
Report to: **Hub Committee**

Date: **11 July 2023**

Title: **Putting Housing First**

Portfolio Area: **Housing – Cllr Mark Renders**

Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken: After the Overview & Scrutiny Call-in period has expired.

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RECOMMENDATION:

That the Hub Committee endorses the prioritisation by this Council of its resources and influence to improve affordable and social housing outcomes in the Borough; specifically to take actions that will benefit the greatest number of homes and help the greatest range of residents in need.

1. Summary

- 1.1 West Devon Borough Council has been striving to tackle the “housing crisis”; the real term cost of housing relative to earnings and the critically low availability of rented accommodation. It has made a positive difference by:
- i. Successfully lobbying for changes to business rates regulations so that second home owners pay a fair share of the cost of the services we all rely on
 - ii. Challenging, influencing and getting a change in direction within Central Government on the supported housing regulations – reversing the trend of commercial profits being put before quality of care
 - iii. Adopting tighter controls on development to reduce the embodied energy and operational carbon emissions from

new homes via our Climate Emergency Planning Statement, reducing future energy costs

- iv. Seeking the greatest proportion and best mix of affordable houses in new development sites that come forward through the planning system
- 1.2 Whilst this success is welcome, there is much more to do: Strong headwinds in the private rented sector as government legislation bites, is forcing landlords to sell or increase their rents, reducing stock affordability and availability.
 - 1.3 The cost of energy is placing ever greater strain on essential income, leaving many in fuel poverty.
 - 1.4 The quality of our existing housing stock is some of the worst performing in terms of energy efficiency, in northern Europe. This mirrors the rest of the UK, which, as a whole, is responsible for ~ 40% of all of the country's carbon emissions.
 - 1.5 Tens of thousands of homes already exist in West Devon, whereas only a few thousand new ones have been built in the last 5 years, and even fewer of those are affordable. To improve housing outcomes, the Council must therefore apply its efforts proportionally to where the biggest challenges lie.
 - 1.6 The Council is and will continue to be a force for good, seeking opportunity to improve housing outcomes that make the greatest difference to our residents.
 - 1.7 To that end, over the next four years it will seek to:
 - i. Lobby government for:
 1. Changes to Right to Buy legislation to reduce the loss of existing rented housing stock particularly in rural areas
 2. An increase in the local area housing allowance, which does not reflect the true cost of rented accommodation
 - ii. Strive to decarbonise the existing social and affordable housing stock, improving living standards, lifting people out of fuel poverty, reducing the cost of living crisis and protecting our environment
 - iii. Hold landlords to account where property is substandard
 - iv. Bring forward new policies that influence the proportion of new development that is affordable and social rented accommodation through the JLP
 - v. Collaborate with housing associations and CLTs to improve the number of affordable, safe and good quality homes delivered for our residents
 - vi. Seek to assist in the delivery of affordable homes where conditions for housing need, finance, partner involvement, deliverability and social outcomes align.

- vii. Support our most vulnerable residents wherever possible with housing options suitable for their needs, for example, older people, disabled people, care leavers or veterans and acknowledging the problems young families face.

2. Proposed Way Forward

- 2.1. In conjunction with the recommendations from the report to this committee "Setting Priorities for the new Council", more detailed proposals will emerge for housing and become embedded in the new corporate strategy.
- 2.2. These will in turn be built into the annual delivery plans and monitored by the Council. Regular reports on housing priorities will also be brought back to this committee.

6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	
Legal/Governance	Y	Reporting will follow existing governance procedures.
Financial implications to include reference to value for money	Y	There are no detailed financial implications in this report. They will be reviewed on a case by case basis in the future.
Risks		Will be set out on a case by case basis
Supporting Corporate Strategy		Housing crisis
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact	Y	Should lead to positive outcomes.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality & Diversity		No implications as a result of this report, however any subsequent initiatives will be equality impact assessed.
Safeguarding		No implications as a result of this report, however any subsequent initiatives may focus on vulnerable groups and any impact on safeguarding considered

Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		No implications as a result of this report however any subsequent initiatives will seek to address community safety (ie domestic violence).
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		No implications as a direct result of this report, however the determinants between housing and health are well known, and any subsequent initiatives will consider any positive impact they may have on health (ie independent living, disabled facility grants)
Other implications		None at this stage.

Supporting Information

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None