

DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING BOARD

MINUTES of the meeting of the Strategic Housing Board held on Friday 28 January 2022.

PRESENT: Councillor David J Mote (Chairman)
Councillor Tom A Maddison
Brian Cooke, Director of Housing, YMCA (Observer)

IN ATTENDANCE Gus Zogolovitch, Director of Unboxed Homes

Dartford Borough Council Officers:-

Peter Dosad	– Director of Housing & Public Protection
Paul Koster	– Head of Housing
Alan Twyman	– Democratic Services Manager

24. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Kite and also on behalf of Jackie Pye and Sonia Collins.

The Board recorded its sadness over the passing of Councillor Ann Allen MBE since its last meeting and noted that the Chairman would be discussing future membership of the Board with the Leader of the Council in due course.

The Chairman welcomed Gus Zogolovitch, Director of Unboxed Homes, who was attending the meeting remotely via Zoom to inform the Board of his experience of the self-build, custom-build and property development with social impact housing market.

25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

26. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC HOUSING BOARD HELD ON 13 OCTOBER 2021 AND MATTERS ARISING

The Strategic Housing Board considered the minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2021.

Under matters arising, the Chairman said that he had contacted Brian Downton to see whether progress had been made over establishing a web

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site for the panel of local Independent Mortgage Advisors and getting this up and running with a view to linking this to Signpost. He understood that, whilst progress had been made this was taking longer than originally anticipated and was not yet ready to launch. The link would be established once the new web site went live.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Housing Board held on 13 October 2021 be confirmed as an accurate record.

27. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

28. REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

There were no references to from other committees.

29. SELF-BUILD, CUSTOM-BUILD AND PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT WITH SOCIAL IMPACT

The Chairman provided some context about the local housing market in Dartford and explained that there was significant ongoing development across the borough and at Ebbsfleet Garden City. He explained that it had been anticipated that this would have included opportunities for some custom-build and self-build projects but that there had not been much evidence of this having happened. He explained the new build projects being carried out by the Council and the constraints posed by the lack of suitable Council-owned land for development and wondered whether there might be opportunities arising from the custom-build/self-build sector to develop niche sites or how the Council could assist in promoting this in the Borough.

The Board received a presentation from Gus Zogolvitch, Director of Unboxed Homes, on his experience of the self-build, custom-build and property development with social impact housing market (copy appended). Mr Zogolvitch advised the Board of his background as an award winning custom-build and self-build specialist who served on the executive board of the National Custom & Self Build Association and described some of the projects that he had been involved in, including building his own home, and his consultancy work on the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and for the London Legacy Development Corporation. He explained the difference between custom-build, where the purchaser customised their own home by buying a serviced plot, a shell or customisable turn-key but didn't take all of the risk, and Self-Build, where the purchaser took all the decisions and risks, purchasing the plot and building themselves. He explained that custom-build more often took place on a multi plot development whereas self-build was

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more likely on a single plot development but that sometimes a purchaser would purchase a multi-plot site and sell the plots individually for self-build.

The three main models of delivery for custom-build accounted for around 95% of such projects in the UK. Where the purchaser bought a serviced plot the developer would establish the planning permissions and put the infrastructure and landscaping in place before selling individual plots. Where the purchaser acquired a shell, the developer would build the fabric of the property and the customer would fit out the interior, and where the purchaser bought a customisable turn-key they would be involved in agreeing the specification and design but the developer would carry out the building. Custom and self-build was currently uncommon in the UK but was widely used in many other countries. Custom-build offered many advantages, including faster delivery and take-up, helping to create more cohesive communities and stronger commitment to the area, generally better design and build quality, and more environmentally friendly outcomes. Custom-build created additional demand for housing and speedier outcomes whereas current mainstream house building options did not deliver quickly and were often of limited quality as their construction was profit-driven rather than focussed on quality. Where customers were involved in the design and build decisions they tended to choose better design, materials and delivery and better locations. This meant that custom build communities were better for the environment as where customers had the choice they tended to choose more environmentally friendly options and this resulted in savings for the occupier.

Mr Zogolovitch described the obligations for local planning authorities to maintain a register for custom/self-build and that there was low take-up in Dartford. He wondered whether there were opportunities for this to be more widely promoted. He explained that there were a number of ways that the Council could help to deliver more custom-build opportunities:

- It could enter into a partnership with a custom-build developer and share the risk and reward;
- It could allocate a certain percentage of all major sites for custom-build;
- It could ensure that a certain percentage of council owned land was sold for custom build provision, although he accepted that the Council had limited land ownership opportunities;
- It could purchase non-residential land and get outline planning permission as a council, gaining an ability to then subsidise allocation; and
- It could create planning incentives through Supplementary Planning guidance.

There were also things that the Council should avoid when considering custom-build, including not allowing mainstream developers to 'game the system,' masquerade as custom-build developers when they were not or claim that there was no consumer demand or that there were no suppliers willing to buy parcels of land and to package them for custom-build. Research had suggested that 50-60% of people considering their ownership options were interested in custom-build but did not know how to go about it. He

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suggested that the next steps for the Council could include more active promotion of the Self-build register, working with custom-build partners and delivery agents and making firm decisions as to the Council's risk appetite in terms of pursuing this.

The Chairman thanked Mr Zogolovitch for his presentation.

The Director of Housing & Public Protection explained the difficulties the Council had in acquiring suitable land for development and the Council's paucity of directly owned land that was viable for development. The Council sought to promote development via the planning process but repeatedly faced challenges on grounds of viability, which had made it difficult to achieve its affordable housing targets.

Mr Zogolovitch felt that there might still be opportunities for the Council to encourage developers to engage with custom/self-build ventures as customers were often prepared to pay more for a custom-build plot than for a development plot. He also felt that there would be schemes which were marginal in terms of planning considerations where developers might be prepared to consider the inclusion of a custom/self-build element, perhaps on land on the periphery of a project which might otherwise be difficult to develop, to secure planning consents. The Council could start by focussing on some of these sites, starting small and monitoring progress.

The Director of Housing & Public Protection said that it was likely that such discussions were taking place with developers of 'knife-edge' projects or small peripheral developments already.

The Chairman explained the Council's housing delivery and strong development performance, but that the pattern of development differed across the borough with most development taking place to the north of the A2 and less to the south of the A2 due to 'green belt' and other constraints. He noted that there was also limited appetite for new-build houses which he felt were poorly marketed, of a perceived limited build-quality and which now always involved the payment of management/service fees. The challenge for the Council was how best to focus on the need for local housing and how to deliver this when the Council owned little land itself. He asked Mr Zogolovitch how he acquired land for development?

Mr Zogolovitch explained that he acquired land on the open market or from land owners such as Homes England. The way forward could be for the Council to set custom/self-build targets for major sites and for development projects with partners such as Housing Associations.

The Board also wondered whether there were an opportunities for shared ownership self-build projects similar to those in other countries. Mr Zogolovitch said that he had seen some shared ownership schemes and cited the Government's Help-to-Buy mortgage scheme as an example.

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The Chairman thanked Mr Zogolovitch for attending the meeting and for promoting an interesting discussion. He undertook to update him of any progress with taking this forward.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the presentation and subsequent discussion be noted.

30. SIGN POST (DARTFORD STRATEGIC HOUSING MOSAIC) - UPDATE

The Chairman provided an update on the Sign Post project. He noted that the Communications Team had promoted Sign Post via Dartford Together and that there would be ongoing promotion to ensure that people were aware of the availability of Sign Post as it evolved and developed.

RESOLVED:

That progress on the Dartford Signpost be noted.

31. COUNCIL NEW BUILD HOUSING PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Head of Housing presented an update on the Council's new build housing programme. Since 2012 the Council had developed three sites, within its ownership, providing 86 new homes for local people, all of which were fully occupied. A further four new build sites totalling 32 new housing units had received planning permission. 3 x 1 bedroom bungalows, all wheelchair accessible units, had been completed in August 2021 on the site of the former Mead Crescent depot and new tenants had moved in. However there had been delays to work on other sites due to the national shortage of materials, delays to deliveries and a shortage of labour. Despite this there had been significant progress. The 3 x 3 bedroom houses at the former garage site at Milton Road were now in the final stage of snagging but the 2 x 2 bedroom and 2 x 1 bedroom flats had been delayed due to Highways issues and lack of materials, although these had now been resolved. The homes were now due for completion in March 2022. Kitchens and bathrooms had now been installed and work on floors was in progress on the 4 x 2 bedroom flats and 2 x 1 bedroom flats at the former Keary Road garage site and these flats were also scheduled for completion in March 2022. As previously reported, work at the former garage site at Gilbert Close had been delayed due to the need for further archaeological investigations and problems with the design of the foundations. The borehole drilling required by Kent County Council had commenced on 10 January 2022 and reptile fencing had been installed and was being monitored, and there was some progress on meeting pre-start planning conditions. However, at present, there was still no firm date for starting building work.

In addition to new build housing, the Council had, since July 2021, acquired 22 properties on the open market for affordable social housing. The Council had recently purchased a 6 bedroom property for council housing and was hoping to buy a 4 bedroom property in the coming week. The Council had

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also been successful in negotiating for the acquisition of land at Westgate Road, when this had returned to the market following the Council's earlier unsuccessful bid, and this was currently at the conveyancing stage, which should be completed by the end of March 2022. The Council would look to design a suitable scheme for affordable housing for this site.

The report also reminded the Board of changes to the regulations governing the pooling of housing receipts, including an increase in the proportion of a replacement home that could be funded from Right-to-Buy receipts from 30% to 40% and an extension to the timeframe for spending the receipts from 3 to 5 years. To date, as a participant in the 1-4-1 scheme the Council had successfully spent £13.9m delivering 86 new homes for local people and a further £6m on the purchase of 22 market properties and land since July 2020.

The Chairman welcomed the acquisition of a larger property and the greater flexibility this would provide for lettings. He was advised that although the rent for a larger property would be higher it was still well below the market rate for private rental.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the New Build Housing Programme be noted.

32. UPDATE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PRIVATE SECTOR RENEWAL STRATEGY

The Head of Housing provided an update on the development of a Private Sector Renewal Strategy (PSRS) following the stock condition survey carried out in 2021. Since then, the Private Sector Housing and Policy and Development teams had made further progress with the development of the PSRS and a draft document was currently being finalised prior to consultation.

The PSRS would address the need for housing renewal in the Dartford area and explain how the Council intended to meet this need. It would build upon the work already carried out in the implementation of the previous renewal strategy, developed in 2009, and set out the Council's aims for private sector housing renewal from 2022 onwards to ensure that Council resources are targeted at areas that need it most and to assist in tackling fuel poverty. The PSRS would also set out the types of assistance available to households for housing renewal, such as grants to assist in bringing properties up to a decent standard and help with renewable energy initiatives/works. It was expected that the PSRS would be presented to Cabinet in May 2022, following a formal consultation exercise.

RESOLVED:

That the Board notes the progress being made on the preparation of the new Private Sector Renewal Strategy.

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33. THE CHARTER FOR SOCIAL HOUSING - WHITE PAPER 2021 - UPDATE

The Head of Housing presented an update on progress being made in preparation for the proposals contained in the Government's Charter for Social Housing – White Paper 2021, which reflected some of the biggest changes that the social housing sector was facing in recent years. The Board was reminded of the contents of the White Paper which set out what social housing residents should be able to expect and the obligations of their landlords and expected standards. Although the content of the final charter was unknown, and further information had not been released, the Government was keen for authorities, and the Housing Associations on which it was focussed, to progress this work quickly.

The Housing Service had developed a detailed draft Action Plan to address the actions emanating from the White Paper. The Action Plan followed the themes of the White Paper and was being monitored by a working group of key officers, chaired by the Head of Housing. The working group was meeting regularly to discuss progress, provide assurance that important milestones were mapped and delivered in preparation for the changes being proposed under the White Paper.

The table below detailed achievements already delivered on the seven key themes contained in the White Paper:

<p><i>To be safe in your home</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An initial HRA compliance review has been completed with a number of actions identified that will inform a compliance strategy on the safety of the housing stock (i.e. gas servicing, electrical testing, fire safety, lift safety. Asbestos, legionella and water systems).
<p><i>To know how your landlord is performing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A response is being drafted to the Regulator of Social Housing's consultation on a proposed set of tenant satisfaction measures.
<p><i>To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A complaints page on the housing section of the Council's website has been set up to raise awareness to residents of how to make a complaint and the role of the Housing Ombudsman• A new process for logging complaints has been set up for the Housing Service• A new process for measuring resident satisfaction with complaint handling has been set up
<p><i>To have your voice heard by your landlord</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A resident engagement survey has been drafted to inform a future strategy on resident engagement• A review of the ways the Housing Service can assist to address loneliness is nearing completion.

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A review of the Vulnerable Adults' Housing Policy, including a review of the support available for vulnerable residents, is nearing completion.
<p><i>To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A new Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator post is in the process of being recruited to who will, amongst other duties, be tasked with developing a Domestic Abuse Housing Policy.
<p><i>To be supported to take your first step into ownership</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A review has been undertaken to consider how the new Right to Buy receipt flexibilities will be used.

The White Paper was also proposing the introduction of a stronger social housing regulatory regime which moved away from the current co-regulatory approach, whereby the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) relied upon landlords to demonstrate their compliance with economic and consumer standards. The Government believed that the current regime of regulation was not strong enough to ensure that social housing landlords were meeting residents' expectations and was proposing a more proactive approach which would include routine inspection, a requirement for landlords to report on compliance with 22 new tenant satisfaction measures (which were currently subject to consultation by the RSH) and a requirement for landlords to provide a clear breakdown of how income was being spent. Landlords would also be required to identify a 'responsible person' to ensure that the organisation was complying with consumer standards and a 'nominated person' responsible for compliance with health and safety requirements. Social housing landlord's decision making bodies would be responsible for actively monitoring and scrutinising compliance and mitigating risk.

The Housing Service was currently preparing a response to the RSH's consultation on the set of tenant satisfaction measures (TSM's), which would be reported to Cabinet on 24 February 2022, and it was also proposed to undertake a Resident Engagement Survey in early 2022 to inform a new resident engagement strategy for the Housing Service and ensure that the Service would continue to meet current and future regulatory requirements. The Board was also informed that a new senior officer post was being recruited within the Housing Policy and Development Team to co-ordinate the activities necessary to meet the forthcoming regulatory requirements and to assist in the development and implementation of other policies and strategies.

The Chairman noted that the measures were being introduced to address the management and performance failures of Housing Associations and that local authority landlords were 'collateral' targets. He noted that Dartford was already well ahead of the game in that it had a good record of management of social housing and strong relationships with partner organisations such as the YMCA and through engagement with its tenants through bodies such as the

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Tenants and Leaseholders Joint Liaison Group. The Strategic Housing Board also demonstrated the Council's commitment to its social housing management and consideration of strategic housing but there would be a need to establish and redefine the Board's role moving forward within the context of the major changes proposed by the Government.

The Head of Housing provided more detail on the methodology for conducting the Resident Engagement Survey to ensure that it reached out to all tenants. This could involve the use of Survey-Monkey, writing to all tenants, hard-copy questionnaires and telephone calls. There might also be an online briefing for Members.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Board notes the progress being made by the Housing Service on preparing for the proposals in the Government's Charter for Social Housing - White Paper 2021;
2. That the Board considers and comments on the draft Charter for Social Housing - White Paper 2021 Action Plan, contained in Appendix A to the report; and
3. That the full list of tenant satisfaction measures, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be noted

34. DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND FUTURE ITEMS

It was noted that the Board's next meeting was scheduled to take place at 2.00pm on 13 April 2022.

Due to the Board's commitment to consider the draft Charter for Social Housing - White Paper 2021 Action Plan, future Board items would potentially support this action.

The meeting closed at 3.34 pm

Councillor D J Mote
CHAIRMAN

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