

## RURAL HOUSING WORK PROGRAMME

Housing and Health Advisory Committee - 19 March 2020

Report of Chief Officer People & Places

Status For Information

Also considered by Cabinet - 16 April 2020

Key Decision No

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**This report supports the Key Aim of:** the District Council's Housing Strategy (2017), Community Plan Priorities (2019-2022) and emerging Local Plan.

**Portfolio Holder** Cllr. Robert Piper

**Contact Officer** Gavin Missons, Ext. 7332

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### **Recommendation to the Housing and Health Advisory Committee:**

- 1) That Members note the draft priority matrix (Appendix A) which will be used to develop and maintain a timetabled programme of rural housing needs surveys in the future; and
- 2) Members recommend that Officers be given delegated powers to populate the template in order to create a working schedule of future surveys and to update as and when necessary.

### **Recommendation to Cabinet:**

- 1) That Members note the draft priority matrix (Appendix A) which will be used to develop and maintain a timetabled programme of rural housing needs surveys in the future; and
- 2) Members give delegated powers to Officers to populate the template in order to create a working schedule of future surveys and to update as and when necessary.

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**Reason for recommendation:** To support the delivery of the District Council's Housing Strategy (2017) whilst also better supporting equality of opportunity.

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### **Introduction and background**

- 1 Following the transfer of its social housing stock to *West Kent Housing Association* (WKHA) back in 1989, the District Council has worked to enable

the delivery of affordable housing in its role as strategic housing authority. This has been carried out in partnership with several external housing providers and, more recently, through *Quercus Housing*.

- 2 Key to the District Council's enabling role is the gathering together of a wide-range of evidence in order to best determine future housing requirements and this is all brought together from a number of sources, e.g. Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA); Local Housing Needs Study (LHNS); bespoke parish-level rural housing needs surveys; and live data from the new in-house *Sevenoaks District Housing Register (SDHR)*.
- 3 When considering the provision of rural housing, independent and bespoke rural housing needs surveys are commissioned by the District Council and undertaken by *Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK)*. This evidence-based approach is essential to pursue such a project and back up any subsequent planning application under Core Strategy Policy SP4 (and emerging Local Plan Policy H3).
- 4 In the past, the District Council worked on a typically ad hoc basis when undertaking rural housing needs surveys and was very much lead by those parish councils generally in support of the idea. Although this approach worked relatively well, some parishes did not engage and with those in housing need not given similar support and opportunities to others elsewhere in the District.

### **Existing and emerging policy**

- 5 In response to the above, the District Council's Housing Strategy (2017) committed it to review its future approach to the provision of affordable rural housing to best meet local housing needs across the whole District (Priority 1.15, p18). This objective was introduced to follow good practice elsewhere and bring the District Council in line with more formal programmes operated in other areas.
- 6 Further to the above, the District Council's Draft Local Plan subsequently included the following paragraph: '*To understand the level of need for rural exceptions housing, all parishes will undergo a five-year rolling programme of rural housing needs surveys*' (Para. 2.28, p45).
- 7 It should be noted that the District Council did not receive any objections to the proposal in either of the related consultation and approval processes and nor at any time during the Local Plan hearings subsequently held by the Government Inspector during October 2019.

- 8 To further support this change in approach, a formal programme would directly contribute to outcomes included in the District Council's Community Plan Priorities (2019-2022) and with particular relevance to the theme covering 'Sustainable Economy' (Priorities 2 and 3, p30-31).

### **Current situation**

- 9 In preparation for this change in approach, it was agreed to place the commissioning of any rural housing needs surveys on hold and until such time as a draft priority matrix was adopted. In doing so, this has also helped the District Council to better manage the nine currently active rural exceptions housing projects and which is, by far, the most schemes than at any time previously.
- 10 Work on a new priority matrix is now complete and this will be the system used to develop a new schedule of rural housing needs surveys (Appendix A).

### **Next steps**

- 11 A timetabled programme of surveys will be created and the results shared with all interested parties as well as being published on the District Council's website.
- 12 Under the rolling programme, the District's parishes which are eligible to develop rural exceptions housing will all then be surveyed in future years. The five parishes not eligible for rural exceptions housing will still be surveyed, however, but with a view to more general housing development and the subsequent use of sustainable lettings plans.

### **Interim arrangements**

- 13 It should be noted that this change in approach will not prevent any parish councils, community groups and/or individuals from pursuing their own projects outside of the new programme and independent of the District Council, should they wish to do so.
- 14 For example, parish councils, groups and/or individuals wishing to take forward a project in the interim would have the option to form a Community Land Trust (CLT) in order to develop a community-lead housing scheme. If this route were to be taken, external funding could be applied for to help set up a CLT and potentially contribute to certain elements of a project.

- 15 For others wishing to pursue a project outside of a CLT and with a view to submitting a planning application, they would have the additional option to fund a rural housing needs survey themselves (as is done by many land owners and/or developers).

### **Other Options Considered and/or Rejected**

- To continue with the current approach of ad hoc surveys
- 16 If the District Council were to continue with the ad hoc approach, it would be at odds with emerging Local Plan policy. It would also not be fulfilling its obligations to all of its communities and would run the risk of being challenged by those not assessed and/or assisted through the rural housing work programme (either historically and/or in the future).

### **Key Implications**

#### Financial

With limited financial resources, a programmed approach would ensure that the District Council invested its time/funds across all parishes as opposed to disproportionately targeting and/or investing in particular areas. To note - there would be no financial impact on District Council budgets.

#### Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

As per paragraph 15 - if the District Council were to continue with the current ad hoc approach, it would not be fulfilling its obligations to all of its rural communities and would run the risk of being challenged by those not assessed and/or assisted through the rural housing work programme (either historically and/or in the future).

#### Equality Assessment

The proposed system would ensure that rural communities were given equal opportunities as opposed to, as is currently the case, some areas being unreasonably favoured over others. This approach would result in fully positive impacts, therefore.

#### Community Impact and Outcomes

The proposed system would provide support to all relevant parishes equally.

#### Resource (non financial)

Being a disproportionately time-consuming work programme, the proposed system would ensure that all relevant parishes were better supported.

## **Appendices Appendix A - Priority matrix**

### **Background papers**

#### **1) Housing Strategy (2017)**

[https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/downloads/file/1028/housing\\_strategy\\_2017](https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/downloads/file/1028/housing_strategy_2017)

#### **2) Draft Local Plan (2019)**

<https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/localplanexamination>

#### **3) Community Plan Priorities (2019-2022)**

[https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/site\\_search/results/?q=Community+Plan+Priorities+%282019-2022%29.++&jadu-search-type=1](https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/site_search/results/?q=Community+Plan+Priorities+%282019-2022%29.++&jadu-search-type=1)

#### **4) Core Strategy**

[https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/info/20069129/current\\_local\\_plan/249/core\\_strategy\\_development\\_plan](https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/info/20069129/current_local_plan/249/core_strategy_development_plan)

#### **5) Housing Act 1996**

<http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=2ahUKEwip907YnJ7IAhUVEcAKHaURAYoQFjAC08-01%3Fwrap%3Dtrue%26timeline%3Dtrue&usg=AOvVaw3aWYGBWTmdaUMDltofqDOe>

**Sarah Robson**

**Chief Officer Places & People**