

## PLACE SELECT COMMITTEE

A meeting of Place Select Committee was held on Monday 15 July 2024.

**Present:** Cllr Richard Eglington (Chair), Cllr Jim Beall (Vice-Chair), Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Stefan Houghton, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, Cllr Hilary Vickers and Cllr Sylvia Walmsley.

**Officers:** Jane Edmends, Alan Glew, Carol Bruce (AH&W), and Michelle Gunn (CS).

**Also in attendance:** Sarah Fawcett (North Star Housing Group), Clare Harrigan (Beyond Housing), David Ripley, Joy Whinnerah (Thirteen)

**Apologies:** Cllr Sufi Mubeen.

### **PLA/18/24 Evacuation Procedure**

The Committee noted the evacuation and housekeeping procedure.

### **PLA/19/24 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **PLA/20/24 Minutes**

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **PLA/21/24 Scrutiny Review of Affordable Housing**

At the second evidence-gathering session for the Committee's review of Affordable Housing the Committee received headline data for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Allocations Service which included:

- A breakdown of all registered providers operating through Tees Valley Home Finder and the percentage of nominations they offered through this system. It was noted that this percentage was the minimum and it was often higher.
- The number of properties advertised in 2023-24 (610) and the number of properties advertised in quarter 1 of 2024-25 (185).
- The number of live applications for 2023-24 (2507) and quarter 1 of 2024-25 (3103), and a breakdown of the applications by bands and bedroom need.
- A breakdown of properties allocated by band in 2023-24, which showed that the largest percentage (81.7%) were allocated to band 1 to assist in the reduction of homelessness and moving households out of Local Authority funded temporary accommodation.

It was questioned whether there were any 'hard to let' properties, and the Committee were informed that the Nominations and Letting team received hundreds of bids on some properties, and up to 75 bids on low demand properties. The team received details of the properties that were becoming available for each Registered Provider and could request that certain properties were allocated through Tees Valley Home Finder if they were aware that there was a need for it.

Following this information, the focus for the meeting moved to evidence from three registered housing providers, Beyond Housing, North Star, and Thirteen. They had been invited to present their investment plans and what influenced their ability to build new affordable housing in Stockton-on-Tees Borough.

The first presentation received was from the Director of Development of Beyond Housing, which included:

- An introduction to Beyond Housing
- A SWOT analysis of development and sales
- Fire safety and energy efficiency data
- Data on repairs, including mould and damp
- Development programme details

The main issues highlighted and discussed were as follows:

- Beyond Housing owned 400 homes in SBC area (including homes in development).
- The Affordable Housing Programme (Homes England grant funding) expiry at March 2026 was noted to be limiting progression of new home development already.
- Fire safety and energy efficiency was discussed, and it was noted that significant work and investment went into ensuring properties met fire safety regulations. They had taken a decision to demolish a high rise building and rebuild due to cost effectiveness of this.
- It was noted that there was a backlog of repairs following covid, and that the repairs required had remained at this level. This was attributed to several causes including higher expectations from tenants and the age of the housing stock.
- Registered Providers had a legal duty to carry out gas checks and therefore held legal powers to enter properties. While carrying out gas checks, they would carry out other home safety checks, so did not need to enter the property numerous times.
- The stalled developments in the borough were discussed. There had been a delay on the Brooklime site due to issues with drainage and nutrient neutrality. Planning was due to expire on the site, which Beyond Housing owned, therefore a decision was due at their board regarding funding the development. Options were being considered for completing the Princeton site, as the provider of these modular homes went into receivership. It was hoped that Beyond Housing would gain control of the site by the end of the financial year.

- It was questioned whether Beyond Housing were working with the Northern Power Grid to meet the EPC rating requirements and the Committee was informed that they were.

The Committee then received a presentation from the Head of Development of North Star, including:

- An introduction to North Star
- Data on housing investment in the last 18 month
- Information regarding repairs, financial viability of properties, length of tenancy, new build target, and other considerations

The main issues highlighted and discussed were as follows:

- Possible reasons for tenants staying in properties for longer were discussed, including the cost of moving, the cost and/or availability of private rented properties, and the current private housing market. It was noted that North Star were happy for tenants to stay in the properties as long as they wanted to.
- Discussion took place regarding the location of affordable housing in private developments and ensuring that these were pepper potted throughout the developments, not grouped in the least desirable area of the site. They were also concerned that 106 properties offered by major developers should be of good quality and space standards and met needs e.g. more bungalows.
- A previous regeneration scheme was raised, whereby a street of houses was redeveloped by the Registered Provider. North Star noted that they were currently carrying out a similar project on a smaller scale in Thornaby. However, it was stated that it would be very expensive to carry out a redevelopment of a full street of houses and it would need wider regeneration activity and resources. It would be more economical to demolish existing housing, clear, and build new housing to meet current standards.

The final presentation was from the Executive Director of Development and Partnerships and the Executive Director of Customer Service of Thirteen, which included:

- An introduction to Thirteen
- Thirteens' strategy
- Constraints and challenges, including information on repairs and length of tenancies
- Pipeline challenges and opportunities
- Stockton-on-Tees development update – schemes on site, schemes in pipeline, and schemes recently completed

The main issues highlighted and discussed were as follows:

- It was noted that the majority of Thirteen properties in SBC, approximately 9,000, were social rent properties, with approximately 1,000 affordable rent properties.
- 100% of new build properties were allocated in accordance with the Tees Valley Common Allocation Policy.

- Thirteen noted that they preferred to partner with private developers for 106 arrangements at the earliest stage, so they had the opportunity to determine the properties that they received. It was questioned why the opportunities for a development in Wynyard did not go ahead and was informed that the tenure, size, and location (clustering) of the properties offered by the developer did not meet local housing needs.
- Discussion took place regarding energy efficiency and installation of PV solar panels. It was noted that battery storage for panels was challenging and that they focussed on other methods for increasing energy efficiency of housing e.g. insulation.
- It was noted that those customers assessed as lower priority bandings for housing were likely to wait longer for housing than someone assessed as high need.
- Infill sites were raised, and it was stated that these sites required extra work to make them viable for small & medium sized enterprises whilst they remained unattractive for bigger developers. It was suggested that packaging multiple smaller sites to deliver higher quantum numbers was both attractive to potential developers and more viable and worthy of further investigation by SBC.
- Right to Buy and shared ownership schemes were discussed. It was noted that while people were still looking to purchase homes under RTB the numbers were falling. With regards to shared ownership, Homes England were pushing all providers to deliver more low cost home ownership homes and Thirteen were committed to do so as a strategic partner. The interest in low cost home ownership remains vibrant.

Drawing the session to a close, the Committee Chair thanked all SBC officers and Registered Providers representatives for their contributions.

AGREED that information be noted.

**PLA/22/24 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2024-2025**

Consideration was given to the Work Programme.

The next meeting would be held on Monday 9 September 2024.

AGREED that the work Programme be noted.