

DRAFT ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR NEW AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT PROVIDERS

Cabinet - 20 September 2022

Report of: Chief Officer People & Places

Status: For Consideration

Also considered by:

- Housing & Health Advisory Committee - 20 September 2022

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: A report establishing eligibility criteria for new affordable housing development providers wishing to deliver homes in the District.

This report supports the Key Aim of: the Sevenoaks District Housing Strategy 2022/2027

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Kevin Maskell

Contact Officer: Sharon Donald, Housing Strategy Manager, Ext. 7131

Recommendation to Housing & Health Advisory Committee:

To consider the draft eligibility criteria for new affordable housing development providers.

Recommendation to Cabinet:

To approve the draft eligibility criteria for new affordable housing development providers, subject to any required amendment.

Reason for recommendation: Approved eligibility criteria gives greater certainty to the District Council that new affordable housing will be delivered by organizations who share our ambitions and ways of working. It will also provide clarity to planning applicants on developments where new affordable housing is triggered by local plan policy.

Introduction and Background

1. The District works with a number of long-standing affordable housing development partners to enable and deliver new affordable housing in the District. These include West Kent Housing Association and English Rural Housing Association.
2. Over the years, we have built a solid and fruitful relationship with our partners. Owing to planning constraints, which restrict new development, and the District Council's commitment to protect the Green Belt, the Housing Register faces huge pressures. This means it is critical we continue to build on our partnerships to maximise new affordable housing delivery.
3. The Council's Housing Strategy 2022/2027 has an objective to develop Sevenoaks District's housing offer, including delivering new affordable homes. Developing strategic partnerships with new/additional affordable housing development providers will help us to achieve this objective. An associated action point is included in Year 1 of the draft Housing Strategy Action Plan.
4. It is important to ensure any prospective provider shares the District Council's strategic vision and is willing to contribute to its achievement. Of equal importance is that the provider is given clarity as to what we will expect from them and they are encouraged to want to come and develop within our District. The attractiveness of the District will be helped by us demonstrating we are forward thinking and willing to be creative and flexible in our approach.
5. In consultation with colleagues from Planning, Economic Development and Corporate Policy, as well as our long-standing affordable housing development partners, an eligibility criteria has been drawn up for prospective providers. The criteria is considered to be balanced and ambitious. It will provide the certainty mentioned above and demonstrate to prospective partners our desire to do business with like-minded organizations. It is anticipated the existence of clear eligibility criteria will encourage new providers to come forward, with the confidence to work alongside us.
6. Subject to approval of the eligibility criteria, it is proposed the Housing Strategy Manager will be the lead assessor of prospective providers, in consultation with relevant colleagues and with final approval by the Head of Housing.
7. If a provider is assessed as meeting the criteria, they may, upon request, be added to our list of preferred affordable housing development partners.

8. If a planning applicant wishes to work with a provider who is not a preferred affordable housing development partner of the District Council, our approval of their proposed provider is required (as per the terms of the template S106 agreement). It is proposed our approval will be dependent upon the provider meeting those elements of the eligibility criteria that are appropriate to the development under consideration. The eligibility criteria will be published on the District Council's website and will provide clarity to planning applicants and their prospective delivery partners. It will also give greater certainty to the District Council that new affordable housing will be delivered by organizations who share our ambitions and ways of working.
9. In summary, the draft eligibility criteria requires prospective providers to assist the District Council in meeting its statutory housing functions by embracing the terms of the Sevenoaks District Housing Register Allocations Schemes 2022-2027 (and any successor document). This means their delivering genuinely affordable housing for Housing Register applicants, i.e. Social Rented Housing or Affordable Rented Housing, where rents (and service charges) are capped at or below Local Housing Allowance levels. New homes will be secured for Housing Register applicants through a requirement for the provider to enter into a nominations agreement with the District Council, providing 100% of first lettings and 75% of all re-lets during any 12 month period.

Other options Considered and/or rejected

None.

Key Implications

Financial

None.

Resource (non financial)

To be managed within existing staff resources.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

The District Council does not have published criteria in place, setting out how new affordable housing development providers will be assessed and approved. It is considered that adoption of eligibility criteria will reduce the risk of legal challenge.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district, or supporting the resilience of the natural environment.

Conclusions

Adopted eligibility criteria will give greater certainty to the District Council that new affordable housing will be delivered by organizations who share our ambitions and ways of working. It will also provide clarity to planning applicants on developments where new affordable housing is triggered under local planning policy, thereby reducing the likelihood of legal challenge.

Appendices

Appendix A - Eligibility criteria for new affordable housing development providers in Sevenoaks District

Sarah Robson

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer - People & Places