



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and Date of Committee	EXECUTIVE – 15 NOVEMBER 2023
Subject	PROACTIVE DELIVERY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING
Wards Affected	ALL
Accountable Member	Councillor Geoff Saul – Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare. Email: <a href="mailto:geoff.saul@westoxon.gov.uk">geoff.saul@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Accountable Officer	Charlie Jackson – Assistant Director, Planning & Sustainability. Email: <a href="mailto:charlie.jackson@publicagroup.uk">charlie.jackson@publicagroup.uk</a>
Report Author	Charlie Jackson – Assistant Director, Planning & Sustainability. Email: <a href="mailto:charlie.jackson@publicagroup.uk">charlie.jackson@publicagroup.uk</a>
Purpose	To outline the Council's aspiration for a more proactive approach to increase the supply of affordable housing within the district, and outline how this can be achieved with the required resources.
Annexes	Annex A – Job Description, Strategic Housing Development & Enabling Manager.
Recommendations	That the Executive Resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Note the suggestions to be explored, in order to increase the supply of affordable homes within the district;</li><li>2. Approve the appointment of a new Strategic Housing Development &amp; Enabling Manager.</li></ol>
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A Good Quality of Life for All</li><li>• Working Together for West Oxfordshire</li></ul>
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Consultation with colleagues, portfolio holders and retained officers.

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Social housing stock has been in steady decline across the county for the past several decades, with former stock being sold off, demolished and not replaced. Shelter report there are 1.4 million fewer households in social housing than in 1980, and 1 million households are currently waiting for social housing. Combined with excessive house prices, making homes unaffordable, this has pushed demand into the private rental sector, where supply has been slow to keep up. The result is above inflationary increases in rents, especially in the south of England and big cities.
- 1.2 West Oxfordshire District Council has identified through its housing register that over 2000 households across the district are in need of affordable housing, and currently aims to deliver 274 new affordable homes every year to 2031 in order to help meet the needs of its residents.
- 1.3 West Oxfordshire is a challenging economical environment for many residents, with house prices in 2021 being on average around 11.4 times higher than average earnings. Furthermore, the council has understood the impact of the changing economical environment upon its residents and wishes to put measures in place to increase the number of truly affordable housing units delivered annually, including the promotion of innovative housing solutions, so that we can reduce the housing waiting list.
- 1.4 West Oxfordshire District Council recognises the national housing crisis and the need to do more to combat the affects within its district. The Council Plan states Priority 2 - Enabling a good quality of life for all will explore the scope for alternative means of delivering the range of homes in the district that meet the diverse needs of our communities, such as investment in tenures and sizes of homes that the market does not currently deliver enough of. And Priority 5 - Working together for West Oxfordshire seeks to invest in the building of homes that meet the diverse housing needs of our residents at all stages of their lives, including for those seeking to downsize or affordable social housing.
- 1.5 Whilst the need has been established and agreed as a priority to address, we now need to consider how the council will address these aspirations.

## 2. CURRENT DELIVERY METHODS

- 2.1 The council currently seeks to deliver affordable housing requirements through a number of mechanisms, including Developer contributions and land led developments and has been successful in achieving the following numbers of affordable housing units over the last 5 years:

Tenure	Affordable Rent		Social Rent		Shared Ownership		Discount Market Sale	First Homes	Total
	Developer contribution	RP land led / grant	Developer contribution	RP land led / grant	Developer contribution	RP land led / grant	Developer contribution	Developer contribution	
2018/19	76	36			61	7			180
2019/20	276	12			123	58			469
2020/21	240				127		7		374

2021/22	164	77			90	47			378
2022/23	146	29		49	70	11		4	309
<b>Totals</b>	<b>902</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>471</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1710</b>

**2.2** Under Section 106 agreement, developers are required to build a portion of affordable housing as part of their planning permission. This can make for a valuable contribution to housing supply and helps to create mixed-tenure communities. However, a survey conducted by Inside Housing showed only 49% of the homes completed by housing associations in 2021-22 were acquired via Section 106, although this percentage is higher in West Oxfordshire. Inside Housing considers that this percentage will continue to reduce meaning alternative methods of affordable housing delivery are required to be found, and more housing associations are exploring land led schemes to deliver affordable housing instead.

### **3. NEXT STEPS**

- 3.1** The council wishes to take a more proactive approach in meeting the affordable housing demands of the district and has identified a number of workstreams to pursue. These include:
- 3.2** Developing key working relationships with organisations to support the council’s ambitions, including already identified partners such as Cottsway, Oxplace and Homes England, in addition to seeking new relationships that can support these aspirations.
- 3.3** Working with partners to identify different models of delivery including building homes on council owned land, acquiring new land, purchasing homes from the open market and reviewing empty homes across the district.
- 3.4** Created a blended approach to housing delivery utilising existing resources including council plans and policies, reviewing strategic site allocations and brownfield site opportunities and exploring alternative options such as rural exception sites and the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders.
- 3.5** Identifying and defining less obvious areas requiring affordable housing, or what could be termed as “hidden needs” within the district, such as the needs of key workers, supported housing and care leaver requirements.
- 3.6** There are no doubt further ideas that can be brought forward to explore, and best practice across the UK can be reviewed and incorporated into these ambitions.
- 3.7** Reporting on progress and outcomes will be required to demonstrate the impact more proactive delivery models have on our communities and so progress reports will return to Executive at appropriate intervals.

### **4. RESOURCING**

- 4.1** West Oxfordshire District Council currently has 1 FTE Strategic Housing & Development Officer working within the Housing Strategy Team. This colleague plays a crucial role in shaping the growth and development of communities within the district to ensure housing needs are met.
- 4.2** The council’s ambition to deliver more affordable homes outside of traditional methods requires additional resource, to enhance and drive the strategic visions for affordable housing

delivery. We require an experienced relationship builder and innovator to seek out new ways of working and explore further routes and models to additional delivery of truly affordable housing. We therefore propose the appointment of a new role, “Strategic Housing Development & Enabling Manager”.

- 4.3 Cotswold District Council shares these ambitions and also wishes to seek out new models for additional delivery. For efficiency it has been agreed that WODC and CDC could share this additional resource in cost and time.
- 4.4 The full job description for this proposed role can be found as an annexe to this paper. As this role is a strategic leader it is proposed that the role will be a L3 or L4 with an approximate salary range of £55-£65,000pa. This will be funding by utilising existing budget and be on a 2 year FTC.
- 4.5 Existing funding will come from the “Project Specialist” role currently vacant within the Strategic Housing team. This post was initially created to focus on priorities and projects around affordable housing delivery within the district, and is therefore fitting that it is utilised to fund this new role.
- 4.6 A 2 year fixed term contract has been proposed as it is not felt this role will be required on an ongoing basis. Once new models and a programme of work has been identified and put into action, we may no longer require this post. Progress should be monitored on a periodic basis to assess.
- 4.7 On Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> October Publica’s shareholder councils announced the decision to return services currently managed by Publica to back within council management. This may have an impact on where this new role will be appointed into and discussions are required with WODC and CDC to understand their preferred option.

## **5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 5.1 An alternative option would be to reduce the current workload of existing colleagues within the Housing Strategy Team, however this would impact on the ability to deliver housing through traditional methods and may risk targets already set for affordable housing delivery.
- 5.2 Another option would be to not take a proactive approach to delivering more affordable housing. This would mean taking a step back from the council’s ambitions as set out within the Council Plan.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 The housing crisis and need for affordable housing continues to grow. Whilst the council is effective in delivery affordable housing through traditional methods, there are alternative options that can be explored to take a proactive approach, meet the needs of the district more specifically, and deliver additional truly affordable housing units for our communities.
- 6.2 In order to achieve this greater capacity and alternative skills are required. A new “Strategic Housing Development and Enabling Manager” role can be appointed using existing budget on a 2 year FTC.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1** This paper outlines the proactive approach and ideas to take forward in order to generate additional affordable housing outside of traditional delivery methods. Those workstreams will need to be appraised and costed at the appropriate time and intervals.
- 7.2** Funding for the new role of Strategic Housing Development & Enabling Manager will be shared between this council and Cotswold District Council. Funding for this role will come from existing budget.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1** No additional legal implications.

## **9. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 9.1** No significant risks identified. There would be some reputational risk if this proactive approach is not adopted or successful in delivering additional affordable housing as set out within the Council Plan.
- 9.2** Some risk that existing funds are used for a new role, but benefits are not realised. This will be mitigated through a robust recruitment process, and support provided to the role by the Strategic Housing team, portfolio holder and Assistant Director for Planning & Sustainability.

## **10. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 10.1** Under equality legislation, the Council has a legal duty to pay 'due regard' to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality in relation to:
- Race
  - Disability
  - Gender, including gender reassignment
  - Age
  - Sexual Orientation
  - Pregnancy and maternity
  - Religion or belief
- 10.2** No detrimental impact on the above groups. This report outlines an approach to explore new ways to deliver more affordable housing, to support balanced and cohesive communities and meet the needs of those requiring affordable housing.
- 10.3** Recruitment for the new role of Strategic Housing Development & Enabling Manager will be done in a fair and transparent manner in accordance with relevant council policies.

## **11. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1** No impact at this stage.

## **12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

(END)