Affordable Housing
Task Group Minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Affordable Housing Task Group held on Tuesday 6 March 2012 at the Civic Centre, Poulton-le-Fylde.

Members present:

Councillor Anderson  Councillor Ormrod
Councillor E Anderton  Councillor Perkin
Councillor Balmain  Councillor Robinson
Councillor Brooks  Councillor Rogers
Councillor M Gandhi  Councillor Shewan
Councillor Henderson  Councillor Williams

Officers present:

Mark Broadhurst, Head of Housing Services
David Thow, Head of Planning Services
Nick Stevenson, Strategic Housing Projects Officer
Peter Foulsham, Scrutiny Officer

One member of the public was present.

AH.01 Election of Chairman

Councillor Brooks was elected as Chairman of the Task Group.

AH.02 Election of Vice Chairman

Councillor Shewan was elected as Vice Chairman of the Task Group.

AH.03 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Pimbley.

AH.04 Declarations of Interest

None.
**AH.05 Public Involvement**

Councillors agreed that meetings of the task group should be held in public.

**AH.06 Context of the Review – The Chairman’s Introduction**

The Chairman reminded councillors that ‘affordable housing’ was a term that was defined in Planning Policy Statement 3, Annex B, which was published by the Department of Communities and Local Government in June 2011.

There was a conflict between the identified need for affordable homes (in the region of 570) and the number that were built each year (in the region of 60-70). It was clear that residents, particularly in the rural areas of the borough, had a number of reasons for objecting to affordable housing development and this would be a main focus of the Review.

**AH.07 Context of the Review**

David Thow, Head of Planning Services, informed members that the Core Strategy, which would cover the plans for growth and development across the borough for the next fifteen years (to 2028), would be considered by Cabinet on 14 March. The Strategy contained a number of references to affordable housing.

The National Planning Policy Framework, which reflected current Government policy, would be published in the near future. It emphasized the need to meet targets for both private and affordable housing.

The Fylde Coast Strategic Housing Market Assessment reflected the joint work of Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre, and provided some of the evidential support to the Core Strategy. It identified the needs of older people as being a priority as well as for other affordable housing. It also recognised that the needs of the three authorities could not be met.

The Regional Spatial Strategy included targets for affordable homes. Over the past five or six years Wyre had been above the target for all completions, and although the numbers of completions had fallen to 160-170 in the past couple of years, Wyre had still met its annual target of 206 homes, as an average taken over that period.

In answer to a question, David Thow confirmed that the council did not have specific policies for promoting housing for older people.

Cllr Perkin asked whether, with an aging population in the borough, some consideration ought to be given to facilitating older people to move into smaller accommodation. It was recognised by councillors and officers present that this was a highly sensitive topic, and many older people would be very reluctant indeed to take such steps. Nick Stevenson, Strategic
Housing Projects Officer, advised that registered providers were looking at how accommodation might be freed up in that way, but he also emphasized the requirement for sensitivity.

Mark Broadhurst, Head of Housing Services, explained his role in relation to bidding for funding for affordable housing, and the way in which he worked closely with registered providers.

A reasonable allocation of funds was available for the next five years. This included Empty Homes Funding, for which Regenda had made a bid, supported by the council, to purchase and refurbish seven properties which would then be let as affordable homes.

Mr Broadhurst outlined the ‘hub and spoke’ model of supported housing, which provided different levels of support according to need.

The Choice Based Lettings Scheme was a new allocation scheme that provided a much more equitable and less repetitive way of dealing with applications for and the allocation of affordable housing. The local connection was seen as crucial and the assessment policy meant that there was a consistent assessment policy that applied to the three local authorities across the Fylde Coast. Mr Broadhurst suggested that the implementation of the Scheme might be a potential subject for scrutiny in due course.

AH.08 Public Attitudes

David Thow said that although there were understandable objections received from people who did not want developments immediately adjoining their own properties, in his view the level of objections has not affected the provision of affordable housing in rural areas. He could not remember any affordable housing scheme that had been turned down as a result of the objections made, although there had been other factors. This view was supported by Nick Stevenson.

Peter Foulsham, Scrutiny Officer, had analysed the objections listed in Annex C of the Rural Housing Needs Assessment, 2010, and he presented members with a summary of that work which highlighted the main areas of objection parish by parish.

David Thow suggested that the council needed a more collaborative approach involving ward councillors and Parish Councils, which should be the focus. He referred members to the Planning Protocol for Rural Affordable Housing Schemes.

Mr Thow also referred to the Affordable Housing Needs Survey, which showed that most people were in favour of affordable housing, although that changed once a specific local proposal had been made.
AH.09 Scoping Document

Amendments were made to the draft Scoping Document to include, as potential witnesses, Fleetwood Town Council and Planning Ambassadors.

AH.10 Next Steps

Councillors agreed to invite a number Chairmen of Parish Councils and Planning Ambassadors to future meetings of the task group. One meeting would focus on the rural area and a second on the urban area. In parts of the borough where there was not a Parish, residents groups would be invited.

AH.11 Date and time of next meeting

To be advised.

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