

Housing Sub-Committee

27 July 2015

Present: Councillor L Darke (Chair)
Councillors A Arkle, A Austin, D Drummond,
John Hunter, P Mason, A Newman, M
Thirlaway and J I Walker.

H08/07/15 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Cox and P Oliver.

H09/07/15 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members appointed.

H010/07/15 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.

H011/07/15 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2015 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

H012/07/15 Affordable Homes Strategy Update

The sub-committee received a progress report on the delivery of the Affordable Homes Programme and the establishment of a new subsidiary of North Tyneside Trading Company for the delivery of Affordable Homes.

The Affordable Homes project continued to work towards the Council's ambition to see an additional 3,000 affordable homes delivered in the Borough by 2024. In 2014/15, the first year of the project, 265 new affordable homes were delivered and it was anticipated that a further 326 new homes would be delivered in 2015/16. A table detailing the anticipated delivery programme to 2024 was appended to the report.

Members were informed of the developments delivered through the HRA which created 18 new affordable homes during 2014/15. Details were provided of a further 104 new council homes anticipated to be delivered across various sites during 2015/16. The report also explained the steps that were being taken to bring empty properties back into use as affordable housing and the number of affordable homes secured through Section 106 Agreements. It was noted that, through Section 106, the Council secures 25% affordable housing on relevant sites (developments with 15 or more units). There were currently 283 affordable homes secured through outline planning permissions and 317 through full planning permissions, making a total of 600 affordable homes. The delivery of these would depend upon when developers start their housing schemes, which is influenced by a number of factors including the buoyancy of the housing market.

The sub-committee was reminded that, in October 2013, Cabinet had acknowledged that there were gaps in the Affordable Home Delivery Programme and that the authority needed to act to create capacity and capability to fulfil those gaps. Officers had applied due diligence to the use of the Authority's Trading Company as an affordable homes delivery

vehicle by appraising it against alternative delivery vehicles and use of financial modelling. In March 2015, Cabinet agreed the Authority's preferred delivery model of a wholly owned Trading Company as a subsidiary of the North Tyneside Trading Company to deliver affordable homes within existing resources. Options were currently being assessed for the first site for development, with a preferred option due to be taken to the Company's Board in August 2015.

Following presentation of the report, a member of the sub-committee asked whether there was any way to speed up the process in which the Council receive money from Section 106 agreements. It was explained that Section 106 agreements were part of planning policy and formed part of the planning permission for the development. In instances where affordable homes were not deemed viable as part of a scheme, the Council could receive other Section 106 money. It was noted that it would not be within the developers' delivery and financial model to release Section 106 money before the scheme had begun. The housing officer undertook to discuss the issue with colleagues in planning to see if there were any options available to speed up the release of Section 106 money.

A Member of the sub-committee asked how many empty properties there currently were within the borough. It was noted that there were around 900 empty properties, which comparatively was a good figure. It was explained that there needed to be empty properties in the system to allow people to move in. Out of the total number of empty properties, around 100 were seen as problematic, where it is difficult to engage with individuals to seek a resolution. Members asked if the properties were targeted based on the length of time they had been empty and it was explained that the most problematic were given priority, especially where multiple empty properties existed within the same locality.

It was **agreed** to note the progress of the Affordable Homes Programme to date and the establishment of a new subsidiary of North Tyneside Trading Company for the delivery of affordable homes.

H013/07/15 Handy Person Scheme

The sub-committee received a report which informed Members of the Hands to Help Scheme (the Scheme) and indicated how scrutiny could contribute to a review in this area. It was explained that the Scheme was run by North Tyneside Homes in conjunction with Kier North Tyneside, with the purpose of carrying out small DIY jobs that many elderly and disabled tenants are unable to carry out themselves or which may place them at risk. The tasks undertaken would normally be the responsibility of the tenant, and not covered by the repairs service. This helps elderly and disabled people remain independent and safe in their own home.

The sub-committee was informed that the maximum time allocated to complete a task is limited to 2 hours. The labour is free but the customer must provide materials such as shelves, cabinets and curtain rails. The Scheme covered various jobs including hanging mirrors/pictures, fitting shelves and plumbing in washing machines. Figures showed that, between April 2014 and December 2014, only 67 jobs were completed under the Scheme. However, it was noted that these figures may not reflect the true number of jobs completed as they may have been undertaken during other repair works and not been recorded separately.

The Scheme was undergoing review by a service development group which included representatives from North Tyneside Homes and Kier. The group had met with tenant representatives and discussed the current usage, performance and criteria and ideas for

improvements to the service. It was considered whether the Scheme should be rolled out to all new tenants; however concern was raised that this would create too big a job load. It was noted that there was one operative working on the scheme, who also had a role undertaking work for the repairs service. The group concluded that the Scheme should be extended to additional vulnerable groups (firstly to customers leaving dispersed properties) and identified issues with the advertising and the communication of the service to customers. A leaflet had been produced when the scheme was introduced but was now out of date and the production of a new leaflet was planned.

Data had been collected as part of the 'tenants profile' which identified 2474 customers over the age of 60 and that 170 tenancies had been accepted for customers over 60 within a six month period. These figures indicated a possible increase in the requests for the scheme in the future. Members were informed that the group planned to meet in September to discuss the impact of increasing appointments and the introduction the service to customers leaving dispersed properties has had on performance, cost and resource. The sub-committee was also informed of a further scheme provided by North Tyneside Council in conjunction with Mears Home Improvement which helps older and disabled people to repair and maintain their homes, keeping them safe and independent. It was noted that it would be useful to examine any available comparative data for the two schemes.

The sub-committee asked whether gardening was included as one of the jobs offered by the Hands to Help Scheme, as this was an area that some residents needed assistance with. It was explained that gardening would not normally be undertaken as part of the scheme but that there were other ways that assistance could be provided to tenants unable to manage the garden, i.e. via the working routes scheme.

Concern was expressed by the sub-committee that information relating to the Scheme had not previously been disseminated to Members. As Members engage with residents on a regular basis, such information would be helpful in offering support and advice. It was acknowledged that the Scheme had not been well publicised in the past and suggested that once the review of the Scheme was complete information would be shared with all Members.

It was **agreed** to (1) note the information provided in relation to the Hands to Help Scheme and (2) request a report to a future meeting with the outcomes of further service development group meetings and the comparative data on the Mears 'Handyperson' service.