

SPECIAL JOINT MEETING OF ADULT AND HOUSING AND PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEES'

11th April, 2012

PRESENT – Councillor Long (in the Chair); Councillors Baldwin, Carson, Harman, Hutchinson, Kelley, Knowles, Lewis, Lister, Maddison and E.A. Richmond. (11)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Cossins, Grundy, B. Jones, Mrs. D. Jones, L. Hughes, Lawton, Thistlethwaite, Wright and York. (10)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Copeland.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Pauline Mitchell, Assistant Director – Adult Social Care and Housing; Steve Petch, Head of Strategy and Commissioning; Alan Glew, Head of Place – Programmes and Projects and Bryan Huntley, Housing Policy Officer.

AHP1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

AHP2. TERMS OF REFERENCE – HOUSING STRATEGY – Members considered the draft Terms of Reference (previously circulated) in relation to this piece of work.

RESOLVED – That the Terms of Reference be agreed.

AHP3. DARLINGTON'S DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY – The Director of Place submitted a report (previously circulated) seeking Members approval on Darlington's Draft Housing Strategy, as part of the consultation process which was due to end on 16th May, 2012.

Steve Petch, Head of Strategy and Commissioning introduced the report and gave a presentation to Members on the need for this Authority to approve a new Housing Strategy that reflected the changes in housing over the last five years; referred to the recently published National Housing Strategy and the development of the Economic Strategy, and the substantial changes to the Benefits system that would present significant challenges to landlords, their tenants and Local Authorities. Members were also informed that the new Strategy would incorporate an action plan for the next two years explaining progress and how it would be delivered, which would be reviewed and updated annually.

As part of the presentation, Members were informed of the key facts on housing in Darlington, the achievements of the existing strategy, including the delivery of the £2.6 million SHIP3 investment, the implementation of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme, the rebuild of Linden and Dinsdale Court, the sheltered housing accommodation improvements, the delivery of 106 houses at Beaumont Hill, the £3.3 million regeneration scheme at Parkside and the 65 council house that had been built, together with the challenges ahead and the vision and ambitions of the strategy.

Alan Glew, Head of Place – Programmes and Projects outlined the twenty five Priority Actions, grouped under 6 objectives that had been identified in the draft Strategy that would be implemented over the next two years to help deliver it. It was highlighted that the Strategy was an evolving document and further changes had been made to the document since it had been circulated for consideration. Members were informed that a further objective to increase

the supply and choice of housing to meet identified local needs had been included within the strategy to help increase the supply of affordable homes in partnership with Registered Providers, implement the Tenancy Strategy to effectively manage the local housing stock, work with developers and landowners to increase the number of new homes and also reduce the number of empty homes.

Discussion ensued on the consultation process and the need to consult with tenants in private housing and community partnerships, the need to explore all ways of increasing the housing stock including cooperatives and self-build schemes and the use of Right-to-Buy receipts, the concerns about the number of private stock that did not meet the Decent Home Standards and the criteria that was used, the reduction of the level of sustainability in new housing developments due to viability, the need to explore brownfield sites/land to use for future housing development, the concerns in relation to setting a strict policy where fixed term tenancies might apply or not be reissued, whether the dedicated officer for empty properties was sufficient to make an impact and whether enforcement action in respect of empty properties was effective, the advice/support that was available to assist tenants and landlords to improve and upgrade their properties and how the Key Point of Access service links with lettings agencies and how this was regulated.

RESOLVED – (a) That Officers be thanked for their attendance and contribution at the meeting.

(b) That the current position in relation to the Draft Housing Strategy be noted.

(c) That brownfield sites and vacant land be explored for further housing development.

(d) That further enforcement be taken in relation to empty properties.

(e) That Scrutiny raise their concerns in relation to setting a strict policy where fixed term tenancies might apply or not be reissued.

(f) That Scrutiny applaud the Accredited Landlord scheme and welcome the opportunity for more landlords to join the scheme.

(g) That Scrutiny welcome the glossary that will accompany the Strategy.

(h) That the advice/support that is available for home improvements and the Equity Release Scheme be published more widely.

(i) That the information on the work that has been undertaken in relation to Veterans be included within the Strategy.

(j) That a training session be arranged for Members on the Decent Home Standard Guidance.