

Denbighshire County Council
Task & Finish Group Terms of Reference
Affordable Housing

Introduction:

Affordable Housing is a key issue for the Council, crossing both Housing and Planning Strategy/Policy. It is also part of the Council's Priority in the Corporate Plan, "Ensuring access to good quality housing".

Provision of Affordable Housing is a complex matter, with many components, and covers a number of Council Services, Lead Member Portfolios with input from external partners. The complexity and Member interest was highlighted at Planning Committee in May when Members were presented with the Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on Affordable Housing and again in June when the Draft Local Housing Strategy was presented to Council Briefing. The issue has also been raised by Welsh Audit Office which highlighted concerns regarding the lack of clarity in relation to Denbighshire's strategy for delivering affordable housing.

The two relevant Lead Members (Cllr David Smith and Cllr Hugh Irving) with support from the relevant Corporate Director (Rebecca Maxwell) and the two relevant Heads of Service (Graham Boase and Peter McHugh) concluded that a Member/Officer Task & Finish Group looking at Affordable Housing was required. This approach was endorsed during the Council Briefing discussion in June on the Local Housing Strategy.

This paper represents the Terms of Reference for the Task & Finish Group, as agreed by the 2 relevant Lead Members.

Membership:

The Task & finish Group shall comprise of 8 Members as follows;

- Lead Member Public Realm
- Lead Member Customers & Communities
- Chair of Planning Committee
- 2 Members nominated by Planning Committee (in addition to the Chair of Planning Committee)
- 1 Member nominated by Partnership Scrutiny
- 1 Member nominated by Performance Scrutiny
- 1 Member nominated by Communities Scrutiny

The Task & finish Group will be co-chaired by the two Lead Members.

Officers supporting the work of the Task & finish Group will be Rebecca Maxwell, Graham Boase and Peter McHugh. Other Officers will attend as and when required.

Remit:

To consider all matters relating to the demand for Affordable Housing, the supply of Affordable Housing and access to and eligibility for Affordable Housing across the County.

The work of the Group should therefore influence the relevant planning policies and guidance associated with Affordable Housing, the Local Housing Strategy, the development of the Council's approach to the Corporate Priority, "Ensuring Access to good quality housing", and all other Council work related, directly or indirectly, to Affordable Housing.

The Group will meet on 6 occasions, unless the 2 Lead Members consider additional sessions are required.

The 6 sessions should be held over a 3 month period starting September 2014 and concluding in November 2014 (i.e. ideally there will be 2 sessions per month for 3 months).

The Sessions shall be as follows;

Session 1: Statistical analysis of historic provision/demand of Affordable Housing. Set a clear definition of what Affordable Housing is (and what it isn't)

Session 2: Look at the supply of Affordable Housing through the "public sector" (e.g. existing Council Housing, possible new Council Housing, Welsh Government funding, Council funding initiatives Registered Social Landlords etc). Furthermore the session will clarify the respective roles and responsibilities for Planning and Housing Services in the supply of affordable housing.

Session 3: Look at the supply of Affordable Housing through the "private sector" (e.g. private developers, Planning controls and new initiatives).

Session 4: Look at access and eligibility, so who can currently access Affordable Housing, how do they access Affordable Housing, what are the "local" initiatives, are certain parts of our society not being catered for etc.

Session 5: A "reserve" session to pick up on issues not currently anticipated or picked up in Sessions 1 – 4.

Session 6: Draw together broad conclusions, make recommendations on how to proceed etc. Prior to each Session Graham Boase and Peter McHugh will ensure a set of papers are circulated to Members of the Group for their consideration, ensuring a balance is struck between providing Members with appropriate information, while not over burdening Members with reports & paperwork.

The Sessions should be informal, and focussed on the topic of the day. Members and Officers should challenge each other on the relevant issues so there is a full understanding of the legislative/statutory requirements, the local issues facing residents of Denbighshire and the concerns of Members in terms of addressing the local concerns and making appropriate decisions.

Reporting:

As a Task & Finish Group, the Group have no powers to make decisions that influence policy/procedures, however the Group have an important role to play in making clear recommendations on improvements and how those improvements should be delivered.

Under 'Reporting', given the debate at Council Briefing, I wonder if we should specifically reference the SPG on Affordable Housing. We should also strengthen the reference to the LDP Steering Group - there will be a role for the Group in reviewing SPGs developed as a consequence of the T&F group's recommendations.

The conclusions/recommendations of the Group will therefore influence a number of areas, not least the Draft Local Housing Strategy, Planning Policy and Guidance and the Corporate Priority, "Ensuring access to good quality housing". Formal decisions on any recommendations from the Group will therefore need to be made through the appropriate channels such as reporting to Council, Cabinet, Planning Committee, Lead Member Delegated Decisions etc. The LDP Steering Group will be responsible for reviewing SPGs developed as a consequence of the Task and Finish Group recommendations and there may also be a role for Scrutiny Committee in moving certain recommendation forward.

It is suggested at this stage that the Group present its findings, conclusions, and recommendations to the first Council Briefing in 2015.

In this regard therefore it is considered appropriate to wait until the Group has concluded before the Council adopts the Local Housing Strategy and before Planning Policy/Guidance on Affordable Housing is amended. Appropriate Forward Work Programmes should be amended to reflect the reporting timelines of this Group.