



St Edmundsbury  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# D285

## Cabinet 13 February 2013

### Recommendations from the Rural Area Working Party: 24 January 2013 (Feb13/15)

**Cabinet Members:**  
Cllr John Griffiths  
Cllr Anne Gower

**Chairman of the Working Party:**  
Cllr Jim Thorndyke

#### 1. Evidencing Rural Housing Need (Report D257)

**RECOMMENDED:**

*That the Borough Council stops carrying out housing needs surveys and evidences future housing schemes in the following way:*

- (a) carry out Borough-wide assessment of rural housing, focusing on key service centres, service centres and infill villages; this assessment to be undertaken using the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, Housing Register and other data with an objective of completing this work within 3 months and updating annually thereafter;*
- (b) this assessment would allow the Borough Council to map localities showing the greatest housing need, thus providing a strategic overview which can then be used to determine future development priorities and allow the Council to be responsive to future opportunities, and would be of particular use once the situation regarding funding post-March 2015 becomes clearer;*
- (c) the assessment to provide a mandate to engage with Parish Councils and work with local communities to shape solutions and then link in with the draft Rural Vision 2031 and the work currently being developed around the Rural Profiling Project; and*
- (d) in the event of approaches by individual parishes who are concerned about housing need in their locality, based on the information from the assessment, the Council would be in a better position to advise accordingly and work with them on potential solutions.*

Report D257 was considered. Its purpose was to propose changes to the current method of evidencing housing need in rural areas to support development of rural exception schemes. These changes are closely linked with the Rural Profiling Project.

Traditionally, in order to evidence housing need, a housing need survey of the parish has been carried out. Once the need has been established a Registered Provider (Housing Association) has been selected to take the development forward. This is then followed by work to identify a suitable site. The scheme is then dependent on the Registered Provider financing the scheme with additional funding support from the Homes and Communities Agency.

The way affordable housing is funded has changed, the Government has allowed Registered Providers to charge rents of up to 80% market rent so that they can borrow more private finance, and in return the level of financial support has been reduced by approximately £40,000 per home. Registered Providers are contracted with the Homes and Communities Agency to deliver an agreed number of homes by March 2015. There is no certainty of funding beyond then and further reductions in grant levels are being planned for. In order to maximise the number of affordable homes built in the Borough, the Council must assist Registered Providers to move quickly to deliver homes before 2015 where possible, but also be cautious about raising expectations of delivery in villages after then until the future direction is more certain. It will be important for the Council to work with its partners to review how affordable housing is funded in rural areas in future and this will be the subject of a separate report to the Working Party.

The current process of carrying out a housing needs survey is initiated usually by the Parish Council and can typically take 6 months to complete. The time taken from survey results to bringing forward a planning application can mean that the data is too old to provide meaningful evidence. The data received back is only an indication of housing need in so far as all households are invited to complete the survey but return rates are typically between 30% and 40%. A further drawback with a survey is that whilst it identifies housing need it does not show best solutions, for example, it may be better to provide smaller homes for people to downsize into rather than build more family homes.

The Borough Council, working in partnership with the Cambridge Housing Sub-Region, jointly funds a Strategic Housing Market Assessment. This follows Government guidance on assessing housing need and is accepted by planning authorities and developers as robust evidence of housing need. The Market Assessment has the additional benefit of having a rolling programme of updates. The limitation is that the data is at a Borough level.

The Housing Register provides further more localised evidence. From this officers can identify the number of applicants who have indicated particular villages as their preference as well as their housing need. The demand for properties can also be reviewed by showing the number of bids per property type. Data from the Housing Register can be reported

on quickly and can also be further refined by working with the County Council to look at specific needs, for example, the impact of an ageing population. Presently, the Housing Register gives insufficient information regarding local connection but this is being addressed.

It is possible, therefore, from both the Strategic Housing Market Assessment and the Housing Register to evidence both the need for affordable housing and the likely property types required in any locality. The advantage of using this data is that it is a quick process and can be updated as and when necessary.

## **2. Rural Youth Work Programme (Report D258)**

### **RECOMMENDED:**

***That subject to budgetary provision for 2013/2014 the following be approved:***

- (a) the Borough Council continue to fund IPSUM YP, or a similar group, to deliver a 'Wos Up' Project in the Rural Areas of St Edmundsbury and look to work with Parish Councils to increase the number of sessions;***
- (b) officers be asked to look at what the future format might be for Rural Youth Work under Shared Services arrangements;***
- (c) officers be asked to investigate relevant external funding to develop other work in the rural areas with the Council's partners including, looking at innovative projects with an aim to increase the participation of females in the Rural Youth Work Programme; and***
- (d) any changes or new recommendations to be followed up by a period of consultation with young people conducted by officers.***

Report D258 was considered which provided an update about the various activities, events and projects which have been delivered over the past year and formed part of the Rural Youth Work Programme. It also provides an evaluation of the rural youth work project, 'WOS UP', which is now in its fifth year.

Projects have been as follows:

- (i) 'On the Spot' Youth Van**

This came into service in Haverhill in 2010 after receiving considerable external funding. The project currently operates up to 2 nights a week in Haverhill and provides a weekly session in

Kedington. Opportunities for taking the project out to Hundon and Clare are being explored.

(ii) Wos Up Project 2012

'Wos Up' is a detached mobile provision in rural areas. In 2012 following the procurement process, IPSUM YP was commissioned to deliver this project. In 2012 the project has been operated in the following villages Barrow, Stanton, Wickhambrook, Hundon, Kedington, Barningham, Ixworth, Gt Whelnetham and Hopton. An amendment of the report containing revised figures relating to attendances was tabled. Out of a total of 235 attendees 49 were female.

The current operational budget for the Rural Youth Work Programme is £10,600. Officers are looking to increase the amount available by funding from Parish Councils and other external sources.

In response to Members' questions, officers advised that the shared services staff structure with Forest Heath for Leisure, Culture and Communities, under whose auspices youth work would operate, was currently being developed. Although services would be provided by a single team, there was no requirement for the two councils to adopt the same approach to rural youth work in their areas. If members wished rural youth work in St Edmundsbury to be continued at the current time, this would therefore need to be taken into account in formulating the staff structure. While there may be changes to the way in which staff resources were provided in future, the draft budget currently allowed for the existing operational budget for rural youth work in St Edmundsbury to be retained in full for 2013/2014, with an allowance for inflation. In relation to the proposal to seek additional external funding a member suggested that an approach be made to the newly appointed Police Commissioner who had included a sum for youth work in his budget for 2013/2014.