



Lewes District Council

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Scrutiny Panel – Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Panel – Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas** held in **Hillcrest Community Centre** on **Wednesday 28 November 2012** at **3:00pm**

Present:

Councillors S J Osborne (Chair), P F Gardiner, I A Nicholson, E C Merry and J Stockdale

Officers Attending:

R Allan, Scrutiny and Committee Officer

In attendance:

S Hemmings, Tenants of Lewes District
T Howell, Homelink
J Marshall, Tenants of Lewes District
N Plummer, Tenants of Lewes District
Councillor D Rogers, East Sussex County Council
Councillor M Scarfe, Seaford Town Council
J Sinclair, Tenants of Lewes District

Minutes

6 Apologies

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors J V Harris and E E J Russell.

7 Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas

The Chair of the Panel welcomed the stakeholders to the meeting and explained the background to the Review. The Panel and all the stakeholders agreed that there was a need for more affordable housing in the urban areas of the District.

The Chair took the Panel through the definition of affordable housing that was used for the Review. Affordable housing included homes rented at rent levels at approximately 50% of the local market level (social rented), homes rented at affordable rent levels at approximately 80% of the market rent (affordable rent), homes that were sold as a part buy/part rent (shared ownership) or homes that were sold as a part equity purchase (shared equity). Stakeholders informed the Panel that feedback from local residents indicated that many families could not afford the costs of the rents and

house prices in the urban areas of the District.

The Panel discussed the proportion of affordable housing that was required by Lewes District Council within new housing schemes. It was confirmed that the current policy stated that the level of affordable housing required within a housing scheme was 25%, but that the level could increase to 40% in new proposals contained in the Local Plan Core Strategy.

Stakeholders raised concerns that people did not want to move from social housing to private sector housing as private rents were unaffordable and unpredictable, due to short term tenancies, and it was safer to remain in social housing where expenditure was fixed. They also informed the Panel that the proposed welfare reforms would have an adverse financial effect on many people in the District.

The issue of the “hidden homeless” was raised by stakeholders, namely people who were not necessarily classified as officially homeless, but were moving between friends houses or staying in unsafe environments. They were not calculated in homelessness figures, and the Chair advised that a Housing Needs Survey may be undertaken in 2013 across the District which would take account of people classified as “hidden homeless”.

The Panel discussed the possibility of the Council entering into a partnership with a lettings agency, or setting up an agency at the District Council to help provide appropriate housing. Stakeholders agreed that this was a good idea. The Panel added that there had been some relaxation in the law for turning office accommodation into affordable housing, so work could be undertaken to consult owners of disused office accommodation in the District.

Stakeholders informed the Panel that there were older people in the urban areas of the District who would like to move to smaller accommodation, but not sheltered housing. Downlands Court in Peacehaven was highlighted by stakeholders as an excellent scheme for older people, and there was a wish that more developments like this could be built within the District.

The stakeholders made various suggestions to the Panel about how to improve the amount of affordable housing in the District, namely:

- Using empty shops as potential sites for affordable housing.
- Helping shopkeepers in developing empty floorspace they own above shops to use as affordable housing.
- Use of the old Post Office in Newhaven for affordable housing.
- The reduction in charity shops in towns across the District to use as affordable housing.

- Examining sites that have been rejected as potential travellers' sites which could be used for affordable housing.
- Examining car park sites in Newhaven that were rarely used for potential affordable housing.
- Ensure that the District Council takes advantage of all the latest initiatives in regard to the creation of new affordable housing.
- Use of the District Council offices in Newhaven and the parking behind that as a potential site for affordable housing.
- Undertaking a review across the District of any potential land that could be used for affordable housing.
- The creation of a strategy for empty properties in the District.
- Conduct a site visit to any neighbouring authority that has experience of turning empty shops into affordable housing.
- Give consideration to the creation of relatively high density buildings in town centres for affordable housing.
- Consider whether the District Council should build new affordable housing.

The Chair thanked stakeholders for attending and closed the meeting in order to discuss affordable housing in urban areas with members of the public who had attended the meeting.

Resolved:

- 7.1** That a vote of thanks be accorded to the stakeholders who attended the Scrutiny Panel meeting on 28 November 2012 for their contributions to the Scrutiny Review on the Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas; and
- 7.2** That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to ensure that the feedback from the Scrutiny Panel meeting on 28 November 2012 be considered as part of the Scrutiny Review on the Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas.

S&CO

8 Date of Next Meeting

Resolved:

- 8.1** That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to arrange a meeting of the Scrutiny Panel in late January 2013.

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The meeting ended at 5.00pm

S J Osborne
Chair