

<b>Title</b>	<b>Housing discussion</b>		
<b>Report of the Head of</b>			
<b>Author</b>		<b>Ext</b>	
<b>Report to</b>	<b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	<b>Date</b>	

### Briefing Summary

Meeting with Phil Turner, Graham Smith, Keith Sutcliffe and Councillors Baverstock and Boulton on Monday 27 November 2017.

At the OSCOM Away Day there were a number of items from members that required a short meeting with Officers to ascertain whether there were any areas to review. Members wished to ensure that the team are delivering information effectively and managing tenant's expectations.

Questions were sought from Councillors Baverstock and Bolton and questions were sent in by Councillor Hamilton who unfortunately couldn't make the meeting.

### Main focus of the document

There were a number of questions which covered;

- **Statutory obligation to provide sites for self building** – The Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 places a duty on certain public authorities to keep a register of individuals and associations of individuals who wish to acquire serviced plots of land to bring forward self-build and custom housebuilding projects and to place a duty on certain public authorities to have regard to those registers in carrying out planning and other functions. A register can be created for anyone interested but there is however no control in the Legislation on who can register. The Legislation does however allow Local Authorities to assess the local need for affordable housing using the Strategic Housing Market Assessment.
- **New Homes Bonus** - New Homes Bonus is collected by the Local Authority and used as part of the Corporate Budget. New Homes Bonus can not be bid for. Parish Councils can bid from the CIL pot for infrastructure projects on their wish list.

- **Who chooses Housing Associations** – the Council has a list of preferred housing association partners, however, any housing association can bid for units on new developments. TVBC are part of the Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing (HARAH) Partnership which is a partnership between a number of Hampshire districts and housing associations, supported by a voluntary sector partner, however developers are free to choose who they want to go with. The Council seeks to ensure that wherever possible, subject to commercial viability considerations, that the local affordable housing policy requirements are being met.
- **Shared Ownership** – it can be challenging to get a mortgage for shared ownership, particularly in the past during the credit crunch and associated recession, but this has now improved and there are lenders who are willing to lend for shared ownership. The Help to Buy South website is a good place for applicants to start.
- **TVBC build own affordable homes** – TVBC have created a Limited Company called Valley Housing which aims to deliver market housing. This is a commercial enterprise, albeit tenants for market rented units may be sought from the Council's Housing Service. There are a range of complex considerations in the context of the Council building its own affordable homes ("Council Housing"), including the requirement to have a Housing Revenue Account and the associated consequences of this for the Council's finances. In the context of Valley Housing delivering units of residential accommodation to be rented at anything significantly below open market value, the government has made a number of suggestions in recent years that it may consider how the Right to Buy could be applied to any sub-market rented housing that is delivered through Council owned trading vehicles. This would obviously impact the viability of Valley Housing and the Council has been mindful of this in terms of agreeing business plans for Valley Housing. The purpose of Valley Housing is to generate commercial investment and income.
- **Plot Shops** – York/Cumbria are taking the initiative to set up Plot Shops. A Plot Shop is a marketing suite from where the sale of building plots is administered and promoted to the public. Councillor Baverstock will be going up to Yorkshire and will find out more information on Plot Shops. Abbotts Ann are looking at developing a small number of houses in the village and in order to ensure that the homes built will remain within the control of the village they have set up a Community Land Trust. Should this project be successful there is a possibility that other Parishes may look at similar projects.
- **Access to Transport** - There are lots of pockets of social housing around Romsey and the lack of access to public transport is creating isolation. Bus routes are included as part of the development of the site however due to lack of use the routes are changed or taken away. Applicants exercise choice by bidding for advertised vacancies and the adverts include information about location. Applicants also have the choice as to whether to accept a property or not. Generally, households on the Housing Register tend to have their own car and for those who do not, they are able to decide for themselves whether or not to exercise choice in bidding for properties advertised through Hampshire HomeChoice. This may be more of an issue for older people who have lived there for many years and no longer drive.

More could be done to incorporate new developments with the towns both in planning and social terms. This is a corporate action plan project. Community Engagement Officers work with Councillors to try to address community issues.

- **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)** – Parish Councils and organisations have the ability to bid for CIL to help fund infrastructure projects. Cllr training session will be undertaken in the new year.
- **Overlap of rent/property** - Timescales for moving from private rent into a socially rented or affordable rented property will be dependant on the property bid for and any associated individual factors that may affect the “readiness” of the property. For example, if the property is on a new development site, then prospective tenants may be offered the unit before construction is complete and there may be a longer timescale before the person is expected to move. In other circumstances, properties may become void and require minimal void repairs and hence become available with the expectation the person will move more quickly. Local housing associations seek to minimise their void times and therefore households nominated from the Council’s Housing Register may be expected to move quickly. Tenants can negotiate with their private landlord to release them at the same time as taking up a housing association tenancy.. The Council’s Housing Services can assist with this by offering to assist the landlord with a new tenant from the existing households they are working with. TVBC do not offer any financial assistance to tenants, they are expected to fund themselves except in exceptional circumstances when the Revenue Service may consider paying rent on two properties, but this is rare.
- **Rent setting and payment** – Housing associations work within the national Affordable Homes Programme Framework, which requires them to set rents at up to 80% of market rent or Local Housing Allowance levels in order to achieve grant funding support from the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA). The borough is affected by 4 separate Broad Rental Market Areas for the purposes of setting Local Housing Allowance rates. These rates are set at the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of rents within each Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA). The BRMAs in Test Valley are Basingstoke (which covers Andover), Salisbury (Western Test Valley), Winchester (Eastern Test Valley) and Southampton (Romsey). This can create affordability issues for low income households in the south of the borough, for example, as rents are expensive but the Local Housing Allowance rates are set taking into account the lower rent levels in Southampton. In addition, Local Housing Allowance rates have been frozen so that they are no longer being uprated in alignment with the consumer price index (CPI), however, rents have been increasing and it is anticipated that this may compound affordability issues for low income households as the level of benefits they receive will not keep pace with increasing rents. Since the introduction of Local Housing Allowance in April 2008, housing benefit payments private rented sector properties have been made to the tenant. This has been the default national policy position since that time. The approach does include some safeguards, including direct payments to the landlord where the tenant is considered to be “vulnerable” (essentially falling into one of 2 categories; those who “can’t pay” or those who “won’t pay”) or where they have accrued a total of 8 weeks rent in arrears.

Similar protections will continue to be available for private landlords under the new Universal Credit system and private rented sector tenants have been receiving their rent directly under the current Local Housing Allowance system. Information for landlords has been made available by the DWP and can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-and-rented-housing--2/universal-credit-and-rented-housing-guide-for-landlords>

- **Homelessness Reduction Act** - The Homelessness Reduction Act achieved Royal Assent in April 2017 and all but one of its sections come into force in April 2018 (the new “Duty to Refer” will commence in October 2018). This fundamentally revises the existing statutory homelessness framework by significantly amending the Housing Act 1996, Part 7. These amendments will introduce new duties on local authorities to prevent and relieve homelessness. An increase from 28 days to 56 days for a threat of being made homeless will require local authorities to act earlier and bring significantly more people under the statutory framework. Local authorities will have to set up a personalised housing plan with each person which will include helping tenants to change their behaviours and giving realistic advice. The new “Prevention” and “Relief” duties apply to all eligible households, including those who may not be in “priority need” and those who may be “intentionally homeless”. A seminar will be run for Members on the Act in due course. The Housing Service is in the process of adjusting its operational practices with a view to compliance with the new Act from January 2018, 3 months in advance of commencement. This will enable the Council to iron out any issues prior to the Act becoming enforceable in law and help us to establish any additional resource implications arising from the new administrative burdens. Some of the work being undertaken includes introducing a much more “asset focused” assessment of our customers so that we are more actively taking an interest in aspirations, skills and strengths, as well as support needs and risk factors, to facilitate working hand in hand with customers to agree meaningful personal plans with them and to engage them in helping themselves. It was suggested that an update could be reported in the MIB quarterly as well as updates on Hampshire Home Choice.
- **Property details** – Housing Associations have property records and TVBC check the information is correct to the best of their ability. There are instances where a property has been advertised incorrectly but it is very rare and regular liaison with Hampshire Home Choice partners seeks to deal with any issues that may arise to prevent repeat incidences wherever possible.
- **Housing Development and Affordability** – TVBC is effective in achieving the ambitions of its Affordable Housing Policy, securing up to 40% affordable housing on new development sites. The number of affordable properties is dependent on what the developer can deliver with regard to commercial viability constraints, site constraints and negotiations with housing associations. Any viability limitations on delivery of affordable housing will be subject to the Council’s careful considerations, and TVBC engages external experts to clarify the position as part of the planning application process. There needs to be flexibility to adapt to the land use/market demand.

- **New Occupants** – New occupants of a property should have local connections and will have to have a reason to be on the register. The Housing Service has been aware of rumours associated with the allocation of affordable housing on specific new development sites, but these have been largely unfounded.

Confidentiality

It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.

No of Annexes:	
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