
Council



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Title of Report:	Report by Cllr Anne Gower Portfolio Holder for Housing	
Report No:	COU/SE/14/006 [to be completed by Democratic Services]	
Report to and date/s:	Council	16 December 2014
Portfolio includes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Haverhill• Strategic Housing• Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social Care• Gypsies and Travellers

1. Housing Investment Appraisal

- 1.1 The recently adopted West Suffolk Housing Strategy set ambitions about taking a more proactive and commercial approach to exploring a range of options to support the delivery of all types of housing over the coming years. Like a number of other councils we have now started to work with our partners to explore a range of new approaches, such as providing loans to Registered Providers, purchasing properties to use as temporary accommodation or developing open market housing for sale to cross-subsidise affordable housing. As part of this work we have commissioned GVA Financial to undertake an option appraisal on the range of approaches, once this work has been completed a full business case will be produced for Cabinet to consider and recommend onto Council.
- 1.2 I also attend attended a workshop on the 29 October 2014, along with Forest Heath Cabinet Members Rona Burt and Stephen Edwards, to explore the potential for local authorities across Norfolk and Suffolk to work together to attract institutional investors to support the development of private rented accommodation. While we are at the early stages of this work, there may be the potential to build one or two bed accommodation that would not only help to meet the increasing demand, but also generate a revenue income for the council. Further information on this initiative will be presented to Council as it develops.

2. Housing Profiling Information

- 2.1 As a result of the rural profiling work we piloted, working with the Cambridge Housing Sub Region the information has been developed further. The profiling information now covers all parishes and wards. Hopefully this will be an invaluable planning tool which is also available as an interactive map. The data

can be found on Cambridge Insight website at:

<http://www.cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/interactive-maps/housing>

3. William Flack Place Whepstead Official Opening

- 3.1 I was pleased to attend the opening of the latest rural exception scheme in Whepstead along with the ward member, Cllr Rushen. The scheme has been named after Private William Flack who was the first Suffolk Regiment fatality of the Great War. There are 10 new homes including a bespoke bungalow designed to accommodate a family with multiple disabilities. This exception scheme will help meet local housing need ensuring families can remain in the village and was warmly received by everyone I spoke to on the day.

4. Homelessness

- 4.1 The number of homeless households that the Council is accommodating in Bed & Breakfast remains at between 8 and 12, and is likely to remain at this level until there is an increase in provision of temporary accommodation.
- 4.2 The Council is currently refurbishing a House in Multiple Occupation in Lake Avenue, Bury St Edmunds to use as temporary accommodation which will provide 5 rooms for single homeless people that the Council otherwise would accommodate in Bed & Breakfast. This should be ready for occupation in February 2015. In addition the Council is actively looking at other options to eliminate completely the use of Bed & Breakfast.
- 4.3 A review of homelessness in the Borough has been undertaken and its results used to inform the forthcoming West Suffolk Homelessness Strategy. The Strategy is currently out for consultation and will come before Council in February 2015.

5. Home Link Statistics

- 5.1 The Home Link Statistics are provided at Appendix A. In October there were a total of 227 new St Edmundsbury Home-link applications. Typically an average around 150 new applications a month are received. I raised my concern about the increase and analysis of the applicants did not identify any particular reason. Any change in the rate of new applicants will be monitored to see if a trend emerges.

6. Private Sector Housing

- 6.1 We have aligned our Guidance & Standards for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) into one document, approved at Cabinet on 2 December 2014, forming the basis for our future approach in this sector across West Suffolk. It will ensure a consistent implementation of the risk based inspection programme, standards and licence fee, applicable to larger HMOs. The Housing Strategy recognises the need for this type of accommodation and, through this document we will work with Landlords to achieve the required standards, using our enforcement powers as necessary to safeguard residents.

6.2 Under the Empty Home Strategy we are undertaking a project to bring identified homes back into use, prioritising properties that are of value to the authority in terms of accommodating those in housing need. We will be taking a pro-active multi-service approach, through enforcement actions and financial assistance as appropriate, and the highest priority properties may be subject to enforced sale or compulsory purchase. We have signed up to the Empty Homes Agency campaign, to pledge our support to reduce the number of long-term empty homes to tackle housing need. Our current strategy and plans will enable us to actively commit to this campaign, whilst potentially increasing the existing housing in West Suffolk. As ever we welcome information about empty properties across the Borough.