

South Lakeland DC Housing Advisory Group

Minutes to Meeting Held 10.00 a.m., Friday 14 November 2014

Georgian Room, Kendal Town Hall

1. Welcome & Apologies

Present: Cllr Jonathan Brook – Housing Portfolio Holder SLDC (Chair)
Tony Whittaker – SLDC
Dave Pogson – NPS Group
Dan Hudson – SLDC
Simon Anstey - SLDC
Andy Lloyd- CRHT
Julie Jackson - SLDC
Anne-Marie Willmott – Impact HA
Peter Thomas – South Lakes Housing
Cllr Stephen Coleman– SLDC
Anne Hall – SLDC and LDNPA
David Peters – South Lakes CALC
Charles Anderson - SLDC
Alison Kinnon – South Lakes Housing
Richard Hayes – South Lakes Housing
Martyn Nicholson – Russell Armer Homes
Paula Allen – LDNPA
Elsa Brailey – Home Group

Apologies: Graham Hale (Cumbria CC), Greg Denwood (Two Castles),
Mark Shipman (SLDC)

2. Minutes of meeting held on 20/3/14 and matters arising.

The minutes were accepted as a true record and there were no matters arising.

3. Cumbria Choice Review and Skipping – Julie Jackson, SLDC.

JJ presented a report regarding a review of Cumbria Choice undertaken by the Cumbria Choice Partnership in 2014 with particular reference to the issue of 'skipping'. The report had been circulated prior to this meeting and will again be circulated with the minutes. Key findings from the Review found that overall customers and partners were very positive about the scheme offering

significant benefits compared to a non-choice based lettings approach. When the issue of 'skipping' was examined evidence shows that in the majority of cases applicants are skipped over for genuine reasons. However, there are significant risks, particularly to the Council, but also to the Partnership and Registered Providers if applicants are 'skipped' inappropriately. Therefore, Cumbria Choice Board have agreed to carry out quarterly audits of the top 10% of skipped applicants and 25 specific audits based on percentage of lettings per Provider. A Policy Review will be undertaken in 2015 following the general election that may offer further clarity to the bidding process.

Housing Advisory Group supported the local recommendations that SLDC's Housing Options staff monitor applicants on a regular basis to ensure that they are bidding appropriately and to highlight if further support is required. Any cases that are being continuously skipped should be examined with the Registered Provider to ascertain the reason why and whether any issues of eligibility are present. If anti-social behaviour and/or criminal behaviour is suspected then recommendations set out in 4.1 of the report will be put into place. The Principal Housing Strategy Officer will ensure that monitoring reports continue to be provided as per 4.1 and that the Policy Review offers further clarity to the bidding process.

A discussion on tenants downsizing took place. AK advised that downsizing figures are monitored and targeted by Revenues and Benefits. Stephen Coleman asked if figures could be provided on downsizing. JB requested that JJ reported back once recommendations were in place and also on local information from the Housing Options team.

ACTION: JJ to report back next time on progress of recommendations and downsizing transfers.

4. Affordable House Price Review 2014 – Tony Whittaker, SLDC

TW presented statistics on median incomes and median house prices. He recommended that there was insufficient evidence to suggest that changes in the affordable house prices are made. He acknowledged that there has been increases in build costs but affordable house prices have not previously been reduced when build costs have reduced. MN pointed out that build costs have increased significantly including due to changes in building regulations. Speaking as a member of the Cumbria Housebuilders' Group he would like a better understanding and pointed out differences in figures from different sources.

AH asked if there were grounds for allowing a higher affordable price in different areas in the District and AL asked if SLDC could offer funds to offset higher build costs in some areas, quoting the Brigsteer/Helsington scheme. TW advised that it is possible for SLDC to grant fund housing association and

community land trust schemes where financial appraisals can prove evidence that additional funding is needed to make the scheme financially viable.

The issue of bungalows was discussed. TW advised that there is an increased need for bungalows but acknowledged the higher build costs of bungalows. He suggested that it might be appropriate to allow higher affordable prices on sites where bungalows are appropriate. SC queried if the need was for affordable bungalows or market bungalows. EB advised that she felt the demand for affordable rented bungalows was greater but there is demand for both. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment has also indicated a need for bungalows. MN suggested reducing the 35% affordable proportion but TW advised that he prefers the above approach as this maintains the 35% which is very important to Council Members.

ACTION: TW to meet with MN and Chris Garner to discuss the above issues in more detail.

5. Custom and Self Build – Simon Anstey, SLDC

SA updated on SLDC's progress on this issue in light of Government promotion. Eleven authorities are piloting Right to Build where self builders can approach the council for help. SLDC have set up a register of interest and held the recent Green Build conference. Policy approach will be developed with the next phase of the Local Plan.

MN queried the practicalities of self build on allocated sites being developed by private housebuilders and reported the lack of take up of government funding.

6. Affordable Housing Programme 2014-2024

TW had previously circulated the table and confirmed that the figures are on target for production of 1000 rented homes up to 2024.

TW has been assessing if housing associations have the capacity to build this amount. He has also contacted other associations with a small number of homes in South Lakeland and are developing elsewhere would be interested in developing further in this area.

A £400m national loan fund at 1% interest rate has been made available to RPs. SLDC is looking at how it can help. EB commented that HCA not requiring 2015-18 bids to meet sustainable code standards will help.

7. AOB

In view of the Green Build conference, MN suggested that SLDC could look at managing an Allowable Solutions fund. DH confirmed that we will be looking at this.

PA advised about proposals to remove S106 on sites under 10 dwellings. The LDNPA and SLDC have made representations to the Department of Communities and Local Government.

DH reported on the AONB work with Lancaster CC. A housing needs survey has been completed and a call for sites exercise will be done. There will be policies for the AONB within the overall Core Strategy.

8. Date of next meeting

17 March 2014, 10am – Georgian Room, Kendal Town Hall.