

JOINT AUTHORITY SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP: WEST CUMBRIA
STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP “AFFORDABLE HOUSING” TASK AND
FINISH GROUP - 13 NOVEMBER 2007

Present:

Cllr Peter Connolly	Copeland Borough Council
Cllr Ray Cole	Cumbria County Council
Cllr Keith Hitchen	Copeland Borough Council
Jane Murray (Scrutiny Officer)	Allerdale Borough Council
Kim Suttle (Housing Services Manager)	Allerdale Borough Council
Neil White (Scrutiny Officer)	Copeland Borough Council

Apologies:

Cllr Ron Munby	Allerdale Borough Council
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1. **Chairmanship**

It was proposed, seconded and

AGREED – that Councillor Peter Connolly be elected Chair.

2. **Introduction to “Affordable Housing” in West Cumbria**

The Joint Scrutiny Task and Finish Group received an overview of affordable housing issues in West Cumbria from Kim Suttle.

The Group noted that Cumbria County Council had looked at the affordable housing needs in the major towns in Cumbria through the Regional Spatial Strategy. Allerdale had however produced H maps which showed Housing Market Assessments for areas within the borough that gave a better understanding of the areas where the need for affordable housing was acute. It also allowed for an assessment to be made of the housing stock against the population and housing need.

Allerdale had two full time members of staff dedicated to producing the H maps. Copeland were yet to produce such maps and did not have the staff established to do this work. The benefits of the maps were in their evidence nature that made it much easier to not only assess need but challenge development to ensure that the right mix of development is provided.

The Group were informed that some Parish Councils had expressed their concern at having Socially Rented Housing in the Parish. The Group considered the different priorities of the Registered Social Landlords in Allerdale and Copeland in dealing with homeless cases and the way in which the Councils spent their Housing Investment Programme funding. It was noted that the County Planning Officers Group had agreed that all the councils in Cumbria should be more directive on this issue.

The Group considered that the mechanism for achieving housing affordable to local people was through the use of Section 106 agreements in the planning process. Whilst this was difficult to do in individual villages it could be possible where a number of villages were considered together as a local service centre.

3. **Housing Policies and Strategies relevant to Affordable Housing in West Cumbria**

The Task and Finish Group considered the references to affordable housing in the Sustainable Communities Strategy for West Cumbria, Cumbria Housing Strategy; Cumbria Structure Plan and information from the Lake District National Park Authority.

The Group felt that it was important for the links from these policies to be incorporated into the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Local Strategic Partnership Strategy.

The Group noted that Allerdale planned to do some scrutiny work on how to reduce the use of bed and breakfast for new homeless cases.

The Group queried what enforcement work has been done with empty properties. It was noted that local authorities were responsible for derelict buildings under Section 79 of the Buildings Act 1984. Where it involved listed buildings or properties in conservation areas there was a choice between demolition and renovation.

The Group felt that the views of the Lake District National Park Authority would be important and it would be appropriate to include them in the ongoing work on affordable housing.

4. **Terms of Reference**

The Task and Finish Group considered its terms of reference.

The Group noted that the part of the action plan from the Cumbrian Housing Strategy that dealt with Affordable Housing had now been updated and it would be appropriate at this stage for the progress on the action plan to be monitored.

The Group felt that Copeland did not currently have the resources to provide enough information on affordable housing which would mean that any further work would not properly cover the whole of West Cumbria. It was crucial for work on affordable housing to be backed up with sufficient evidence before policy decisions could be taken.

In light of this the Group considered that it should not meet again for six months whilst progress on the action plan and the Regional Spatial Strategy was monitored. The opportunity, at that time, could be taken to reassess the

resources of the councils and whether it would be appropriate for the group to do further work.

The Group further considered that it would be useful to share information between the authorities on rural Section 106 agreements particularly whether it had been possible to achieve housing affordable to local people through this process.

The meeting finished at 12.00