

HINCKLEY AND BOSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING TASK & FINISH GROUP

5 SEPTEMBER 2024 AT 2.00 PM

PRESENT: Cllr MJ Crooks – Chair and Cllr C Lambert

Officers in attendance: Valerie Bunting, Rebecca Owen, Madeline Shellard and Steven Connor

23. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Gibbens and Harris.

It was noted that the meeting was not quorate but members agreed to proceed on the basis that it was not a decision-making body and the report which would be created as a result of the meeting would be sent to all members of the group for comment and presented to the Scrutiny Commission for approval.

24. **Declarations of interest**

No interests were declared.

25. **Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record.

26. **Private sector housing**

A local letting agent attended the meeting to talk about challenges in the private rental market. It was noted that changes to taxation, EPC rules, interest rates and regulations around no fault evictions had led to landlords selling their properties and a reduction in the private rented sector. It was explained that there was such demand for rental properties that private landlords did not need to work with local authorities in order to fill properties, even if there was little risk or if incentives were offered. It was agreed that dialogue would continue with representatives of local landlords to see whether there were opportunities to work together.

27. **Lobbying - meeting housing need**

The group received a report with suggested areas for lobbying and an outline of existing lobbying activities.

Members supported the suggestions for areas for consideration within the report. It was agreed that the following areas for lobbying in relation to S106 sites be recommended:

- Increase in affordable housing provision: lobby for a higher percentage of affordable housing within section 106 agreements

- Enhanced community infrastructure: advocate for more funding allocated to community facilities like schools, healthcare and public transport
- Strengthened enforcement: call for stricter enforcement mechanisms to ensure developers comply with section 106 obligations
- Transparency and accountability: push for greater transparency in the negotiation and implementation of section 106 agreements
- Addressing viability issues: explore ways to balance the need for affordable housing and community infrastructure with developers' viability concerns
- Review and update section 106 guidelines: Advocate for regular reviews and updates to ensure the policy remains effective and relevant.

Further area for lobbying to be recommended in the final report included:

- Restricting the sale of council properties through right to buy
- Increasing funding to bring empty properties back into use
- Promoting a more coordinated approach to housing-related policies across government departments.

28. **Next steps - production of final report**

In considering the content of the final report, members felt that consideration should be given to officer capacity with the view that additional staffing would not only enable provision of additional support to tenants and those seeking our services, but would also reduce spend on temporary accommodation by enabling quicker turnaround of allocations. In relation to housing acquired through S106 agreements, the capacity and skills gap was noted, with the risk of missed opportunities that this created. The importance of recognising the difference between HRA and general fund expenditure was emphasised. The powerful message that could be conveyed via benchmarking was also reiterated.

Members wished it to be noted that the housing service was well run and provided an exceptional service, but there was concern that it would become increasingly difficult to sustain due to emerging pressures.

Recommendations from previous meetings of the task & finish group would be included in the final report:

- Council tax: Exchange of information between the revenues team and the housing service in relation to the size and tenure of empty properties, addresses of empty properties and a list of second homes.
- Private rented sector: Discussion between the council and private landlords (via a representative, for example the letting agent who attended the meeting) about opportunities to work together to reduce homelessness.

It was agreed that the final report would be drafted and sent round to group members for their agreement before being presented to the Scrutiny Commission.

(The Meeting closed at 3.08 pm)