

REPORT TO: CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING 18th JULY 2008

REPORT BY: ALAN CUFLEY, HEAD OF COMMUNITY HOUSING

WRITTEN BY: HAZEL HINE, CORPORATE INITIATIVES MANAGER,

**SUBJECT: COMMUNITY HOUSING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES
PROGRAMME UPDATE**

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide an update on progress in developing and implementing the housing sustainable communities programme, including an outline of achievements since the last report.

Recommendations:

1. That the work undertaken so far on the development and implementation of the housing sustainable communities programme be noted and supported.
2. That the Housing Carbon Challenge Action Plan be approved and
3. that a further report be brought forward on resource implications and progress at a future date.
4. That the "Green and Keen" resident training programme on housing sustainability be extended subject to identifying appropriate finance
5. That a report be brought forward on the achievements of the John Pounds development later in the year.

Background

The report to the Cabinet Member for Housing of 19th July 2007 set out the programme of work which had been initiated by the Corporate Initiatives Section in Community Housing to address issues connected with the sustainable communities agenda across the then Directorate of Health, Housing and Social Care.

It noted progress, including the setting up of the Housing Carbon Challenge Group. This Group promotes corporate working, for all housing types and tenures, related to sustainability.

The report also highlighted the disproportionately negative effect on vulnerable people of issues relating to climate change and sustainability.

Since that time, work has continued. A reorganisation of directorates has led to increased emphasis on the strategic role of Community Housing. The approved Community Housing Business Plan recognises this and the significance of housing in developing sustainable communities.

This report is to update the Cabinet Member for Housing on progress with the sustainable communities programme in the last year.

1. A rapidly evolving agenda

Since the last report there has been a substantial amount of new legislation and policy as well as philosophical and technological development, related to sustainable communities. Keeping up with these advances and changes is a major challenge.

Appendix 1 lists some of the legislation and ideas coming from national policy, local strategies and influential bodies and indicates the complexity of developing a coherent and practical response.

It is clear that the sustainable communities approach to housing is now a key driver of both policy and funding and that the council needs to ensure it is reflecting this in its own strategies and initiatives.

2. Relevant factors for the sustainable communities and housing programme:

- a) Sustainable Communities can only be achieved by taking an integrated approach to the design and planning of housing, the lifestyles of residents and the infrastructure and sustainability of the environments and communities within which it exists. Sustainability is not just an energy or carbon issue for housing, but is about *Place Making*.
- b) Housing plays a pivotal role in most social, cultural and economic aspects of sustainable communities, including community cohesion.
- c) The government's view is that a lack of housing in general and affordable housing in particular is having an adverse effect on the economy. It wants to see more housing built more quickly and to high environmental standards. At the same time there is a wish to address social equity by ensuring everyone is decently housed.
- d) In addressing environmental sustainability and carbon emissions, lifestyle issues are key. The average UK carbon emissions per household in existing homes are 6 tonnes p.a. (average UK car carbon emissions are 3 tonnes pa. In other words a 2 car household can emit as much from their cars as from running their home). Therefore the environmental impact of individual homes must be considered in the context of wider patterns of behaviour: the choices around food consumption and the means of travelling to work, leisure facilities, shopping and holidays collectively outweigh the impact of buildings alone.
- e) Mitigating the future impact of climatic extremes on housing also needs to be taken into account.
- f) Recent national surveys (and ones undertaken relatively recently in connection with housing improvements) indicate a high level of cynicism about carbon emissions. Public perceptions must be addressed in order to make an impact on targets for carbon reduction There are increasingly strong financial arguments in favour of living in more environmentally friendly ways. But there is a strong argument that taking a sustainable

- communities approach, by making better places for everyone and addressing quality of life issues, offers the most constructive way forwards.
- g) Local change, making areas better places in which to live, and global change, addressing all relevant issues, are both needed to make an impact on carbon emissions and to respond to future climatic extremes.
 - h) Maintenance and management issues are an essential part of sustainability. This includes considering the ability and willingness of residents to use and maintain new technology as well as new ways for the community to manage and maintain the housing areas in which they live.
 - i) True sustainability depends upon learning from lessons and modifying future approaches accordingly. It is a steep learning curve for everyone.
 - j) The Egan review of skills related to sustainable communities recognised a lack in the skills, knowledge and understanding to create lasting communities.

The factors above indicate a very broad agenda for housing.

3. John Pounds Development

3.1 Background

The Community Housing Business Plan highlights the significance of the John Pounds development in:

- a) creating a local pride within a community
- b) illustrating a way in which housing can take a lead role and support sustainable communities and regeneration whilst being a catalyst for change which addresses a wide range of issues, including healthy living and lifelong learning
- c) promoting sustainable solutions e.g. through community management and by encouraging “green” access.

The business plan therefore places an emphasis upon further supporting the sustainability of activities at the John Pounds Centre and upon developing a programme of learning and follow-on activities.

3.2 Achievements.

3.2.1 A report will be brought forward later in the year on the achievements of the whole development, following an evaluation during the summer.

3.2.2. Creation of new housing: 2008 will see the completion of all 153 units of housing on the various development sites:
Site One (former Delaval House): 39 no. affordable 1 and 2 bed flats, both rented and shared ownership , with 1 bed flats capped at £115k and 2 beds at £135k (rented element capped at 40% instead of 50%).
Site Two (former JPC): 83no. 1 and 2 bed flats, of which 26 are affordable (incl. 7 shared ownership), the remainder being sold on the open market.
Site Three (former youth club): 31no. 1 and 2 bed flats, all sold on the open market.

3.2.3 General trends from monitoring at the John Pounds Centre illustrate a good take-up of activities by priority groups, including by local residents, and a high level of user satisfaction. Data also shows an increase in requests for housing transfers into Portsea. Although there could be many other factors involved, this does indicate that the area is now viewed in a positive light compared to when work started. More detailed feedback on findings will be given with the later report.

4 The Housing Carbon Challenge Group

4.1 Background

This group was set up in spring 2007 to encourage corporate working related to housing sustainability. Its objectives are based upon those of the national English Partnerships “Carbon Challenge” Initiative. *The important difference, however, is that it includes sustainability for existing housing, which is not included in the English Partnerships scheme. Existing housing creates the greatest challenges. By 2016 at least 80% of the nation’s housing stock will be those homes currently in existence.*

The evolving Housing Carbon Challenge Group Action Plan is set out at Appendix 2.

An explanation of the Code for Sustainable Homes is set out at Appendix 3. Housing Corporation funding in future will be linked to the Code.

4.2 Purpose and Objectives of the Housing Carbon Challenge Group

Purpose: “By working together, to create and implement an action plan for improving the environmental performance of all housing in or owned by the city, to levels which meet or improve on national targets”

Objectives:

- a) To raise environmental standards for new housing to Level 6 of the Code for Sustainable Homes by 2016
- b) To raise environmental standards for existing housing
- c) To deliver and promote high quality design in existing and new homes, combined with exceptional environmental performance
- d) To identify opportunities for micro-generation and other innovative approaches to energy use
- e) To drive down construction and supply chain costs through economies of scale
- f) To incorporate lifestyle features that cut emissions within the community through good design that encourages behavioural change in the use of electrical appliances and include changes in transport, waste collection and food delivery.
- g) To ensure that affordable and low cost homes are included, especially for families

- h) To do the above whilst meeting agreed benchmarks which encourage urban housing design quality, community engagement, access for the elderly and people with disabilities, good public spaces, sound delivery arrangements and long-term management.

*The emphasis of the Group is upon supporting each other to take **practical** actions, reviewing and addressing **gaps** and **barriers** and producing **recommendations** for future work.*

4.3 Achievements

The work of the Housing Carbon Challenge Group is wide-ranging across the city council's activities. Members of the group also belong to a variety of external groups representing housing providers, contractors, residents and sustainability groups. The work of this group also feeds into a number of strategies including the Corporate Sustainability Strategy and planning strategies related to LDF and PUSH.

Achievements to date include:

- Joint response to consultations (including Green Paper on Housing 2007)
- Staff awareness training including attendance at seminars, visiting BRE "Offsite" exhibition, training and information exchanges about the Code for Sustainable Homes.
- Resident sustainability training: first "Green and Keen" resident training course held and further courses proposed. Learners will act as housing advisors. (Appendix 4)
- Trials of renewable energy generation on council housing premises, some with external grant funding
- Pilot scheme for council area housing offices ("Greener Offices") to reduce waste (Appendix 6)
- Work with Housing Associations on developing model sites in Portsmouth
- Action Plan being prepared for improving the take-up of insulation etc measures in private sector housing
- Work on addressing infrastructure issues related to lifestyles e.g. joint work with affordable housing providers to discourage car use through green access plans for John Pounds Centre and Cumberland Gate (Appendix 5)

4.4 Future Work (see Action Plan appendix 2) **includes:**

- Supporting private sector housing improvements and developing greater community engagement with this, linking to the private sector housing strategy, including looking at sustainability targets.
- Developing the "Green and Keen" training further, both to ensure learners have an input to future housing sustainability improvements and to extend it into the private sector. In particular, examining this as one potential vehicle for looking at issues where a collective approach is needed e.g. on housing blocks and in streets.

- Conducting a Training Needs Assessment
- Improving the information available locally to staff, residents, builders and other existing and potential partners about housing sustainability.
- Reviewing the wider environmental implications of the Code for Sustainable Homes as well as its possible impact on housing supply.
- Examining new and integrated approaches to energy generation for housing at micro, local and district levels as well as “passive” housing with low energy demands.
- Looking at other key lifestyle issues, including the connections between homes, food and travel.
- Exploration of possible further initiatives with external funding, housing providers etc.

4.5 Challenges and Conclusions

- 4.5.1 Technological and other innovations may need multiple approvals and face restraints imposed by existing regulatory systems which are slow to change (including Building Regulations, EU directives etc)
- 4.5.2 An increasing amount of technical expertise is required, particularly by staff involved with planning and design, in order to be able to assess the implications of new approaches.
- 4.5.3 There are difficulties in keeping abreast of a rapidly, almost daily, changing policy environment, which has a knock-on effect on aspects of housing e.g. 26/06/08 Prime Minister announced 15% energy must come from renewable sources by 2020.
- 4.5.4. Timescales for action to reduce carbon emissions, especially for existing housing, are short.
- 4.5.5. At the moment, there are few national incentives for existing housing improvement, whereas requirements for new housing are at least covered by legislation.
- 4.5.4. There is a lack of dedicated resources to cover the significant current and evolving sustainable communities agenda related to housing.

5.0 CITY SOLICITOR’S COMMENTS

The City Solicitors considers that the recommendations are within the powers of the Cabinet Member to approve.

An Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken

6.0 SIGNING OFF THE REPORT

Signed.....
Alan Cufley, Head of Community Housing

Dated.....

7.0 APPROVAL TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations set out above were approved / approved as amended / deferred / rejected by the Cabinet Member for Housing on.....

Signed.....
Councillor Steve Wylie
Cabinet Member - Housing

Appendices:

- Appendix 1 Legislative and policy influences
- Appendix 2 Housing Carbon Challenge Group Action Plan
- Appendix 3 Code for Sustainable Homes
- Appendix 4 “Green and Keen” training course
- Appendix 5 Green access plans for John Pounds and Cumberland Gate
- Appendix 6 “Greener Offices”