IPSWICH BOROUGH COUNCIL

IPSWICH HOUSING STRATEGY 2017 2022 APPENDIX 5

STAKEHOLDER EVENT

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Housing Strategy Stakeholder Event, I- City Centre, 5 July 2016.

Introduction

Ipswich Borough Council hosted a Housing Workshop Event at Ip-City Centre on 5 July 2016. The purpose of the event was to bring together housing professionals in Ipswich to enhance closer working relationships and help shape the next Housing Strategy.

The subsequent report details the objectives of the event in more detail, how the day occurred and what was needed to make the event happen, a summary of the outcomes of the day and some conclusions are drawn.

Objective

The purpose of hosting the Housing Strategy Stakeholder Event was to:

- co-ordinate with a representative cross-section of all housing organisations within Ipswich
- develop the vision and key aims of the Housing Strategy
- obtain a holistic overview of the housing challenges within Ipswich
- embed commitment from stakeholder partners
- aid the implementation of the Housing Strategy

What happened?

Thirty-seven delegates attended the event. These delegates represented the social housing sector, the private rented sector, supported housing providers and agencies, housing developers, local authorities and government agencies and so provided a representation across all spheres of housing within Ipswich.

The day started with presentations to provide context and emphasise the importance of the need for co-ordinated partnership working in order to create a meaningful and relevant strategy.

Speaker included Ian Blofield (Head of Housing & Community Services) who welcomed delegates, Karen Paton (Strategy Officer, Colchester Borough Council) who discussed the development of Colchester Borough Council strategy and Matthew Warburton (Policy Advisor, ARCH) who covered the national context of Housing. Our facilitator for the day was Roger Jarman (Housing Quality Network).

The day moved onto the group workshops. The workshops were arranged according to the four identified priorities for the new Housing Strategy:

- **Supply of Housing**
- **Homelessness**
- **Vulnerable groups**
- **Existing Stock**

Delegates were placed into the workgroup that best matched their expertise in order to obtain the most comprehensive discussion possible. Each group had two pre-determined group facilitators who had been briefed beforehand as to the objectives and given questions to use to provide a standardised format across the different groups. The workshops were broken into two focussed sessions. The first session looked at the challenges being faced within the category. The second session focussed upon potential solutions. The group facilitators fed back the group discussions to the whole group. Delegates were asked to complete a feedback form before leaving. The use of the workshops meant that a wealth of qualitative data was collected throughout the day and the feedback forms provided valuable information as to the perceived value of the day.

Outcomes

A number of general themes emerged across all four workshops. These are:

- That existing housing stock needs to be assessed to see if it could be used in a better way to meet demand
- That the Spare Room Subsidy('bedroom tax') has had an effect on demand and size of accommodation required
- That there is a need and shared desire that effective communication is maintained beyond the day of the stakeholder event between IBC Policy and Strategy team and other housing professionals within Ipswich
- That there is a general desire and need to re-establish an Ipswich Housing Forum that meets regularly.

Challenges

A number of specific challenges were identified for each priority area:

1) The prevention of homelessness locally includes:

- Accessing private rented accommodation as an alternative to becoming homeless and the possibility of living in temporary accommodation.
- Increase in single homelessness & homelessness generally (rough sleeping)
- Dual diagnosis and complex needs single homeless people and accessing suitable accommodation for them.
- Changes to mental health & learning disability thresholds
- Out of area placements impacting on local resources
- No recourse to public funds cases (roughly one third of those sleeping rough?)
- Private sector conditions

2) Meeting the needs of communities, vulnerable people and those in need of support locally include:

- Sheltered product across the town is dated – there is now an emphasis on residents remaining in their homes longer and therefore needs are more complex if entering sheltered much later in life. Suffolk County Council specialist accommodation review will inform the direction in this and similar areas.
- Demand & demography changing there are 1500 on the housing register in identified need and social housing cannot accommodate that volume.
- Working with Public Health and opening up the conversations
- Distinct lack of communication between services
- Will Housing Associations (HAs) move away from social rented towards low costs home ownership?
- Will IBC be sole social housing provider?
- Housing Related Support (HRS) Review – this is a major review of HRS services within county. This is currently being undertaken and the outcome unknown.
- Young people who are care leavers are having support cut at 21 (previously 25) which will see this category of vulnerable people either unsupported or needing support from adult care services, increasing the demand there.

3) Making the best use of and increasing access to existing stock locally include:

- There are a number of challenges around accessing affordable private rented accommodation:
    - Cost to tenants
    - Making tenants in need attractive to landlords who need to consider:
    - Wanting long term tenancies
    - Effects of leaving Brexit
    - Need for flexible tenancies (6 months/2 years/5 years)
    - More advice needed for prospective landlords (HMO's in particular) to invest
    - Landlords won't buy 'over 55's' accommodation to rent out
    - Need more stock across all property types
- There are a number of challenges around accessing affordable Social Housing
    - Housing Associations
    - Meeting standards (National Policy) size criteria
    - 1 + 2 bed in demand, bedroom tax effect, under 35 shared room rate (stock profiles do not meet current demand)
    - Demand for sheltered housing – it has been difficult to let the current offer with the changing aspirations of the older population
    - Pensioners in large properties with no incentives to downsize

4) Increasing the supply of affordable housing locally includes:

- Managing uncertainty surrounding the forms of 'affordable housing' that will be provided by developers and registered social landlords in light of changing definitions and funding conditions.
- Continuing to build positive working relationships with private developers and registered social landlords (RSLs)

- Reducing levels of uncertainty for developers by, where possible, minimizing pre-commencement conditions and considering the importance of phasing / viability in order to convert permissions into completions.
- Understanding the implications that high infrastructure costs may have on the ability of new developments to deliver high levels of affordable housing.
- Meeting the challenge of Ipswich's constrained geography to ensure that sufficient land is brought forward for development.
- Tackling the skills-gap that exists in the local building sector, a legacy of the exodus and retraining that occurred as a result of the 2007 economic downturn.

Conclusion

The feedback forms completed by delegates showed a generally high level of satisfaction as to the usefulness of the day and the structure of the day. All delegates reported that their knowledge surrounding housing issues in Ipswich had increased. Delegates further used the feedback forms to reiterate their interest in establishing a new Ipswich Housing Forum.

These combined outcomes show that the delegates valued the opportunity to meet with other housing professionals outside of their individual sectors and a commitment has already been expressed by the vast number of delegates to build upon these working relationships by partaking in a structured housing forum to address key challenges in a partnership. Delegates responded that they would have appreciated more workshop time and the opportunity to participate in more than one workshop. This is a recommendation that can be factored into the development of the 2017 event. The feedback from delegates highlighting the need for continued communication indicates that the public consultation period of the Housing Strategy should prove fruitful and time should be factored in to allow for analysis following the closing of the consultation period.