been cancelled due to the pandemic. He wondered

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whether this could be considered at the Board's next meeting for sign off and also whether it should feature in the development of the proposed Housing Strategy to be discussed later in the meeting. The Head of Housing said that once the final content was agreed it was planned to make it available as an intuitive web site application to lead those seeking housing in the Borough through the various options but that it could easily sit within the Strategy. He was currently talking to IT about improving the design. The Chairman agreed that this was essential so that it could become an interactive module integrated within the existing Council web site. He suggested that the content should be brought back to the next meeting for agreement and work could then begin to link it into the web site.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Housing Board held on 29 January 2020 be confirmed as an accurate record.

31. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

32. REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

There were no references from other committees.

33. NEW HOUSING STRATEGY FOR DARTFORD

The Housing Policy and Development Manager informed Members that the last Housing Strategy had been agreed in 2009 when it had been a statutory requirement for authorities to have a strategy and the content had been prescribed. This requirement had been removed and given other priorities a new strategy had not been developed since that time. However it was felt that given the significant changes that had taken place in the housing sector, including the greater ability of authorities to build homes directly, concerns about housing affordability, the shortage of homes for social and private rent, welfare reform, landlord licensing, legislative change and pressures on the homelessness service, now would be a good time to produce a new housing strategy. The Board was asked to give its views on the merits of producing a new strategy.

Councillor Grehan said that although Councillor Maddison was unable to attend the meeting he had asked her to convey his views on the need for a new Housing Strategy. He felt that there was a need to conduct an independent Housing Needs Survey, particularly in view of the changing demographics in the borough and possible lessons learned during the pandemic. He also cited the current Government proposals to increase the targets for housing nationally and the need for any strategy to include a mechanism for providing more affordable and council housing.

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The Vice-Chairman said that the Council already carried out a Housing Needs Survey as part of its planning processes. He noted the massive implications of the Government's current Planning legislation which would not only affect the number of houses to be built but also their location. Any new Housing Strategy should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate these changes and would need to reflect the current demand and market for housing. Members also stressed the need to work with local partners to deliver housing requirements.

The Head of Housing confirmed that the Council reviewed housing need on a regular basis but that a new published strategy would provide information for partners and providers and also clearly set out the Council's housing priorities.

RESOLVED:

That the Head of Housing and his team should develop a framework for a new Housing Strategy for circulation to the Board and key partners and for this to be considered at the Board's next meeting.

34. COUNCIL NEW BUILD PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Head of Housing updated the Strategic Housing Board on the success of the Council's new build programme. Since 2012 the Council had built 86 new homes for people on the Council's housing register and four new sites had been identified moving forward which would provide a further 30 homes. Planning permission had already been granted for sites in Milton Road, Keary Road and Mead Crescent and he was pleased to announce that permission for the proposed scheme in Gilbert Close had been granted by the Development Control Board on 8 October. However he noted that opportunities were becoming fewer in terms of land owned by the Council and that these sites were becoming less viable. The Council would explore opportunities with Kent County Council (KCC) to work together but these had previously been impacted by KCC's determination to achieve 'best consideration' for its landholdings. The Housing Team had also purchased a number of properties on the open market using 1-4-1 funds and was looking at the possibility of acquiring properties at auction that might be suitable for conversion or adaptation. Although there was currently a small underspend on the current 1-4-1 budget the Council was optimistic that it would not have to surrender this funding to the Government. It was also in discussion with the Government about flexibility in the scheduled housing stock loan repayment given the impact of the current pandemic on finances.

The Vice-Chairman stressed the need to ensure that the Council did not have to surrender 1-4-1 receipts to the Government and noted that the requirement to spend receipts within a certain timeframe did not reflect the realities of the development industry which tended to ebb and flow. He welcomed the Council's multi-faceted approach to providing quality Council housing whether by new build or by acquisition on the open market. He stressed the need to ensure that any properties purchased should deliver the same high quality as

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the Council's new build homes and the need to ensure that robust governance arrangements were in place to ensure value for money and that valuations reflected market prices.

The Strategic Housing Board strongly supported the steps taken by the Council to increase the Council's housing stock both by building quality new housing and the acquisition of suitable properties on the open market.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

35. DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND FUTURE ITEMS

It was noted that the next meeting would be held at 2.00pm on Wednesday 27 January 2021.

It was suggested that it would be helpful to have an informed discussion of the mortgage and other financial products available in the local housing market, both through public and private lenders, possibly focussed on first-time-buyers and older people. This could be facilitated by an invited representative from a suitable industry body such as the Association of Mortgage Lenders.

The following items would also be considered at the next meeting:

- Framework for a New Housing Strategy for Dartford
- Dartford Housing Mosaic
- New Build Programme - Update

The meeting closed at 2.35 pm

Councillor D Mote
CHAIRMAN