

Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

27 January 2020



Engagement with social housing providers operating across County Durham

Joint report of John Hewitt, Corporate Director of Resources and Ian Thompson, Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The report provides members with background information on the various means by which Durham County Council engages with the Social Housing providers in the county prior to a presentation by Lynn Hall, Strategic Manager for Housing, Regeneration and Local Services.

Executive summary

- 2 The Economy and Enterprise OSC considers a number of housing issues including:
 - The Housing Strategy
 - The Homelessness Strategy
 - Housing Solutions including Durham Key Options scheme
 - Selective Licensing Scheme proposals
 - Chapter Homes
 - Private rented housing sector including empty home projects and the landlord accreditation scheme
 - Housing regeneration and renewal

- 3 The committee's work programme for 2019 -20 identifies a number of housing related issues to be considered by the committee including detail of:
- The development of both the Housing and Homelessness Strategies
 - The development and progress of the selective licensing scheme for County Durham
 - Various projects undertaken with the private rented housing sector in County Durham
- 4 Whilst considering various housing issues the committee has asked for detail of how DCC currently engages with social housing providers in the county. It was therefore thought timely that arrangements be made for the Strategic Manager for Housing to attend the meeting on the 27 January 2020 to deliver a presentation focusing on:
- County Durham Housing Forum
 - Durham Key Options
 - Specific Projects

A copy of the presentation is attached as Appendix 2.

Recommendations

- 5 Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note and comment upon the information provided in the report and during the presentation.

Background

- 6 The Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee includes in its work programme on an annual basis a number of housing related issues. During 2018/19 when considering various housing matters members have asked as to how DCC currently engages with social housing providers in the county. Arrangements have therefore been made for an overview of the various engagement mechanisms to be provided to the committee.
- 7 Durham County Council has a number of housing functions which fall within the responsibility of Councillor Kevin Shaw, the Executive Member for Strategic Housing and Assets. These functions are:
 - Understanding housing need and the production of the Housing Strategy
 - Enabling the delivery of the Housing Strategy
 - Strategic Fuel Poverty / Energy Efficiency
 - Coordination of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme - Durham Key Options
 - Delivery of the poverty agenda via the Council's Poverty Action Plan
 - Housing Regeneration activity
 - Statutory Homelessness, a duty to find accommodation for those clients who meet the legal requirements
 - Prevention of Homelessness
 - Gypsy Roma Traveller Site Management
 - Private Sector Housing
 - Home Improvement Agency including home loans and the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants which is a statutory function.
- 8 There are currently 31 Social Housing Providers operating in County Durham which equates to 20% of the housing stock in Durham
- 9 There is regular engagement with four Housing Providers (Believe, Karbon, Livin and North Star which cover almost 18% of the Housing Stock. Other housing providers are involved in a number of partnerships and meetings and invited to contribute to any consultation.

- 10 There are currently three main ways DCC will engage with the larger social housing providers:
- The Durham Housing Forum
 - The Durham Key Options Board
 - Delivery of specific projects

The Durham Housing Forum

- 11 The Role of the Durham Housing Forum is to act as the strategic partnership within County Durham for the consideration of housing and related policy issues; to oversee and enable the delivery of the housing strategy and to assist with the development of more sustainable communities and to support the well-being of County Durham.
- 12 The members will provide a strategic policy advice function in relation to strategic housing and neighbourhood issues to:
- Provide a means to secure consultation with partners and other stakeholders including Area Action Partnerships and local communities to help determine appropriate policy positions that promote the best interests of County Durham in respect to housing and related policy issues.
 - Contribute towards the development of sustainable community strategies in Durham and its localities; assist with the development and implementation of the County Durham Plan and take a role in monitoring key housing related performance
 - Work in partnership with each other (and in conjunction with AAPs) towards achieving and improving key local outcomes including:
 - Contributing towards the development of local areas which are safe
 - Contribute to strengthening the local economy through investment, procurement and worklessness initiatives
 - Ensuring that tenants are healthy and safe
 - Ensuring that open spaces and the natural environment is accessible and well managed and can provide attractive places in which people want to live and bring up their families
 - Support raising standards of existing housing stock
 - Support plans to regenerate existing areas showing signs of decline

- Contribute towards ensuring climate change issues are addressed
- Ensure housing needs are identified and met
- Ensure vulnerable client groups are well supported and adequately housed.
- Undertake an advocacy and advisory role in promoting and discussing housing and neighbourhood issues of importance to County Durham with other organisations and stakeholders operating at regional and national levels.

Durham Key Options

- 13 Following a successful pilot with East Durham Homes (2009), Durham Key Options choice based lettings scheme was established in 2009. This merged the previous district council lettings policies into the same, countywide lettings scheme to make social housing more accessible and create greater choice for applicants.
- 14 The scheme has continued to grow and develop - delivering a high standard to customers, with all partners of the scheme following one policy for assessments of housing need and allocations. Those housing partners letting 100% of their stock via DKO are:
 - believe housing
 - Karbon Homes
 - Livin
 - North Star
- 15 A number of other housing providers advertise and let a % of their stock via the scheme under nomination arrangements.
- 16 To date, Durham Key Options has seen over 42,000 lettings across all Registered Providers advertising through the scheme. There are currently approximately 14000 applicants registered for housing and on average 1200 registrations received each month.
- 17 A Board meet bi monthly to oversee the work of the scheme and a steering group meet regularly to ensure the scheme is running smoothly and report to the Board.

18 In 2018-2019, the DKO partnership has:

- Improved marketing of the DKO scheme via its website
- Changed the DKO logo and colour scheme
- Introduced matching of *first* bidders to properties, via the new Available Immediately Homes module.

19 Further potential actions remain for DKO for completion in 2019-20:

- Amend the back-office system to allow greater analysis of applicant's area of preferences and match them to void properties (without the need for bidding)
- Investigating qualification for those with ASB/rent arrears and/or vulnerable groups/those in poverty;
- Implementing a pre-tenancy course and/or offering greater assistance across the partnership;
- Reviewing procedures and raising awareness at the end of a tenancy (where future qualification to DKO may be impacted);
- Review whether disqualifying transfers in the first 12 months of tenancy should be extended to 24 months.

All actions have a completion target of 2020, with the aim of:

- Improving customer service
- Increasing accessibility to social housing
- Improving support and tenancy sustainment
- Creating greater awareness of the brand and benefits of Durham Key Options
- Reducing void costs for partners

Specific Projects

20 As part of the enabling role to deliver the housing and homelessness strategies, DCC work with housing providers on specific projects, for example a new start model providing support and accommodation for clients previously excluded from DKO. The strategic manager for housing will provide additional detail as part of the presentation.

Conclusions

21 Members are asked to note the content of the report and the delivery of a presentation.

Background papers

- Housing Strategy
- Homelessness Strategy
- Terms of Reference for the Durham Housing Forum
- Durham Key Options annual report

Other useful documents

- None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Climate Change

Not applicable

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Not applicable