



Report to Cabinet

- Date:** 1st March 2022
- Title:** Outcomes from the Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group
- Author:** Nigel Dicker
- Recommendations:** That Cabinet considers the findings of the affordable housing member led task and finish group, including the proposed interim position statement on affordable housing,
- and
- a) Provides any comments and amendments as appropriate;
 - b) Agrees that the affordable housing position statement is adopted with any required amendments and the required activities be taken forward by officers.

Background

- 1.0 An affordable housing member task and finish group was initiated in August 2021. Led by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Regulatory Services the group met on a number of occasions to discuss the issues and challenges around the delivery of affordable housing in Buckinghamshire and to develop an affordable housing 'position statement', with the aim of reporting back to the Leader and Cabinet.
- 1.1 The position statement is intended to set out the Council's interim approach and immediate commitment to bringing forward a development on a Council owned site that provides affordable housing, potentially with an element of specialist affordable and key worker housing. The interim approach is intended to cover the period while the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping and overarching housing strategies are in development and is expected to provide early tangible progress for the key Council priority of increasing the delivery of affordable housing.

- 1.2 The member led task and finish group (TFG) had the immediate objectives of:
1. Identifying how the Council can help secure more affordable housing delivery, for example by looking at options for making use of county wide property and land assets.
 2. Identifying and following up issues that may require further clarification, for example a corporate 'key worker' definition.
 3. Agreeing a site or scheme(s) to pilot new approaches for delivery of affordable housing of various types.
 4. Applying learning from these schemes to set the framework and methods for getting the best outcomes for future affordable housing schemes.
- 1.3 Some of the longer term objectives of the member led TFG are to provide input into the development of the Council's overarching housing strategy and to identify learning from completed pilot projects to inform future schemes, thereby maximising delivery, and also complementing existing delivery that occurs through the planning process and registered provider partnerships.

Main content of report

- 2.0 The proposed position statement is shown at Appendix 1. The key aspects or immediate commitments are in bullet points a-g., para 2.1 of Appendix 1. The TFG also proposes a two-line statement to describe its basic purpose:
- "to develop proposals on how to best provide affordable housing in Buckinghamshire, and bring forward a site that demonstrates the Council is delivering on its promises".*
- 2.1 Appendix 2 - site costings - outlines the potential impacts of introducing different types of affordable housing on site values at two major development sites and presents possible options for consideration and highlights that there may be a direct impact on the Council's capital programme.
- 2.2 As shown below in points 1-16, the TFG considered a number of aspects and challenges around the delivery of affordable housing in Buckinghamshire, identifying areas of need and prioritising opportunities to house those residents in greatest need. (Types of affordable housing are listed in Appendix 4.)
1. There is more need in the north of the Council's area – how can this be addressed, given that there are underused Council owned sites across the whole of the Council area.
 2. Where there is a business case to do so, we will use Council owned land / buildings where possible, tying into our ambitions to regenerate town centres and using the Council's planning powers and permitted development rights where appropriate, to convert these into affordable housing and discounted rent units.

3. We will develop a definition for key workers, and how we house them sustainably (including what happens when they stop being key workers). This is likely to be a combination of social and affordable housing, discounted rent or in some cases discounted ownership models.
4. We recommend that the planning requirement for affordable housing on new build developments across the Council area is harmonised, reducing the existing requirements ranging from 25% affordable to 40% affordable to a single requirement for Buckinghamshire.
5. We will look for opportunities to use rural exceptions and neighbourhood plans driven by local communities to develop local schemes that keep families connected with their villages, especially in locations where developers would be unlikely to build.
6. We will explore the use of innovative building methods, including modular construction techniques to enable quicker builds and fit-outs where possible, especially on previously undeveloped Council-owned land (and distinct from conversion of former Council buildings).
7. We will include sites for affordable housing in the emerging Buckinghamshire Local Plan, balancing the need to maintain green belt with the need for more affordable housing units, and using brownfield sites where possible.
8. We will develop an enabling strategy to partner with other organisations (e.g. Homes England), leading with RSL's and private builders, using S106 and grant funding.
9. We will develop and upscale Consilio, a Council owned company, as an active partner that could contribute to bringing forward affordable housing, potentially at lower cost, especially in areas where there is already an active regeneration plan. Consilio will need to be properly resourced to meet this considerable challenge. There will be detailed attention to ensuring sufficient capacity and robust governance processes.
10. We will continue with the process of setting up the governance arrangements required to create a registered provider of social housing (RP) potentially as a subsidiary of Consilio so as to be able to act as a social landlord and let affordable units acquired by or possibly brought forward by Consilio.
11. We will develop a 'principles' document outlining the affordable strategy, and relevant principles to follow, including tenure (number of bedrooms) and types of housing, including adapted housing, bringing clarity to geography, location and utilisation of Council owned sites, working with the 'one estate' work stream.

12. In order to assess potentially foregone capital receipts from using Council properties or land, and so the impacts on the overall capital programme that can be afforded by the Council, we will identify and cost out options (Appendix 2) for at least one Council owned asset in Buckinghamshire on which to deliver additional affordable (potentially of a specialist nature) and key worker housing. We will expedite such a scheme on one of these Council owned sites:
 - Stoke Mandeville Sports and Social Club
 - Horns Lane, High Wycombe
 - Tatling End, Denham
13. We will review and catalogue empty homes in Buckinghamshire and explore the possible use of processes to bring these back into use. We will review the framework of Council Tax charges to incentivise owners to bring these back into use as dwellings.
14. The Council will agree a position statement on the new national 'First Homes' product for first time buyers and ensure that First Homes delivered in new Buckinghamshire housing developments are prioritised for Buckinghamshire residents and key workers. See Appendix 5, First Homes Interim Position Statement.
15. We will adopt language that avoids stigmatising occupants in mixed tenure developments and find better descriptions than "social housing" that minimises stratification.
16. We will carefully examine and summarise the opportunities that are in the pipeline (Appendix 3) making the Council's objectives transparent and developing a narrative that follows and showcases the progress of our activities.

3.0 Next steps and review

- 3.1 If Cabinet agrees to adopt the approach suggested above and the content of the position statement, with or without further amendments, then officers will action as appropriate and in particular, as soon as possible seek to identify a Council owned asset in Buckinghamshire on which to deliver additional affordable (potentially of a specialist nature) and key worker housing.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Affordable Housing Position Statement

Appendix 2 - Site costings (confidential appendix)

Appendix 3 - Affordable housing delivery performance

Appendix 4 - Affordable housing types

Appendix 5 - Draft First Homes Position Statement

Your questions and views (for key decisions)

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by telephone [01296 382343] or email [democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk]

