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**REPORT TO:** OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**DATE:** 2 JULY 2009

**REPORTING OFFICER:** HEAD OF ECONOMY AND HOUSING  
JULIAN RUDD

**SUBJECT:** RECONSIDERATION OF AN AFFORDABLE HOUSING  
REVIEW

**WARDS AFFECTED:** ALL

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## **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To consider the Overview & Scrutiny Committee undertaking a review of affordable housing as part of its work programme.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 That members do not undertake a review of affordable housing as part of the Committee's work programme.

## **3.0 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 At the 3 July 2008 meeting of this Committee the Work Plan for 2008/9 was discussed. Members were reminded that the 2004 CPA Report on Ryedale District Council had identified the need to develop and focus the activities of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and, in response, the Authority had committed to the production of an annual work plan to provide better links to corporate priorities.
- 3.2 When considering the reviews to be undertaken in the coming year, the Committee was requested to have regard to certain issues, including that:
- Although the Committee had from time to time touched upon aspects of affordable housing it had not considered the continuing impact on the community of a lack of affordable homes, the performance of the Council to date, the views of the Audit Commission and the high priority the Council gave to affordable housing;
  - That there should be a focus on the implementation of the recommendations from the Audit Commission as contained in the Annual Audit Letter.
- 3.3 Following a detailed discussion it was resolved 'That Affordable Housing be considered the next major scrutiny review for the Committee after the completion of the Waste Management Review'. Although the scoping of any affordable housing review was programmed to take place at the 11 December 2008 meeting of this Committee, it was agreed at the 7 August meeting to bring this forward.

3.4 This Committee also discussed housing issues at the Special meeting on 19 August when it resolved 'That Full Council creates a broad based Steering Group for Affordable Housing' with an aim 'To enable Ryedale District Council to have a strategy and systems that ensure that affordable housing stretch target is achieved'. However, Full Council on 4 September 2008 subsequently resolved to "instruct Community Services and Licensing Committee to consider affordable housing as a standing item on its agendas" and to "consider how best to meet the aspirations expressed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee". The CS&L Committee on 25 September then agreed to undertake the following actions:

- a. Affordable Housing tabled as a standing item on all Community Services and Licensing Agendas;
- b. The reporting of progress against the Housing Strategy Action Plan being brought to each meeting;
- c. The development of a set of performance indicators to improve the means by which Ryedale District Council measures its performance against the delivery of affordable housing targets;
- d. The regular reporting of the indicators to committee.
- e. To bring forward for discussion and approval new initiatives to enable the Council to both deliver its affordable housing objectives and to help those in housing need.
- f. To invite presentations from officers and partners on the following:
  - examples of best practise;
  - potential new opportunities – national, regional and district;
  - changes to national policy;
- g. To run a training/briefing session for Members that will cover the following:
  - national policy and the impact that has on the approach the council could take;
  - practical issues and the options the council has taking account of national, regional and local policy;
  - the need for a local policy and what the council will need to do to achieve an acceptable policy.'

3.5 The 9 October 2008 meeting of this Committee again considered the need to undertake a review of affordable housing. In view of the activities of the Community Services Committee it was resolved that:

"1. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that the Community Services and Licensing Committee incorporate the following elements into the work they are undertaking in relation to affordable housing provision:

- Review of progress in implementing the Audit Commission's Review of Affordable Housing in North Yorkshire;
- Assessment of the impact of raised affordable housing targets in the planning system against a background of economic downturn;
- Potential for working with local estates to deliver increased levels of affordable housing in Ryedale;
- Scope for increased delivery through work with new Homes and Communities Agency;
- Assessment of current local grants and interventions given the range of local housing needs identified in the 2007 Ryedale Housing Needs Assessment and elsewhere;

2. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee incorporate "the performance of other Local Authorities/Benchmarking, with investigation of 'success stories' in other parts of the UK to identify good practise" into their (review) work.

3. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee defer their Affordable Housing review until Spring 2009.”

#### **4.0 REPORT**

- 4.1 Since the need for a scrutiny review of affordable housing was last considered by this Committee in October 2008 the Community Services Committee has considered current housing activity and issues at each of its meetings, via a standing item on Housing Performance and through guest speakers. A report is submitted to each meeting which details progress made over the previous two months. The progress made is set out against the Council's agreed housing priorities, as defined in the Ryedale Housing Strategy. Members can view the Housing Performance reports on the Community Services agendas via the 'Agendas and Minutes Archive' at [www.ryedale.gov.uk](http://www.ryedale.gov.uk).
- 4.2 Under the standing item at Community Services that Committee considers grant performance and the need for any amendments to better meet housing needs, together with staffing and other changes to meet recommendations of the Audit Commission Review of Affordable Housing in North Yorkshire. Separate reports to the Committee consider initiatives and joint working with the Homes & Communities Agency regarding housing performance. Through speakers invited to the Committee there are discussions regarding affordable housing delivery. This has included the impact of different affordable housing targets and the difficulties caused by current economic conditions. Through future speakers the Committee will consider closer working with local estates to better meet local housing needs and Members will visit recent developments to examine energy efficiency improvements and to view recent affordable housing.
- 4.3 As a result of the above work the Community Services Committee had monitored delivery of new affordable homes, which, at 57, was on target at Christmas 2008 to meet an annual figure of 75 units for 2008/9. However, the housing market collapsed and there was a sudden fall-off in affordable units through the Section 106 route. Since that point the Committee has met with Yorkshire Housing to discuss means of improving delivery and will meet with house builders. Progress on delivery is also provided on a site by site basis, including the stage reached with rural exceptions sites. Members have also closely monitored the dramatic effects of the Council's homelessness services, with a 50% reduction in the number of families who have had to spend time in temporary accommodation in 2008/09 when compared to 07/08. Correspondingly the Council was involved in preventing 239 cases of homelessness in 2008/9 compared to 149 on 2007/8. In 2008/9 the Council provided 91 grants (totalling £438,447.00) to allow homes to be adapted to meet their occupiers changing physical needs, thus meaning their housing needs were met in situ as opposed to requiring new accommodation.
- 4.4 Clearly, if a scrutiny review of affordable housing were to be undertaken this should add to and not replicate the activities of the Community Services Committee. However, given the above activities of the CS&L Committee it is considered that there is very limited benefit in proceeding with a scrutiny review of affordable housing.

#### **5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a budget of £5,000 that it can use to assist in undertaking any review.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 The work of the Community Services Committee relating to affordable housing and other housing performance issues means that there is very limited basis for undertaking a scrutiny review of affordable housing activities.

### **Background Papers:**

None

### **OFFICER CONTACT:**

Please contact Julian Rudd, Head of Economy and Housing, if you require any further information on the contents of this report. The officer can be contacted at Ryedale House on 01653 600666 ext 218 or e-mail [julian.rudd@ryedale.gov.uk](mailto:julian.rudd@ryedale.gov.uk)