

Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

29 October 2015



Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2015/16 - Scrutiny of Housing Issues

Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report informs members of the key housing related issues which face the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee and proposes a methodology for scrutiny of how the County Durham Housing Group will deliver against the requirements of the Stock Transfer Agreement.

Background

- 2 The Economy and Enterprise OSC is responsible for the scrutiny of the Council Plan Altogether Wealthier priority theme and associated actions. The Committee's terms of reference include examining key policies and services within the sustainable neighbourhoods and rural communities' priority.
- 3 The Economy and Enterprise OSC has previously considered a number of housing related issues such as:-
 - Durham County Council's Housing Strategy
 - Housing Solutions – including Homelessness and Durham Key Options
 - Affordable Housing
 - Housing Regeneration including renewal schemes
 - Private sector housing including empty homes, private Landlord Accreditation and Selective Licensing
 - Annual Performance Monitoring of Durham City Homes; Dale and Valley Homes and East Durham Homes
 - The LSVT process which established the County Durham Housing Group.
- 4 With the completion of the Stock Transfer process and the establishment of the County Durham Housing Group (CDHG), the County Council relinquished its housing landlord function. Accordingly, the Economy and Enterprise OSC needs to review its approach to the scrutiny of housing related issues to better reflect the County Council's strategic housing function and related statutory duties.

Durham County Council Housing Functions

- 5 Durham County Council retains a number of housing functions which fall largely within the responsibility of Councillor Eddie Tomlinson, the Executive Member for Assets, Strategic Housing and Rural Issues. These functions are:-
- Statutory Homeless
 - Produce the Housing Strategy
 - Fulfil the government's recognised functions of a Strategic Housing Authority
 - Work closely with Government's Housing arm, the Homes and Communities Agency
 - Ensure Affordable Housing is available and oversee the Affordable Homes Programme for Durham
 - Maximise the benefits of housing development
 - Strategic Fuel Poverty / Energy Efficiency
 - Specialist housing schemes and older persons accommodation
 - Rural enabling
 - Liaison with and where appropriate co-ordination of large number of social housing providers, including LSVTs.
 - Also monitoring of LSVT performance.
 - Choice Based Lettings Scheme – Durham Key Options
 - Anti-Poverty agenda
 - Prevention of Homelessness
 - Housing Regeneration activity
 - Gypsy Roma Traveller Site Management – please note this sits within a different Cabinet portfolio
 - Fuel Poverty / Energy Efficiency
 - Private Sector Housing Issues
 - Home Improvement Agency
 - Market Housing Company

County Durham Housing Group

- 6 The Council completed the transfer of ownership of its remaining housing stock to the new County Durham Housing Group and its component housing management organisations, Durham City Homes; Dale and Valley Homes and East Durham Homes on 13 April 2015. Within the Transfer Agreement were a series of key duties, obligations and responsibilities placed upon the Council and the Company, including 19 Service Level Agreements through which the Council will support CDHG.
- 7 It has been proposed that performance management arrangements in respect of the Transfer Agreement will be developed jointly between the Council and CDHG and reviewed and recorded through the Council's Overview and Scrutiny procedures.

- 8 In view of the timescales within which CDHG has been established, it is important that the Company's new operational arrangements are allowed time to bed in including how the group are to develop performance management arrangements in respect of delivery against the Transfer Agreement. To this end, it is suggested that a report be brought to the Economy and Enterprise OSC in June 2016 which will detail progress made against the Transfer Agreement as well as key milestones identified within DCHG's Annual report.

RSL housing performance and day to day housing enquiries made to Councillors

- 9 As detailed earlier, the County Council no longer has any responsibility for day to day performance management of individual RSL's as this sits wholly within the Governance arrangements of those organisations.
- 10 For those organisations who are former Local Authority housing providers, the Council remains a shareholder and retains a presence on the Company Boards although it has been evident that housing regulators are placing increasing pressure upon RSLs to reduce this level of Local Authority representation.
- 11 It is to be expected that Councillors will continue to receive requests for assistance from their constituents regarding housing management related issues but it is essential that these are pursued by members through the Housing providers' engagement/complaints processes rather than Overview and Scrutiny.
- 12 The Economy and Enterprise OSC considered a report at its meeting held on 23 June 2015 which detailed its proposed work programme for 2015/16. In agreeing the work programme, it was noted that there are several housing related issues which were contained therein including:-
- Homelessness;
 - DCC Market Housing Scheme
 - DCC Housing Strategy
 - Post Transfer monitoring of the Stock Transfer Agreement with CDHG.

Conclusion

- 13 This report summarises the post LSVT housing related issues facing the Economy and Enterprise OSC during the coming year and beyond now that the authority is no longer stock owning and suggests a mechanism through which the Committee will engage with RED and the CDHG in examining how the Transfer Agreement key aims and objectives will be delivered and whether timelines/targets are being met.

Recommendation

- 14 Members are asked to note the information received within this paper and agree the proposals detailed therein

Background papers

None

Contact: Stephen Gwilym, Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer
Tel: 03000 268 140 E-mail: stephen.gwilym@durham.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance - None

Staffing - None

Risk - None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty - None

Accommodation - None

Crime and Disorder - None

Human Rights - None

Consultation - None

Procurement - None

Disability Issues - None

Legal Implications – None