

Scrutiny Commission for Rural Communities	Agenda Item No. 4
01 SEPTEMBER 2014	Public Report

Report of the Housing and Strategic Planning Manager

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HOUSING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide the Commission with information on the Council's Housing Strategy and Social Housing Allocations Policy to enable the Commission to consider how these may enable young individuals and families to remain living in the rural community.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 For the Commission to consider and scrutinise the information presented in this report, and to make recommendations or suggestions to officers with a view to enabling young individuals and families to remain living in the rural community.

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 3.1 Providing affordable, warm, safe and secure housing is the cornerstone of a strong society, and so the policies and services described within this report are fundamental to the success of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 At the last meeting of the Scrutiny Commission for Rural Communities on 7 July 2014, Members agreed that they would like the following item to be brought to a future meeting:
- To scrutinise the effectiveness of the Council's Housing Strategy, Social Housing Allocations Policy and relevant planning with a view to enabling young families to remain living in the rural community.

5. KEY ISSUES

5.1 The Housing Strategy

- 5.1.1 The Peterborough Housing Strategy sets out a commitment to ensuring the sustainability of rural communities. At the time when the Housing Strategy was adopted in February 2012, the Council's adopted rural housing strategy had a stated term of 2010-2013. The Housing Strategy refers to this document and specifically to the priority of addressing a lack of affordable housing specifically built and designed to meet the needs of local households (especially the needs of young families).

In order to meet this priority of the Rural Housing Strategy and work towards securing the future sustainability of village communities in Peterborough, the Council had established a Rural Housing Delivery Partnership in 2010. The partnership consisted of Cambridgeshire ACRE (an enabling organisation that works with rural communities to help address local issues), two Housing Associations and the Council itself.

- 5.1. The Housing Strategy states that:
2 *'The Council will maintain membership of the Rural Housing Delivery Partnership until 2013 when a review will be conducted of the Peterborough Rural Housing Strategy. The Rural Housing Delivery Partnership will aim to visit every parish across Peterborough by the end of 2011/12.'*

From April 2012 the Peterborough partnership amalgamated with the Cambridgeshire Rural Housing Partnership to benefit from access to a wider partnership that could provide a greater level of experience and resources through its more extensive membership. The Cambridgeshire partnership which is also coordinated by Cambridgeshire Acre now consists of 11 Housing Association partners and 5 local authority partners. The partnership has two main objectives: to work with willing parish councils to identify the level and type of housing need, and to identify opportunities to develop affordable rural housing on 'exception sites'.

- 5.1. All Peterborough rural Parish Councils have been contacted by Cambridgeshire ACRE on behalf
3 of the Rural Housing Partnership and presentations have been delivered to those Parish Councils that wished to receive more detailed information on developing a rural exception site. Ongoing liaison will continue with those Parish Councils who have expressed some level of interest in learning more about the exception sites and where provision of a rural exception site would be sustainable based on community size and facilities.

- 5.1. To date, two Parish Councils have taken the next step of commissioning Cambridgeshire ACRE
4 to carry out a housing needs survey to investigate the option of developing a rural exception site in their parishes. A needs survey was completed for Castor Parish Council in March 2013 and for Wansford Parish Council in April 2014.

- 5.1. An 'exception site' is a site that is located adjacent to a village boundary where development
5 would usually be prohibited. However, where there is evidence of unmet housing need, development of solely affordable housing may be granted on such a site. Any housing development permitted must be for the benefit of households local to the development, and must also remain as affordable housing to meet local need in perpetuity. The Council's Planning Policy on exception sites is set out in policy CS8 of the Core Strategy which states:

The council may release a site adjacent to a village envelope for the provision of affordable housing, as an exception to the normal policy of development restraint in the countryside, provided that:

- *The site is otherwise suitable for residential development in the light of all other policies in the development plan; and*
- *A specific local need for affordable housing has been demonstrated, over and above that which could be met through the operation of the affordable housing policy; and*
- *The proposed development would provide affordable housing of a number and type which meets (or contributes towards meeting) the local need.*

- 5.1. At this stage the Rural Housing Strategy has not been refreshed. However, we continue to
6 support and promote the Affordable Rural Housing Partnership to Parish Councils, rural communities and social landlords and an updated strategic rural housing focus will be incorporated within the next update of the Housing Strategy in 2015.

- 5.1. The new draft Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) reports that within the
7 Peterborough Sub Regional Housing Market Area, the urban areas have a higher proportion of households living in rented accommodation – both in the social rented and private rented sector. In smaller rural communities owner occupation dominates accounting for 76% of households, in part reflecting an older population profile. The more rural communities in particular have a lower proportion of social rented properties.

5.1. The SHMA also states that rural communities tend to have higher house prices, and the tenure
8 profile can create problems for younger households in accessing housing which they can afford. Provision of new affordable housing is important in addressing this. Looking at house types, the villages, hamlets and isolated communities tend to have a housing offer which is focused towards detached homes, which account for 58% of the stock. The proportion of flatted and terraced properties, which are generally more associated with entry level housing, is more limited. The policy implications of this mean that it can be difficult for younger households, particularly those on lower earnings, to access suitable properties which they can afford, emphasising the need for affordable housing provision.

5.2 Social Housing Allocations

5.2. In the last year the Housing Needs service has undertaken a comprehensive review of the
1 Peterborough Housing Register after significant changes were made to the Peterborough Housing Allocations Policy. These changes were brought about by a change in legislation following the introduction of the Localism Act 2011. This change gave local authorities the power to set their own qualifying criteria to determine who could join the housing register. This was important for Peterborough as for years the number of applicants on the housing register continued to grow.

5.2. The Housing Needs service made a number of recommendations and after a period of
2 consultation it was agreed to make the following changes to the allocations policy:

- i. Setting the entry criteria to the housing register to allow only those in the most urgent housing need to join. This includes homeless households, those who are threatened with homelessness, those living in insanitary or unsatisfactory housing conditions, those who need to move for social/welfare reasons or where failure to assist in moving will cause particular hardship
- ii. Only accepting applications from those who have a local connection with Peterborough by having lived in the area for 6 of the last 12 months or 3 of the last 5 years, those who are working in the city, or those who need to move to the area for special reasons
- iii. Excluding applicants who own suitable accommodation or those who have sufficient financial resources to secure suitable accommodation by other means from joining the housing register (this does not apply to those over 55 and eligible for sheltered accommodation)
- iv. Excluding applicants who have behaved in an unacceptable manner. This will be determined by the Council or social landlord being satisfied that the applicant or a member of their household has previously been guilty of unacceptable behaviour which would make them unsuitable to be a tenant, or the applicant or member of the household has been served with an injunction by the Council or their landlord to stop them behaving in a way which causes nuisance or annoyance to others, or the applicant or a member of the household has current tenancy arrears in excess of 8 weeks rent, or the applicant or a member of the household has any outstanding former tenant arrears.

Additionally, the bedrooms standards policy that has previously been more generous was changed and brought in line with the criteria that is applied to housing benefit claims from April 2013.

5.2. In order to support the social landlords in managing the issue of the removal of the spare room
3 subsidy the allocation policy also made provision to give band 1 priority to those who were assessed as under occupying their social housing tenancy. This has been relatively successful, but the continued demand for 1 and 2 bedroom properties has meant that many households are still unable to move into smaller accommodation.

5.2. In addition to the above changes we also included a number of additional preference categories,

- 4 which gave increased priority for those who had a long standing local connection with the city (through 5 years continuous residence), those making an economic contribution to the city through employment or voluntary work in the area, and ex-servicemen and women who have been discharged from service in the last 5 years.
- 5.2. The result of the review has been a significant reduction in the number of applications on the
5 housing register from 9703 in January 2013 to 2688 at the end of June 2014. Most of the applications which were removed from the housing register were from applicants who were considered to be adequately housed in their current accommodation setting and were therefore not in housing need. The remaining applicants who were removed from the housing register were removed as they had not been participating in the choice based lettings scheme. They had not bid for suitable properties in at least the last 12 months and, further to us writing to them advising them that they would be removed from the register, still did not make contact with us or bid.
- 5.2. In rural areas, demand for social housing from those assessed in housing need and therefore
6 eligible for the housing register is relatively low. Of the 2688 live applications on the housing register there are 97 applicants who are currently living in one of the villages in greater Peterborough. Additionally, of the 97 applicants, almost 66% have a 1-bedroom need, for which there is typically a shortage of supply in rural areas.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 This report sets out the policy and procedural context relating to housing in rural communities. There are therefore no implications.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Not applicable.

8. NEXT STEPS

- 8.1 The next steps relating to this report are dependent upon the suggestions or recommendations made by the Commission.

9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 9.1 The Peterborough Housing Strategy 2011 to 2015 –
http://www.peterborough.gov.uk/housing/housing_strategy_team/peterborough_housing_strategy.aspx

The Peterborough Rural Housing Strategy 2010 to 2013 -
<http://www.peterborough.gov.uk/pdf/Housing-PeterboroughRuralHousingStrategy2010-13.pdf>

The Peterborough Core Strategy Adopted February 2011 –
<http://www.peterborough.gov.uk/pdf/Plan-policy-ldf-cs-adoptedCS.pdf>

The Peterborough Sub-Regional Strategic Housing Market Assessment (draft) June 2014

The Peterborough Housing Allocations Policy Adopted April 2013

10. APPENDICES

- 10.1 None