

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 30th June 2015

Lead Member / Officer: Cllr David Smith / Cllr Hugh Irving

Report Author: Angela Loftus, Strategic Housing and Planning Manager

Title: Conclusions & Recommendations from Affordable Housing Task & Finish Group

1. What is the report about?

1.1 Affordable Housing is a key issue for the Council, and forms part of the Council's Housing Priority in the Corporate Plan. The Council's approach to delivering affordable housing was identified as a potential weakness by the Wales Audit Office in the Council's Annual Improvement Report May 2014 with a recommendation that the Council clarify its approach. The Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group was set up in response to concerns amongst Members about affordable housing policy and delivery. This report outlines the conclusions and recommendations agreed by the Task and Finish Group.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1 The final report will inform the development of Denbighshire's wider Housing Strategy and future reviews of planning policy and guidance. Where appropriate the finalised recommendations will be reflected in strategies, plans and guidance relating to affordable housing.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That Cabinet endorses the conclusions and recommendations agreed by the Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group (attached as Appendix I) to be taken forward through the Housing Strategy and accompanying Delivery Plan.

4. Report details.

4.1 The Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group has been co-chaired by the Lead Member for Customers and Communities and the Lead Member for Public Realm. Members from Scrutiny and Planning Committee were part of the group and the aim of the group was to review the Council's approach to delivering affordable housing and make recommendations for improvement to inform the Draft Housing Strategy and future reviews of planning policy and guidance. The terms of reference and membership of the Group are included as Appendices 2 & 3 in the attached Task and Finish Group report. The Task and Finish Group began meeting in September 2014 and held 7 workshops. It considered a range of affordable housing issues in depth, including defining

affordable housing, planning policy approach, how affordable housing is accessed, demand and funding options. A note summarising the areas of discussion at each of the Task and Finish Group meetings is included in the Report back on Conclusions and Recommendations attached as Appendix I.

- 4.2 The recommendations from the Task and Finish Group will form a key input to the on-going development of the Council's wider Housing Strategy and accompanying Delivery Plan and it has been proposed that the Housing Strategy should be reported to Council for consideration in October 2015. Actions identified by the Task and Finish Group, which have been developed with a view to delivering the Task & Finish Group's recommendations, will form part of the Delivery Plan for the Housing Strategy.
- 4.3 The Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group - Report back on Conclusions and Recommendations is attached as Appendix I and it summarises the key findings agreed by the Task and Finish Group at its final meeting. A summary of these recommendations was presented to Council Briefing on 14th April and Members raised some additional issues to be reflected in the Affordable Housing Task & Finish Group final report.
- 4.4 Appendix II sets out the issues raised at Council Briefing, together with the relevant recommendation in the Report back on Conclusions and recommendations attached as Appendix I.
- 4.5 The conclusions and recommendations agreed by the Task & Finish Group were considered by Communities Scrutiny Committee on 28th May 2015 and notes from the meeting are attached as Appendix III. The key issues emphasised by Committee were:
- Future affordable housing should include a mix of family dwellings to provide opportunities for families and first time householders to move up the housing ladder – *this will be addressed through the Housing Strategy*
 - Future new build social housing should be exempt from the 'Right to Buy' - *this will be addressed through the Housing Strategy*
 - The need to focus on housing needs of residents and value for money for council-tax payers – *this will be addressed through the Housing Strategy*
 - The need to raise awareness of the affordable housing register & process for registration without raising expectations – *work is currently underway to address this issue*

What happens next?

- 4.6 If endorsed by Cabinet, the conclusions and recommendations will form the basis of the affordable housing theme in the Housing Strategy. The Housing Strategy will be reported to Communities Scrutiny Committee on 10th September 2015 to provide the opportunity for Scrutiny Committee to have an input prior to a report to Council on 20th October 2015.

4.7 A number of the recommendations are already being actioned, including proposals to revise the Council's approach to the re-use of rural buildings in the open countryside. Revised supplementary planning guidance allowing for re-use for market housing, provided affordable housing can be demonstrated to be unviable, was adopted by Planning Committee on 13th May 2015.

4.8 The Task & Finish Group recommended that planning policies relating to affordable housing should be reviewed. There is currently no mechanism to amend policies in the Local Development Plan other than through a full review of the entire plan. Welsh Government is considering legislative amendments to allow for partial reviews but this has not been confirmed to date. As an interim arrangement, amended supplementary planning guidance has been adopted, which will allow for the conversion of rural buildings to market housing, however a full review of planning policies will remain a longer term action.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

5.1 The recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task & Finish Group will form a key input to Denbighshire's emerging Housing Strategy and will contribute to the following corporate priorities:

- Developing the local economy – development within the County will contribute towards securing local employment opportunities in the construction sector
- Ensuring access to good quality housing – successful delivery of the proposed actions will enable improved provision of additional affordable and market housing across Denbighshire to meet the County's needs.
- Vulnerable people are protected and are able to live as independently as possible

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1 Successful delivery of the actions identified will be dependent on a partnership approach within the Council, including input from Finance, Legal, Property, Planning & Public Protection services.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.

7.1 A desktop Health Impact Assessment (HIA) was carried out on the main text of the housing strategy on 15th June 2015. A rapid HIA is planned by August 2015 on the delivery plan.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

8.1 The Task and Finish Group comprised Members of Planning Committee and Scrutiny, who had the opportunity to be involved in all the meetings. The conclusions and recommendations agreed by the Task & Finish Group were considered by Communities Scrutiny on 28th May 2015

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

- 9.1 The full cost implications of specific proposals as the Strategy is developed will have to be assessed to ensure they are affordable and sustainable.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

- 10.1 Failure to progress the findings and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group would miss the opportunity to improve the Council's approach to the delivery of affordable housing and demonstrate action to Wales Audit office. The delivery of the Housing Strategy is a key priority for the Council & improving the delivery of affordable housing within the County will be a fundamental aim of the Strategy.

11. Power to make the Decision

- Local Government Act 2000. The following Housing Acts set out the Council's role with regard to the functioning of the housing market and production of a housing strategy:
- Housing Act 1985 (S8) - requiring Local Authorities to consider housing conditions/needs in their locally
- Housing Act 2004 (S8) requiring Local Authorities to keep housing conditions in the private sector housing in their area under review
- Local Government Act 2003 (S87) - requiring Local Authorities to produce a local housing strategy