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| SUBJECT: | <i>Housing Workshop update</i> |
| REPORT OF: | <i>Graham Harris, Healthy Communities Portfolio Holder</i> |
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| WARD/S AFFECTED | <i>All</i> |

1. Purpose of Report

To advise Members on how the information from the Housing Workshop will be taken forwards.

RECOMMENDATION

To discuss the findings of the Housing workshop and the implication for affordable housing development in Chiltern District.

2. Executive Summary

3. Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 As at 17th February 2016 a total of 567 applicants were registered with Chiltern District Council for Bucks Home Choice and were entitled to express interest in vacant social housing tenancies. A further 240 applicants were registered as Housing Options cases meaning that they have applied to Bucks Home Choice but do not qualify for the scheme and cannot express interest in vacancies. Applicants who are assessed as Housing Options cases will have received advice on their alternative housing options via the Bucks Home Choice website

3.2 The availability of properties to let via Bucks Home Choice remains limited in comparison with the number of households registered with Bucks Home Choice. Since 1st April 2015, an average of just 4 properties per week have been available for letting and been advertised. Consequently, many applicants in Chiltern District continue to face a long wait for accommodation.

3.3 Since 1.4.15 a total of 179 properties have been let in Chiltern via Bucks Home Choice and the average waiting times for an applicant to be rehoused were:

- 1 bedroom flat = 12 months
- 2 bedroom house = 17 months
- 3 bedroom house = 36 months
- 4 bedroom house = No Lettings.

3.4 Between 1/4/15 and 1/2/16 Chiltern DC a total of 77 homelessness applications of which 50 were deemed to be subject to the main homelessness duty (i.e. the duty to secure accommodation). This indicates that the number of

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homelessness applications determined by Chiltern DC in 2015/16 is on course to at least match the total number from the previous year (87 in 2014/15) or possible exceed it.

3.5 This pressure on the housing options and homelessness service is evident in the continuing high demand for temporary accommodation for homeless households. As at 16/02/16, CDC had a total of 32 homeless households in temporary accommodation including 5 in B & B. Of the 5 households in B & B, 1 was a household with/expecting children who had been in B & B for at least 6 weeks (the household had been deemed none qualifying for homelessness assistance and was pending a review of that decision). Officers are working actively to move these households on to alternative accommodation.

4. Content of Report

4.1 The purpose of the Housing Workshop event was to:

- brief Members on the range of national and local housing policy issues and trends that are affecting the delivery of housing services across both authorities,
- provide an opportunity for Members to discuss these issues and trends (in individual table discussions focussing on specific projects and in the wider group) and
- Identify specific ideas, issues and options for the authorities to follow up and take forward in developing a shared Chiltern District Council and South Bucks District Council Housing Strategy.

4.2 The pre-event briefing to Members highlighted that:

- The delivery of Housing services is undergoing a fundamental change at a national and local level.
- Government policy is focused on supporting initiatives to promote home ownership and is no longer directly supporting the provision of affordable (i.e. sub-market) rented accommodation. This extends to changes in planning policy that will reduce the ability of Councils to secure affordable housing for rent on new developments via the development control process.
- The traditional providers of affordable housing for rent and sale, Registered Providers, are undertaking full reviews of their business plans following changes to their funding streams (including rent cuts) and are re-assessing both what housing they develop and who they house.
- Welfare reforms continue to progress with increasing restrictions on the level of benefits available to support low income and workless households to meet their housing costs.

4.3 Members were informed that, against this backdrop, Chiltern and South Bucks District Councils continue to have some of the highest housing costs in the country (outside London) for buying and renting. This in turn is placing increasing pressure on the CDC/SBDC Shared Housing Service as more people seek help from the Councils (because they cannot afford to secure housing in the private sector). In particular, there is significant pressure on the

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homelessness service in both districts with a large number of households in temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast with consequent impacts on client welfare and the Council spending. We also face the prospect of more landlords letting poorer quality accommodation to exploit a market where low income households have no other options available to them.

4.4 Members were also advised that, as the two Councils seek to respond to these increasing pressures, many of the tools and measures that we have operated previously are either no longer effective or will be coming to an end. Starter Homes and other home ownership initiatives being launched by Government will be too expensive for many low income households in Chiltern and South Bucks. Rising rent levels and housing benefit restrictions mean that previously successful schemes operated by the Councils to secure private tenancies for clients (e.g. the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme) are no longer attracting landlords. Future changes to planning policy mean that the Councils may no longer be able to secure affordable homes to rent via the planning process and will probably see a significant reduction in the level of associated commuted sums as well. Registered providers may choose not to develop affordable homes for rent without significant support and incentives from local authorities and may start to refuse to re-house clients perceived to be “high risk

4.5 Attached in **Appendix 1** is a summary of the workshop and discussions that took place, the wide ranging discussion highlighted a number of areas for further work.

4.6 The workshop identified the following opportunities for further consideration

- The council utilising its own land or supporting land assembly to enable affordable housing development for temporary or permanent accommodation
- Supporting the development of low cost affordable housing including the use of self-build, off-site construction methods and park homes
- Partnership working with public sector landowners to derive value and public benefit in the delivery of affordable homes
- Incentivise RSL and developers to build affordable homes
- Work with communities to develop opportunities for rural exception sites
- Return empties to use and support conversion of properties to deliver affordable homes
- Assisting persons at risk of homeless to develop skills enabling them in to the workplace and maintain benefits as appropriate
- Assist persons to access repayable loans through the Credit Union to fund rent in advance and deposits for the private rented sector
- Short term use of discretionary Housing Benefit to bridge the top up required for persons to access the private rented sector and increase their ability to access work

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- Incentivise landlords to offer accommodation to persons from Chiltern at risk of homelessness rather than accommodate persons from outside the district.
- Support persons to move out of the area as appropriate
- Support initiatives encouraging people to rent out a room in their home.
- Access and use the data from RSL's on the movement within the stock to maximise opportunities to deliver affordable housing
- Develop or access social media tools to inform choice when accessing private rented accommodation and support landlords to comply with legislative requirements to deliver appropriate housing conditions
- Monitor and score the standard of private rented accommodation similar to the methods used in the food industry.
- Enable landlord's access to low cost loans and accredit private landlords that are achieving standards.
- Work with RSL's to manage Housing in Multiple Occupation reducing the risks to tenants
- Develop flexible funding packages to enable homeowners to invest in disability adaptations.
- Support older persons to access reputable traders when undertaking home repairs, improvements and adaptations

4.7 Officers will be taking this forward as we progress the development of a joint Chiltern District Council and South Bucks District Council Housing Strategy. However, it is clear that the wide range of national housing, planning and welfare policy developments that have been introduced or are forthcoming will present significant challenges as we seek to fulfil our statutory housing responsibilities.

4.8 It has been proposed that in Chiltern a Member Affordable Housing Task and Finish group will be established to consider the opportunities to develop policy in relation to Affordable Housing. The findings from this group will be developed through the Housing Strategies and brought to the Housing, Health and Communities PAG and the Services Overview Committee for consideration before consultation with stakeholders.

5. Consultation

Not Applicable

6. Options

There are two main options and these are as follows:-

- a) To do nothing and risk demand outstripping supply for affordable housing which will impact on increasing homelessness which is a cost to the council
- b) To develop the housing strategies with a focus on prevention, personal responsibility and support to those in need to mitigate the risks to the Council

7. Corporate Implications

- 3.1 Financial – There is a risk that affordable housing is not delivered in Chiltern District increasing the emergency housing accommodation costs to the Council.
- 3.2 Legal – the council has a duty to provide housing advice and assistance including emergency housing provision.
- 3.3 Other risks – inappropriate housing and homelessness have a direct impact on the health of the occupant and there are proven links to crime and disorder and reduced quality of life.

8. Links to Council Policy Objectives

A key aim of the Council is to ‘address the needs of the elderly and those who are vulnerable’ and ‘work with partners to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour’ and to ‘improve community safety, working with our key partners to help safeguard children and vulnerable adults and prevent them becoming victims of crime’.

9. Next Steps

Following agreement officers would bring reports through the Member Affordable Housing Task and Finish group, Housing, Health and Communities PAG and the Services Overview Committee for consideration before consultation with stakeholders

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| Background Papers: | None other than those referred to in this report |
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