

## **Report of the Cabinet Member for Policy, Corporate and Asset Management**

I have been asked to report as follows for Full Council on 16 February 2023:

1. By **Councillor Hannaford** on the work of the Devon Housing Task Force and Council Tax Premium.
2. By **Councillor Hannaford** on the Devon Devolution Deal.

### **Response**

1. **Housing Task Force**

#### **Update on the Devon Housing Forum**

Following discussions at Council in December 2021 (minute \*68 refers), Cabinet subsequently resolved to work with Team Devon to create a Devon Housing Task Force.

The Devon Housing Task Force was formed in May 2022 in response to the housing crisis across many parts of the County with the consent of all the Leaders of the Devon, Plymouth and Torbay local authorities.

The Devon Housing Task Force is a member-led, cross party task force representing the eleven local authorities across the County. It is chaired by Councillor Judy Pearce (leader of South Hams District Council) with the following Members Councillor Ken James (Torridge Council), Councillor Swithin Long (Torbay Council), Councillor Rebecca Smith (Plymouth City Council) and Laura Wright (Exeter City Council).

The Task Force is supported by the lead Chief Executive for housing under the Devon Deal - Stephen Walford (Mid Devon) alongside Ken Miles (North Devon) and Andy Bates (South Hams and West Devon). Devon County Council provides secretariat support to the Task Force.

The Task Force provides regular update reports and engages with the leaders of the local authorities to receive its mandate to operate. Its role is not to interfere with the statutory duties of the individual housing authorities but to bring collective understanding of the common issues impacting across the County, share intelligence and learning on challenges, and to provide a strong platform for influencing positive change.

#### **2. Task Force Objectives**

The Task Force objectives are set out in its Terms of Reference:

- Understanding the pan-Devon picture (including Plymouth and Torbay) to inform the County Deal and other representations to Government
- Feeding into appropriate housing consultations by Govt – such as recent DCMS consultation on a registration scheme for holiday lets
- Exploring how Devon can stimulate/accelerate community based projects such as Community Land Trusts
- Liaising with MPs to reflect their priorities and the those of the authorities on housing
- Initiate the Devon Housing Commission – led by Exeter University
- Increasing visibility of ‘houses vs homes’ picture and the various financial, taxation and regulatory levers that are having perverse impact on our communities

### **3. Asks of Government**

Overall, to provide greater local control for the effective management of local housing markets including:

- Licensing of short-term letting market (DCMS consultation)
- Change of use (planning consent) needed when a property changes use from a ‘home’ to a commercial asset
- Significantly increase the second home council tax premium (Welsh model)
- Properly resource planning departments (can be done through fee flexibility to ensure fees cover costs, i.e. not just ‘grant’ to councils)
- Local flexibility on right to buy discounts and all receipts to be retained locally for new housebuilding
- Bids, bids, bids... and better alignment with Homes England affordable housing delivery programme
- Further funding rounds for Community Land Trusts

With regards to Council Tax premium on second homes we are aware that the Levelling Up Bill has provision for Councils to be able to charge an additional 100% of Council Tax to second homeowners. If this legislation is passed it will be up to the eight district councils and the two unitary authorities, as the Devon Council Tax Billing authorities, in Devon to consider if they would apply this premium.

The Devon Housing Task Force and Devon County Council will support authorities to apply this premium if this provision passes into law.

### **4. Work by the Task Force:**

Since May 2022 the Task Force has undertaken the following work in pursuit of its objectives:

- Agreed a political framework and priorities with the Members of the Task Force to guide discussions and formulate ‘asks’ of Government
- Literature Review of Housing
- Entered into working arrangements with the senior team at the LGA to influence lobbying on Local Housing Allowance uplift, Community Land

Trusts, Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, Renters Reform Bill and aligning lobbying responses

- Responded to DCMS/DLUHC on the need for a registration scheme for holiday lets to support the wider housing market with acknowledgement from the new Housing Minister of potential inclusion in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill
- Sought engagement with the reappointed Secretary of State DLUHC and new Housing Minister on Devon's housing priorities
- Collated housing data across the partnership to understand local housing markets and demand and supply pressures
- Engaged with Community Land Trust networks to lobby for further investment in the model
- Appeared at the House of Lords Built Environment Select Committee to give evidence on impact of holiday lets and second homes and the wider housing system pressures
- Presented alongside the ICB Co-Chair on importance of housing impacts on health to Devon MPs with requests to support joint asks
- Presented at the annual Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) conference to foster engagement with the 300+ Devon Town and Parish Councils regarding housing need
- Ongoing discussions with Devon MPs
- Engagement with DLUHC housing strategy officials on housing market issues
- Sought to understand the housing challenges of sector-specific industries; particularly the NHS and wider social care system
- Aligned thinking, awareness and action on associated housing pressures such as refugee and asylum and supporting the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme
- Exploring the issues, challenges and investment pipeline in the registered provider sector

## 5. Focus moving forward:

One of the key objectives of the Task Force was to establish and oversee the work of the Devon **Housing Commission**. With funding from Exeter University and the eleven local authorities, the independently chaired Commission will draw on a panel of experts to:

- Develop a clear picture of the problems across local housing markets and tenure types across geographic Devon with a wide-range of engagement and evidence gathering from communities, experts and partner agencies.
- Understand the future need for housing supply, tenure types and use that will aid the wider outcomes of prosperity, economic growth and social mobility
- Provide recommendations for social and housing policy changes required to respond to the crisis over the next decade
- Provide some practical recommendations that help to deliver, through cross partner collaboration improvement in stock use,

supply and tenure type and improving the quality of stock in line with our health and carbon reduction objectives.

The exact terms of reference and work programme will be determined once the Chair and Programme Director are in place.

The Commission will start its work by April 2023 and the University is currently recruiting to the role of Programme Director and Chair. The Commission is for a fixed twelve month timeline with its final report coming to the Devon Housing Task Force and all member authorities in early 2024.

There will be a communication plan agreed as part of this work and Members alongside the public will be kept up to speed with the work of the Commission.

2. **Devolution** - The Leader will respond verbally to this report request.

**Councillor John Hart**

Cabinet Member for Policy, Corporate and Asset Management