

Housing & Community Safety Advisory Committee

11 February 2015

Portfolio Holders Report

Housing Strategy/Policy and Housing needs

Pat Smith, Liz Crockford and I met with Civil Servant, Andrew Dack (plus others from DCLG), about rural designation order extensions in some of our villages that want them on 9 October. Housing Policy and Planning Policy are working together to see how we can move this forward and to examine alternative routes. A recent letter received from DCLG indicates they should make a decision hopefully before the election.

Community Safety

Attended the LGA Councils' role in tackling female genital mutilation (FGM) conference in London on Tuesday 14 October.

Met Kelly Boyd, the Kent & Medway Youth Police & Crime Commissioner, on Monday 20 October to discuss her role and the role of the Sevenoaks Community Safety Partnership.

Met with Ann Barnes (Kent & Medway PCC) on 14 January.

Attended the SDC Substance Misuse Conference on Wednesday 19 November and chaired the Domestic abuse conference on Friday 28 November. Also attended the Legal Highs conference on 13 January.

Licensing

Met with our West Kent licensing partners to examine closer, more cost effective partnership working on Wednesday 22 October with Claire Perry. Joined with our other two Licensing Partners: Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone Borough Council's to celebrate 5 years of a successful partnership.

Changes to the Government's response on planning obligations and the implications on SDC's affordable housing.

These changes will have the biggest impact on the Housing & Community Safety Committee's role since the committee first came into being. Regardless of whether this committee decides to recommend to cabinet that this council lobbies central government about the impact that these changes will have on the district or not; I thought it was important to update the committee on the sorts of actions we can take to mitigate their consequences.

- **Rural exception sites:** There are a number of villages that have expressed an interest in rural exception sites that have the advantage of keeping the new dwellings affordable in perpetuity. To keep working with local communities where they are wanted, and to keep working with DCLG on extending the rural exception orders.

- **Shared Under Occupation Officer with West Kent HA:** We fund 50% of this Officer with WKHA .He has successfully freed up several under occupied social housing properties and we should do our best to ensure that we keep funding this position from other sources.
- **To promote and make best use of national schemes** such as ‘Starter Homes’ and ‘Help to buy’
- **DIYSO** due to DIYSO’s success and growing national profile to look for other sources of funding for a future DIYSO 3 which includes negotiating with the HCA.
- **Maximising use of all suitable land** – To examine all SDC owned land, and land owned by partner organisations such as Housing Associations to see if we can pool land or develop small brown field sites such as garages.
- **Empty Homes** – to continue to successfully use ‘No use empty’ funding from KCC (maximum £25,000 per property and is a free loan) to turn around empty homes in the district
- **Cross subsidy models** – to seriously examine cross subsidy models when they are suitable
- **Further develop housing policy** to maximise every property in the district. Moving HERO into the private landlord sector. To make the 7,000 social homes in the district work hard to provide for our housing need .
- **Maximising rural schemes** and working successfully with the rural enabler
- **Joint schemes with other local authorities** .We currently have an enhanced supported scheme for older people with DBC and this frees up vacancies at Hollybush and Whiteoak schemes
- **Sheltered schemes and self builds** – sustainable, quick and affordable.

Swanley Housing Needs Survey – October 2014

Swanley as a town is partially disconnected from the rest of the district in terms of public transport and residents of Swanley are more aligned to Dartford than the rest of Sevenoaks. Swanley also has the highest density of social housing than anywhere else in the district – so it is vital that we capture the housing need here in order to influence housing policy moving forward.

Achieving the right housing strategy in Swanley could have a major impact in regenerating the town.

Due to Swanley’s uniqueness it was important to conduct a housing needs survey that will form a major plank of the new Housing Strategy that is currently being worked on. We hope to conduct similar surveys for the District’s other two towns: Sevenoaks and Edenbridge. The survey was conducted using a Kent-wide template.

Alongside other needs, the needs of older people were identified in the survey and this has led to talks between SDC and Moat about a potential dementia friendly housing scheme in the town. Other practical steps will follow from the results of the survey.

Air quality – update

Defra are considering removing some of the air quality reporting burdens on local authorities – possibly in response to the 2% of local authorities (including Sevenoaks) that wanted this burden given to an authority that could actually positively change things.

If these changes were to come into effect, SDC could (although this is not certain) save some further money on consultancy fees as we would only need to submit one single annual report rather than the extra five that we have to produce at the moment.

SDC will still have a statutory requirement to review air quality, and where a pollutant is in exceedance – declare an AQMA and prepare an action plan setting out measures to address the problem.