

### Housing Committee – 17 November 2022

#### Questions submitted under Standing Order 30

##### **1. Question from Councillor O'Driscoll**

Residents in housing association blocks across Tandridge have expressed concerns about anti-social behaviour taking place in recent months. What steps can this Council take to compel the housing associations to take action to address these issues?

##### **Response from the Head of Housing:**

As part of the ongoing work being undertaken around anti-social behaviour, a Council wide enforcement policy is due to be written. This work will be led by senior officers from housing, community partnerships, legal and environmental health. This policy will set out how anti-social behaviour will be tackled within the district, regardless of whether it is within Council owned housing stock or not. Consideration is also being given to delegate powers to housing associations within the district, allowing them to use the legal tools to tackle such behaviour in accordance with the anti-social behaviour, crime and policing Act 2014.

If residents within housing association owned properties are unsatisfied with the way in which their landlord is dealing with the anti-social behaviour, a Community Trigger can be instigated via the Council's website. Once a Community Trigger request is deemed to meet the threshold, the Council can call upon both the housing association and other partner agencies to resolve the matter. This is likely to result in the issue being discussed at the Community Harm and Risk Management Meetings held monthly which is attended by partner agencies and housing providers. It is through these forums that housing associations can be held to account.

##### **2. Question from Councillor O'Driscoll**

Vulnerable residents requiring new homes in Tandridge are facing lengthy waits in accommodation that is simply not fit for purpose. I've been contacted by younger families rehoused away from their support networks who are feeling trapped and isolated and by families with several autistic children who are living in one-bedroom flats in Whyteleafe and Caterham. Residents in both of these situations have told me they feel like hope is being sucked away from them as a result of there simply not being enough homes to suit their needs.

While I appreciate the positive steps being taken by this Council to reduce the waiting time for a new home, can this Council take steps to further reduce this?

##### **Response from the Head of Housing:**

The Council's housing allocations scheme sets out how affordable accommodation is allocated within the district. The scheme assigns medical priority to households on the housing register where sufficient supporting medical evidence is provided. This is to help prevent lengthy waiting times for suitable accommodation. However to prevent lengthy waiting times there needs to be a sufficient supply of accommodation.

## Appendix A

Members will therefore be aware that the Council has an ambitious house building programme that aims to deliver new council homes on both council owned land and land purchased on the open market. The programme is focussed on delivering family sized accommodation to reflect the greatest needs on the housing register. There has been a slow down over the last year, partly due to a lack of resources but largely due to the difficulties contractors have had with sourcing materials and labour to maintain their programmes. The situation has been further compounded by the financial collapse of W Stirling which will see the remaining 17 units at Uplands delivered a year later than originally forecast. There is no disguising the fact that the construction industry is experiencing unprecedented difficulties owing to the combined factors of Brexit, Covid and the invasion of Ukraine. To try and combat the slow-down in delivery and to assist with meeting the growing demand on the register, Officers will be proposing an extension of the buy-back programme in the next financial year to allow the open market purchase of a further 10 family sized properties in 2023/24. The emphasis will be on purchasing properties that assist in future scheme delivery such as those with restrictive leases or those that would enable access to developable land beyond.

Sales of new market properties have recently started to fall with the contraction in available mortgages and the cost of living crisis and there are signs of a slow-down in volume house building. This may see the more recent increases in material prices start to level off which will bring some stability back to the sector. The onset of a recession has historically seen housebuilders turn to local authorities and housing associations to buy their surplus stock in return for a quick capital receipt. Officers of the Council and our housing association partners will be monitoring the market closely so that we can capitalise on any opportunities that arise because of a downturn. Naturally, a recession will have other negative impacts on SMEs so there will still be risks associated with the building programme.

The Council also has a housing enabling function and Officers continue to be involved in pre application discussions where there is an obligation to provide affordable housing so that the proposed mix best meets the identified needs of the district. Financial viability agreements are robustly defended and affordable units are secured by way of a S106 obligation with early delivery of the units where possible.

In addition to the work being undertaken by the development team, initiatives such as the incentive scheme and assisted purchase scheme are in operation to incentivise residents to downsize or move from family sized accommodation where it is no longer required, in turn freeing up high demand accommodation. Work with private sector landlords continues through our private sector liaison officer which will be supported by the development of an empty homes strategy in 2023/24.

### **Supplementary Question from Councillor O'Driscoll:**

Most of the shortage of housing in my experience has been found in north of District in Woldingham, Caterham and Whyteleafe. You mentioned the market purchase of family sized properties. Would these properties be located where the demand is greatest?

## **Appendix A**

### **Response from the Housing Development Specialist:**

The previous buyback programme will see us shortly complete on the tenth and final purchase. Almost all, if not all, are in Caterham and Whyteleafe and that's largely due to the fact that there are family sized properties in flatted schemes and where we already own the freehold it is much easier for us to buyback those properties from the leaseholder at a competitive price. I foresee the next 10 properties being in the north of the District, maybe some further south but values are higher further south for family sized accommodation which makes it difficult for us to put in a competitive offer.