

Housing Event 27th June 005

Workshop Top Tips and Feedback

Workshop 1 - Member Involvement and Commitment

Wychavon Top Tips

- ◆ Win over the Members to the cause. This has to be a whole Council effort, not just for the Housing Department. Everyone in every department must feel they are doing their bit, and Members and Officers must work effectively together.
- ◆ Extra cash may be needed, but don't waste it on consultants – get smart, think outside the box, visit authorities who have already got the situation under control, and learn from their doing. Make sure your investment is effective long term, for real improvements and not just fire fighting.
- ◆ Partnership working is essential: get the RSLs on board, use the LSP effectively to deliver, etc.
- ◆ It's important to be even clearer about what you are not going to do than about what you are hoping to do.
- ◆ Be pragmatic not dogmatic, and remember at all times to see the wood for the trees – think strategically even when looking at detail.

Key Feedback from Workshop

- All members need to be involved
- Members and officers - work together - trust and honesty
- Change at the top where needed - swallow the pill
- Draw a line get rid of the blame culture
- Packaging and presentation
- Treat Council / Departments as a business - team build, manage relationships
- Let the members present items at public meetings creates ownership & team philosophy.
- Involve other members
- Cross party groups / meetings / papers
- Overview & Scrutiny - task and finish groups
- Break down barriers - encourages consensus rather than opposition
- CPA self-assessment is key - honest inward looking removes false self protectionism
- Temporary accommodation - private landlords providing
- Rural proofing - providing services e.g. subsidised transport, East Midlands Development Agency provide mopeds
- Put rural hamlets in a hub
- South Oxfordshire - rural exceptions sites have established land values
- Small employment sites and affordable housing - could reduce emigration of valuable youth element - more self-sufficiency at village level.
- Lack of supply of affordable housing - allocate to local people only - any surplus - Staffordshire Moorland build own

Workshop 2 - Achieving a 'Fit for Purpose' Housing Strategy

Wychavon Top Tips

- ◆ Up to date robust, evidence of Local Housing Market needs. Don't rely on your perceptions - get evidence and target resources more effectively
- ◆ Effective consultation with members, partners and residents - reaching the hard to reach groups e.g. focus groups, text messaging
- ◆ Involvement of other Departments - bring in the expertise you need e.g. Strategy Unit, Finance Department, Planning Department etc
- ◆ Strong financial planning with Member engagement and support - don't try to implement actions within your own resources, identify what resource will be needed to achieve the actions and get member support
- ◆ Clear, concise document

Key Feedback from Workshop

Resources

- Inadequate capacity within housing teams is common - need to get senior officer/member support for investment
- Land for affordable housing - need to work with Planning to lobby for public land to be sold on a not-for profit basis.
- Need for key worker accommodation - may be able to work with employers to gift land
- Rural exceptions sites are outside of permitted numbers - need to promote the benefits to members
- Members are accountable - where planning applications are refused members should defend planning appeals
- Encourage more RSL direct funding for additional affordable housing
- Stretch resources further - private sector loans / RSL contribution / support transfers into new affordable homes with vacancies allocated to those on housing register
- SLA / protocols to bring in added value services from other organisations - recognise SLA needs to be clear regarding expectations - monitoring is crucial.
- Delivery of affordable housing at a more economic cost - Redrow properties - £55,000 to develop each

Housing Needs

- Encourage closer working between Housing and Planning departments
- Need to move towards ongoing housing need assessment - linked with stock condition survey - perhaps employ one person between a number of Local Authorities and share the cost. Cannot use existing staff - too resource intensive.
- Need to develop the same methodology for use by different Local Authorities to enable cross authority comparison
- Need to make cost of housing needs assessments more attractive - joint commissioning should reduce costs. Promote the need to undertake these assessments with members.
- To make best use of existing sources of information e.g. land registry, census etc
- Encourage more people in housing need to register for housing - both for social rented and shared ownership properties

Consultation

- Many different ways to consult;

- e-mail draft strategy for views
- Consultation events for stakeholders
- focus groups for hard to reach groups e.g. ethnic minorities
- text messaging or e-mail surveys, use of website
- questionnaire in local residents magazine / tenants newsletter
- presentations to local stakeholder groups e.g. Local Strategic Partnerships
- Ask people to vote on issues at consultation events
- Playing cards or 3 pins into a board to assess views on priorities
- Telephone surveys - get more out of speaking to a customer
- Link consultation with housing needs survey - door-knocking
- Cross agency /authority - pay for an officer post to undertake this work
- Tap into main interest - home ownership
- Via local voluntary groups
- Tell people the outcomes
- Co-ordinated consultation - organise all consultation activities via 1 point within the Council

Workshop 3 - Housing Advice and Homelessness - A Proactive Approach

Wychavon Top Tips

- ◆ Link with Revenues (ability to fast-track benefit claims, dedicated assessors, access to Discretionary Housing Benefit payments)
- ◆ Close links with RSLs to ensure re-housing in discharge of duties, sustaining of tenancies, work with under 18s.
- ◆ Introduction of 'early warning system' - ensuring that we can do preventative rather than just reactive works.
- ◆ Access to Welfare Benefits and Money Advice - again preventative works
- ◆ 'Spend To Save' budget permitting some innovative thinking e.g. mediate with parents to keep adult children at home paying £50 per week as incentive, negotiating with private Landlords to prevent homelessness by paying market supplements, installing door defenders for victims of violence, paying off rent arrears and allowing customers to pay back to us at a small amount per week, paying half towards void work to move a man with mental health and alcohol issues to a more suitable property which freed up a 3 bed house for a homeless family

Key Feedback from Workshop

- ◆ Use of bed & breakfast - 50% reduction now we have introduced temporary accommodation, also have information packs showing accommodation, good move on arrangements
- ◆ Prevention - proactive not reactive - rearranged team to put most resources into prevention, hospital discharge scheme, nomination rights for 'empty homes', early warning system, Police Liaison Group, Mental Health Group, Rent Deposit, fast track to Welfare Benefits and Money Advice member involvement - coffee morning for members, tell the customers story, let members shadow you
- ◆ Staffing - recruit for attitude and then train, you can't train someone to have the right attitude. Be honest in your recruitment process homeless work is not for everyone

Workshop 4 - Working in Partnership to Deliver Additional Affordable Housing

Wychavon Top Tips

- ◆ Being creative
- ◆ Good communication network
- ◆ Robust housing needs evidence
- ◆ Clear policies for the delivery of affordable housing -
- ◆ Member support for delivery of affordable housing

Key Feedback from Workshop

- ◆ How will we reconcile delivery where no allocated sites left
- ◆ Need to lobby for closer alignment of the Regional Planning Strategy/Regional Housing Strategy
- ◆ Wyre Forest Affordable Housing Toolkit - considers loss through Right to Buys
- ◆ Rural exception sites - how can we deliver them? Broadland D C is allowing market housing to cross subsidise the affordable housing. Issues of affordability. Consider Parish owned land - Community Land Trusts.
- ◆ Use of Rural Housing Enabler to undertake local needs assessments and bring forward sites for affordable housing in rural areas
- ◆ Skills shortage an issue
- ◆ Nature of partnerships with RSLs at strategic level - use of recyclable capital grant - need for transparency
- ◆ Develop a register of potential sites within the area
- ◆ Councils joining together on preferred partner agreements
- ◆ Maximise opportunities for development at nil grant
- ◆ Specify the developing RSL in s106 agreement
- ◆ Threaten not to give planning permission
- ◆ Shared ownership - less traditional forms - need to promote with members
- ◆ Affordability - preference not to have 100% staircasing
- ◆ 2nd homes/holiday homes - reduce discounts on Council Tax
- ◆ Staffordshire Moorlands - local needs occupants -? subject to challenge
- ◆ SPG on affordable housing key tool
- ◆ Rural resistance to affordable housing provision an obstacle to be overcome
- ◆ Use of own resources for affordable housing - council owned sites
- ◆ Re-development of existing RSL stock
- ◆ What will happen beyond ADP - if not a priority for investment
- ◆ Commuted sums - calculations vary from LA to LA
- ◆ Policy - go to 40% as a minimum - Conflict between authorities re %ages sought - West Sussex experience - relates % to property values

Workshop 5 - Private Sector Housing - Focussing on Those in Housing Need

Wychavon Top Tips

- ◆ Reach out to the vulnerable
- ◆ Gather data
- ◆ Action Plans
- ◆ Research and organise evidence
- ◆ Staff attitude

Key Feedback from Workshop

- Recruitment and retention issues - why did we all deal with it, discussed careerships, market supplements, secondments
- Innovative solutions - Pods and ramps
- Private sector - discussed type of grants e.g. Landlord grants with nomination rights
- Turnaround time from OT visit to completion of work - all agreed depended on type of job
- 5 year financial plan - how did we manage to agree with members - discussed
- Waiting list for DFG - most agreed done on a priority need
- Member involvement - ways of getting members involved, shadowing, coffee mornings etc.
- Landlords - forums, leaflets, grants
- Disrepair - grants etc.
- Lack of consultants - Wychavon used the expertise in house
- Diversity of staff - who brought what skills
- Manage expectations of customers, be honest and open
- Shops and text - very cheap and effective