

HOUSING TASK GROUP UPDATE

Executive Summary

Councillor Ian Johnson, Chairman of the Housing Task Group, provided an update from the last meeting of the Task Group that was held on 7 July 2020:

“On 7 July 2020 the task group held its first meeting since November, having cancelled a meeting in March due to the pandemic.

The group received an update on the arrangements made and the activities undertaken by the Housing Service in light of the pandemic. This had been a challenging time for the service, with government directions on the provision of accommodation for rough sleepers co-inciding with the closure of most hotels in the UK. Working with York Road Project the Council secured space at Woking Hotel and Travelodge, along with the conversion of the HG Wells centre with bedroom pods. At the time of the meeting there were 33 rough sleepers in these spaces.

In addition, there was a need to house a significant increase of people presenting as homeless due to sofa surfers having to leave their accommodation or relationship breakdowns. In conjunction with the York Road Project, work was ongoing to find sustainable housing and support pathways to reduce dependency on hotels and the key to this was securing long term affordable housing across the borough.

A paper noting the current housing data and needs was shared with the task group ahead of a discussion by the Overview and Scrutiny committee to review aspects of housing. The data showed there were currently 1,110 applicants on the housing register, of which 618 were in band D (i.e. less urgent need) which would involve a wait of over 10 years, and of which 41% were in need of 1 bed and 34% seeking 2 bed accommodation. Families requiring larger housing have a longer wait than those requiring smaller units. At the end of May 187 households were in some form of emergency accommodation. Further data would be added to the paper prior to the Overview and Scrutiny meeting and it was recognised that we would need to avoid duplication of work between it and the task group. There was a discussion concerning a housing needs survey which would give a broader picture across all housing sectors not simply the housing register. Given the amount of work currently taking place this wasn't considered to be an urgent priority but would be helpful in due course.

Housing policies were being updated and the next focus would be on the Housing Strategy which was last produced in 2011, with a view to approval in 2021. The task group receives a regular update of affordable housing in the pipeline which provides an opportunity to share outstanding issues and progress.

The annual report of New Vision Homes showed they had clearly gone to great lengths to support tenants despite changes in management and a high turnover of staff. Overall performance had been maintained, including estate inspections and property repairs. There had been calls to vulnerable tenants which had generated excellent feedback and tenant engagement continued. The sustainment of tenancies remains a key objective. NVH noted the significant collaborative and flexible work with WBC especially with the challenges faced in recent months.

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The task group recognised the enormous contribution by the housing team to support residents at these most difficult of times.”

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE That the update be noted

Background Papers: None.

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