

DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING BOARD

MINUTES of the meeting of the Strategic Housing Board held on Wednesday 29 January 2020.

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

Dartford Borough Council Officers:-

Sheri Green, Strategic Director (External Services)
Peter Dosad, Head of Housing
Jackie Pye, Housing Development & Policy Manager
Teresa Ryszkowska, Head of Regeneration

18. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

20. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC HOUSING BOARD HELD ON 16 OCTOBER 2019 AND MATTERS ARISING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Housing Board held on 16 October 2019 be confirmed as an accurate record.

21. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

22. REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

There were no references from other committees.

23. UPDATE ON GOVERNMENT FUNDING TO SUPPORT HOMELESSNESS

The Strategic Housing Board received an update on funding streams provided by the Government to local authorities and other organisations to assist in the prevention and relief of homelessness and on recent funding for homelessness projects in Dartford. It was noted that Dartford had been

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awarded funding of £362,679 by way of Flexible Homeless Support Grant (FHSG), £137,140 Homelessness Reduction Grant (HRG) (replacing what was previously called New Burdens funding) and £106,000 Homeless Prevention Grant (HPG). The report outlined the initiatives that could be supported from the funds provided by each grant and in particular the greater flexibility to prioritise homelessness prevention under FHSG rather than by utilising the more restrictive temporary accommodation management fee that could only be used for households that were already homeless. The report also described the successful joint bid in 2019 for funding under the Government's Rough Sleeper initiative, with Gravesham and Swale Borough Councils, and in conjunction with Look Ahead and Porchlight and how support was being delivered under that initiative. It was noted that Porchlight had been able to carry out their complex needs navigator role immediately as they already had an officer in place but that difficulties had been experienced with delivering the complex needs and supported housing role. The current bid for further funding under the Rough Sleeper Initiative envisaged this role being brought back in-house by each of the Councils and the additional funding that the Council had bid for would be for Dartford clients only.

The Head of Housing described the innovative work carried out by the Council's Housing Hub, working with partners across the sector, which had proved very successful and had enabled the Council to deliver its full range of statutory housing responsibilities within the Homeless Reduction Act. This had been introduced on a pilot basis for two years, which was nearing its end, and it was proposed to continue with this model as it was working well. He welcomed the greater flexibility associated with the FHSG and outlined the intention to appoint 1.5 FTE's (subject to approval) specifically to support rough sleeping and to assist rough sleepers during their first year of tenancy, which often proved challenging. It was noted that since the operation of the first Winter Shelter the numbers of rough sleepers in the Borough had fallen from 28 to around 10-11 but that it would be difficult to eradicate rough sleeping entirely, as for a small number of people, this was a lifestyle decision. The Board recognised the good work being carried out by the Council and local partners.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

24. DARTFORD HOMELESSNESS

The Strategic Housing Board considered a report which provided background and context to the annual homelessness statistics for Dartford produced by Shelter and outlined the measures taken by the Council to manage temporary accommodation. The report clarified the legal definition of homelessness and the various different housing circumstances that this could comprise and explained that the homelessness statistics produced by Shelter were misleading. The figure produced for Dartford included not only homeless applicants that had been placed in temporary accommodation by the Council but also those families transferred to Dartford by London authorities for

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accommodation and placements made by KCC whilst still counting these within the figures for the relevant London Borough and KCC. As a result there was an element of double counting which distorted the figures. Porchlight had also expressed doubts about the accuracy of the data for Dartford published by Shelter.

The report explained the different ways in which the Council provided temporary accommodation to homeless families through privately leased properties in and outside the Borough. It was explained that it was a Council policy to not place families with children in Bed & Breakfast accommodation or in any properties with shared facilities. As at 16 January 2020 there were 88 households placed by the Council in nightly paid temporary accommodation of which 72 households included children. The vast majority of these households were in self-contained placements within the Borough but 26 were in out-of-borough placements. Where a household was placed outside of the borough the Council endeavoured to obtain accommodation for them within the borough as soon as possible to enable them to move back to Dartford and to minimise the impact on education, employment and family support networks.

One of the ways in which the Council secured accommodation was via the Dartford Private Leasing Scheme (DPLS) whereby the Council leased privately owned accommodation from landlords and the property and occupants were managed by the Housing Solutions team directly. There were currently 157 households in DPLS accommodation, 98 of which included children. All of these properties were located in Dartford and were self-contained flats and houses. This type of accommodation provided greater stability than nightly paid-for accommodation could offer thereby benefitting vulnerable households and mitigating the higher cost of nightly paid-for accommodation. This was a significant cost with the net spend on nightly paid accommodation totalling £824,136 and the net expenditure on DPLS accommodation totalling £580,781. It was estimated however that the use of DPLS accommodation offered a saving of c.30% against the cost of using nightly paid-for accommodation and provided higher quality for housing clients. The new staff resources, if approved, would enable the team to increase the DPLS portfolio.

The Head of Housing explained the background to the statistics published by Shelter on an annual basis which he explained tended to be collated from responses to freedom of information requests and focussed on children. He explained that every person in need of temporary housing was important to the Council but that where people were housed in Dartford by other authorities the Council had no input to that process and no control over the quality of the accommodation provided. Where the Council dealt directly with people in need of accommodation it ensured that the quality of accommodation was good and that families were always placed in self-contained accommodation. He explained the operation of the DPLS and how this enabled the Council to provide decent temporary accommodation at a lower cost than using nightly-paid for accommodation and that, although the budget for temporary accommodation was constantly under pressure, the use of DPLS and other measures meant that the spend for the current year was

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significantly better than the previous year. He explained that it was not always possible to house people in the Borough, and that where this occurred the Council tried to find in-borough placements for them as soon as possible. This situation was not helped by London authorities placing their clients in Dartford to take advantage of lower rents than were available in their own areas which then resulted in displacement of local people with housing need. The scope for using specific properties within the borough was discussed and it was noted that if opportunities were missed these would be quickly picked up by other local authorities. The success of the Copperfields scheme was noted. Members noted the displacement effect caused by the placement of other authority's housing clients in the borough and felt that this would be addressed if the funding followed the client rather than providing an incentive for the originating authority to seek cheaper rental options in other areas to meet their statutory obligations.

The Strategic Housing Board recognised that homelessness and the response to it were complex matters and that statistics could be misconstrued and noted the ways in which the Council sought to manage the demands made on housing services.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

25. KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE CALL FOR EVIDENCE - AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The Strategic Housing Board was informed that Kent County Council (KCC) was currently running a Select Committee on Affordable Housing which would consider how Kent fitted into the national context, the current ways in which KCC supported the development of new affordable housing across the county, and to identify some key areas where KCC could do more to support the development of affordable housing in Kent. The committee was taking evidence from a wide array of sources and the Strategic Housing Board was invited to submit its views as part of this process.

The Board was reminded that in recent years the Council had developed a build programme for affordable social rented Council housing and had built or acquired over 90 homes for local people for rent since 2016. Although this programme was likely to continue on small parcels of surplus council owned land this was in short supply and it was felt that it could be helpful for the district councils to work with KCC to identify surplus KCC land or buildings that could be used to provide affordable social housing. Members were reminded that Dartford's planning policies set a target that all qualifying developments should include a 30% affordable housing element but that because of the lack of government funding for social rented homes many developers and housing associations were seeking higher levels of shared ownership or other forms of home ownership products which might not be affordable for those on low incomes. It was therefore suggested that KCC

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could be asked to help lobby MP's to highlight the need for additional government funding for social rented homes.

It was noted that although KCC had established a select committee to look at affordable housing, it had no direct responsibility for housing which was a Borough/District Council function. As such the select committee could form an opinion but not determine or implement a solution. It was also noted that KCC was often reluctant to dispose of surplus land and that there were sometimes good reasons why KCC should retain land, notably for school provision. Where it did dispose of land KCC usually demanded the market price rather than 'best consideration'. It was also noted that Parish Council's had significant landholdings and that it might be possible for them to release land for housing.

The Board felt that it would be beneficial if KCC adopted a similar 'risk appetite' in housing matters to that of the Council and that it should be clearly established that if KCC did release land there should be no diminution of its obligations to provide infrastructure to support development. It was also noted that KCC might need to take a different approach to releasing land that could be needed for education purposes. The Board felt that it would be helpful if a protocol could be established between KCC and the District/Borough Councils to give them first refusal on surplus land disposals and to drop the requirement for KCC to obtain market price rather than best consideration, or a value between the two. It was also felt that KCC tended to hold a homogenous view of the Districts and did not understand the differing needs of various areas.

RESOLVED:

That the Head of Housing Services should prepare a response to the KCC Select Committee on Affordable Housing, in consultation with the Strategic Director (External Services) and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Strategic Housing Board, as proposed in the report and incorporating the views expressed by the Board.

26. DARTFORD STRATEGIC HOUSING BOARD MOSAIC

The Strategic Housing Board considered the first draft of the Dartford Housing Mosaic. The Chairman explained that this was a work-in-progress and had attempted to identify the main categories of people seeking housing in Dartford and various scenarios. It would be necessary to drill-down into these in greater detail with a view to producing further narrative and links that could be incorporated into web pages. He explained that in preparing the mosaic he had considered the contents of Dartford's Local Plan and felt that these were fully reflected. The Vice-Chairman felt that the mosaic had principally focussed on the Council's responsibilities rather than looking at the wider housing market which he believed had been agreed at the last meeting. To this end the mosaic needed to include other aspects of interest to people contemplating living in Dartford, such as services for businesses seeking to set up in the area and parents who might be interested in finding out about

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local schools and support services. The mosaic also needed to be frank and honest. In terms of the ex-servicemen, for example, it might point to support available from other organisations that might be in a better position to offer advice and support. The same might apply to ex-offenders who might be seeking housing. The Chairman explained that these themes could be picked up within the wider narratives and by the provision of suitable links. It was suggested that some of these might best be addressed by including case studies by way of illustration.

The Chairman thanked Members for their comments and asked to be sent any further comments after the meeting. He would reflect these in the next iteration of the mosaic and look at developing the narratives and case studies.

27. PROGRESS WITH THE BELLWAY 'COPPERHOUSE GREEN' DEVELOPMENT AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Vice-Chairman informed the Board that he had attended the opening day for the marketing of apartments at the Bellway 'Copperhouse Green' development in the town centre. This had been very successful and had attracted 280 visitors with 24 sales on the day. He noted that 81% of the visitors came from within 10 miles of Dartford. He said that he was optimistic that there would be opportunities for closer working with Bellway and the positive impact that the development would have on the town centre.

The Strategic Housing Board noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on 25th March. **[Post meeting note: the date of the next meeting has been moved to 2.00pm on Wednesday 1st April 2020]**

The meeting closed at 3.27 pm

Councillor D Mote
CHAIRMAN