



Mr Vincent Paliczka
Director of Environment, Culture and Communities
Bracknell Forest Council
Time Square
Market Street
Bracknell
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RG12 1JD

Date: 1/06/2009

Dear Mr Paliczka

REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S HOUSING STRATEGY BY A WORKING GROUP OF THE ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Further to my letter of 13 May, conveying the detailed comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Working Group on the Housing Strategy, I am now writing to give the group's comments on the specific issues on which you invited our views.

(i) Does the Working Group agree with the strategy and the direction of travel proposed in it?

The Working Group (WG) agrees with the strategy, also the direction of travel proposed in it, subject to the points made in my letter to you of 13 May.

(ii) There are four strands to the strategy - are these appropriate for BFC?

The WG concluded that, subject to the following points, the four strands are appropriate for BFC.

- a) The term 'vulnerable' could usefully be explained more fully, for example it includes ex-offenders.
- b) In relation to 'vibrant housing', the WG noted with some concern that the government's new South East Plan requires an increase from 11,000 to 13,000 new homes in the borough during the period 2006-26. The Chief Officer advised us that the strategy will be revised, also the Council's wider strategic plan. Similarly, the viability analysis for the percentage of affordable homes on new developments (which was recommended to increase to 35% in the new South East Plan) will be revised.
- c) The WG considered that the headings in the statement of strategic priorities, though necessarily brief, could usefully be amended to better describe the Council's enabler/facilitator role, since as stated the headings related more to the pre-2008

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position (i.e. before the Large Scale Voluntary Transfer) when the Council was a social housing landlord.

- (iii) The future Affordable Housing Policy is trailed in advance of its formal adoption process through the Local Development Scheme – is the Group supportive of this or should it be something else?

The WG noted that the policy proposed an overall 25% requirement for affordable housing, but varying between individual developments depending on the viability of each one. Actual delivery of these was also dependent on the amount of Social Housing Grant available. The WG discussed the possible disincentive to future housing development if the percentage requirement was to be increased, consequent on the new South East Plan. The WG was supportive of the future Affordable Housing Policy provided it took account of this point.

- (iv) The strategy identifies how the Council intend to spend £17m - is this the right plan?

The WG concluded that the intended usage of the £17m stock transfer receipts as set out in the strategy is appropriate.

- (v) Private Sector Housing Provision is discussed - is this the right approach?

The WG observed that the current market conditions are very difficult for private sector housing development, and that it was not possible to predict the future position. The WG concluded that the approach set out in the strategy was sound.

We note that the Strategy is currently the subject of public consultation, and we therefore ask that the Working Group's comments are also taken into account as part of the response to the consultation.

As Overview and Scrutiny usually make recommendations directly to the Executive, I am copying this letter to Councillor Birch for information, as the Executive Member concerned.

With best wishes,

Councillor James Finnie
Lead Member of the Working Group

Copies to: Councillors Mrs Fleming and Finch
Councillor Dale Birch, Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing
Chief Officer: Housing

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