

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Growing Barnsley Workstream
DATE:	Tuesday 1 November 2022
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Council Chamber, Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present

Councillors Ennis OBE (Chair), Bellamy, Bowler, Bowser, Cain, Clarke, Denton, Eastwood, P. Fielding, W. Fielding, Hayward, Lodge, Lowe-Fleelo, Markham, McCarthy, Mitchell, Peace, Smith, Webster and Wray

27 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

No apologies for absence were received in accordance with Regulation 7(6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

28 Declarations of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interest

Councillor Lodge declared a non-pecuniary interest as he is a Berneslai Homes tenant.

Councillor Webster declared a non-pecuniary interest as his partner works for Anchor Homes.

29 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 11 October 2022 were received.

30 Affordable & Social Housing Provision in Barnsley

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:

Matt O'Neill, Executive Director Growth & Sustainability, BMBC

Kathy McArdle, Service Director Regeneration & Culture, BMBC

Sarah Cartwright, Head of Strategic Housing, Sustainability & Climate Change, BMBC

Alison Dalton, Group Leader Strategic Housing, BMBC

Amanda Garrard, Chief Executive, Berneslai Homes

Dave Fullen, Executive Director of Customer and Estate Services, Berneslai Homes

Cllr Kevin Osborne, Cabinet Support Member Growth & Sustainability, BMBC

Members were invited to consider a report of the Report of the Executive Director Core Services and the Executive Director Growth and Sustainability (Item 4).

Councillor Osborne introduced the report and stressed that homes were an integral part of family life. Members were informed that an update on housing need and requirements would be covered in the presentation, along with a summary of the Council's work on affordable housing and how needs are addressed in the borough.

Sarah Cartwright further informed Members on the definition of affordable housing, which included different affordable tenures such as shared ownership and discounted market sale. The First Homes scheme was a new government initiative which would also provide affordable housing in the Borough, a report on the First Homes scheme would be taken to Cabinet imminently and a pilot with Keepmoat homes had commenced. In terms of affordable rent, the government definition stated that affordable rent should be up to 80% of market value. In regard to Council stock, the Authority had just over 18,000 units, along with 4500 Housing Association units. The waiting list fluctuates and currently stood at around 8000-9000. The Council loses around 150 homes due to Right to Buy every year and were currently delivering 50 homes through new-build and the small acquisitions programme. However, due to the lack of sufficient funding it was difficult for the Council to invest in large scale building projects in the current economic climate.

Alison Dalton took Members through a presentation. Members were informed of how the National Planning Policy Framework had informed both the adopted Masterplan Frameworks and Local Plan. This had fed into the strategic growth sites across the Borough, with around 6000 homes planned in addition to smaller Local Plan housing allocations. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) provided a breakdown of affordable dwelling types and the number of bedrooms required. The Council was currently reviewing the future of council housing in the borough via an independent consultant to review the evidence base, other wider considerations, and developing modelling to understand the impact of wider market factors.

Members were informed that in June 2022 key stakeholders met to discuss the Strategy for social housing stock and affordable housing provision in the Borough. The purpose of the session was for Barnsley Council and Berneslai Homes to jointly explore what the future of council housing looked like for Barnsley.

In the ensuing discussion, and in response to detailed questioning and challenge the following matters were highlighted:

In regard to comparisons with other Local Authorities, Councils such as Rotherham had a substantial building programme and also had a shared SHMA with Sheffield. Doncaster had a similar need profile to Barnsley but had a larger build programme, As an authority, Barnsley lacks land under its control when compared to neighbouring authorities which had inhibited larger building projects. Barnsley Council had worked closely with other South Yorkshire Local Authorities surrounding affordable housing policy, including the SYMCA housing framework of strategic priorities which included affordable housing. Some Housing Authorities worked across all four areas of South Yorkshire, and from a lettings perspective there were residents in crossover boundary areas on the waiting list.

Various discussions arose surrounding the Right to Buy scheme. The Council had a Right to Buy team, this year it was predicted that around 120-130 homes would be purchased under the Right to Buy scheme. Purchases had slowed down in

comparison to previous years due to the expectation that the housing market would cool. In regards to Right to Buy receipts, the calculations were complex in which the Council retained a small proportion which was invested into Council build programmes, however it could not be used alongside Homes England grants. The rest of the money was paid either to the government, towards administration fees or towards the payment of historical debts. Members would be provided with the Right to Buy financial breakdown. The Right to Buy scheme was an important tool for those wanting to access home ownership however there was not sufficient funding available to replace lost accommodation.

Along with Right to Buy receipts, the Council could use Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funding, Section 106 monies, and Section 106 commuted sums to support development. Section 106 and Section 106 commuted sums were negotiated between the Council and developers during the planning application process. The Council does use this funding for affordable homes, including building projects and acquisitions. The Council had historically not sold many large land and assets sites, however land and assets that had been sold for housing developments in the past had been general fund sites and therefore could not be used to build affordable housing.

Waiting lists are a key priority for the Council and Berneslai Homes, and the revised lettings policy would address some key concerns. It was noted that Berneslai Homes had around 150 people applying each week to the housing waiting list. Reviews are conducted frequently, and people were often removed from the register when a review is undertaken. This could be due to their housing needs being able to be met in an alternative way, and these reviews increased administration work for staff. It was noted that there was a need to undertake more conversations regarding managing expectations along with communication around realistic waiting times. There would be an enhanced customer experience with the updated lettings policy particularly in regards to managing expectations. People that already lived in Barnsley or had strong connections to the borough via family links or employment made up the vast majority of the waiting list and the choice-based system did take this into account when assessing priority. The lettings policy was also fully compliant with the armed forces covenant and granted reasonable preference to current and former members of HM forces and partners. Work on the new lettings policy and banding would be fully transparent and people would still have the right of appeal, local information from Members remained important in ensuring the right assessment of residents.

It was noted that Barnsley lacked brownfield sites in which to develop new building projects, especially in comparison to other South Yorkshire Local Authorities. Barnsley also had a tightly defined green belt and this therefore created a distinct disadvantage. SYMCA did provide funding for brownfield development, which historically Barnsley had not been able to take full advantage of. However, the Council had been able to secure brownfield funding for the Goldthorpe Market site and had also put in a bid for The Seam development. The Council worked with Homes England to maximise funding opportunities and live conversations were ongoing with SYMCA in regards to maximising brownfield funding opportunities.

The Council and Berneslai Homes engaged in a good working relationship with the Housing Associations operating across the borough. Housing Associations worked

particularly closely with Berneslai Homes letting service. Berneslai Homes monitored and reported on how many Housing Association properties were available in the borough and how many had been offered to Berneslai Homes, with Housing Associations consistently meeting targets. Housing Associations also worked with Berneslai Homes on finding solutions to specific and unique housing needs. The Council did not provide funding to Housing Associations but did have a framework of preferred Housing Associations if the Council wanted to dispose of sites such as garage sites.

Members had various questions regarding accessible housing provision in the Borough, including bungalows. It was noted that the Council currently had 4664 bungalows, and bids for bungalows had increased by 76% in the last year. Although bungalows were a popular accessible housing choice for elderly residents and those with medical needs, the Council and Berneslai homes had found via the SHMA that people wanted to stay in their own homes for longer rather than move due to their accessibility needs. Therefore, the Council and Berneslai homes were focused on making adaptations to residents' homes to ensure accessibility, along with reviewing sheltered accommodation in the borough. The Council would work closely with developers as the SHMA stated that 25% of new homes should be adaptable and 6% should be wheelchair accessible. This has recently been consulted on in the Design of New Housing Development Supplementary Planning Document. The Local Plan sets out aspirations on indicative yields which would be difficult to achieve if the Council built too many bungalows and this therefore was a balancing act. The Council historically had not sold many bungalows via Right to Buy, partly due to age restrictions. In regards to bungalows on private developments, there were particular issues with size and purchase prices, many new build bungalows were more expensive than family homes.

The target level of housing decency for the Council is 100%, this currently sat at 99.7%. The Council had engaged in work with the private sector to ensure that properties that don't meet health and safety requirements were thoroughly investigated by the housing enforcement team. Regarding empty or abandoned properties, the Council's empty homes officer had worked proactively with landlords and looked at acquiring empty properties in the Borough. A new Landlord Accreditation scheme was launched over the Summer to further ensure residents had access to homes that meet decency requirements.

The Council worked with developers in the Borough on providing affordable homes. Paragraph 65 of the NPPF confirmed that 10% of the total number of affordable homes should be available for affordable home ownership unless this would prejudice the ability to meet the identified affordable needs of specific groups. Most developments in Barnsley are policy compliant, if developers wish to contest the affordable housing provision, they would need to undertake a viability assessment which is assessed independently. First Homes is the governments new preferred scheme to provide discounted homes to first time buyers, discounts would be subsidised by the developer. The government set the eligibility criteria for the scheme, and earlier pilots with Keepmoat had proved successful. Barnsley Council has added a local eligibility criteria to offer First Homes to local people in the first instance.

Members raised queries surrounding garage sites. It was confirmed that the allocation and agreements for homes were separate from garage sites, all garages or plots were rented or under a license, and ownership remained with the Local Authority. A full audit of garage sites within the borough was ongoing, with an asset management strategy currently under review. It was noted there could be opportunity to use garage sites for infill development or electric vehicle charging points. Any funds from garage site sales that were conducted by the Council were used to fund new building projects or acquisitions. There was a need to look at sustainability when discussing the sale of garage sites as this could impact residents parking needs.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) Witnesses be thanked for their attendance and contribution and the report be noted
- (ii) Members be provided with the financial breakdown of the Right to Buy scheme; and
- (iii) Members continue to provide local information to both the Council and Berneslai Homes

Chair