

# **Slough Housing Options Appraisal**

## **Independent Tenant Advisor communication and consultation report**

### **Executive Summary**

#### **Process**

1. The Consultation has been fair and accurate, with opportunities, including through the Conference, for tenant and leaseholder input.
2. The engagement of tenants and leaseholders in the Commissioners Consultative Group (CCG) and Resident Consultative Group (RCG) has meant a focus on tenants and leaseholder issues.
3. The level of engagement, although encouraging, remains low.
4. Involved tenants and leaseholders have been gain valuable experience. This should be continued with the next steps in the Option Appraisal.

#### **Option Appraisal**

5. Tenants and Leaseholders have been clear about the need to maintain properties and improve services.
6. There was support for new build, but that it should meet demand, be affordable and be of a good standard. The Council should consider how it gets enough land and using modern methods of construction.
7. New Slough homes should be for Slough residents.
8. Institutional Investment was seen as a preferred option but with a fuller understanding of what was involved including the risks.
9. There was a more nuanced reaction to shared ownership including a need to provide clarity on what was involved.
10. There was support for bidding for new homes for social rent from the Government's recently announced £2bn funding for social rented housing.
11. The need for coverage of older and vulnerable people in new build.
12. The Council should adopt an involvement policy for redevelopment sites.
13. There was interest in future involvement of tenants and leaseholders.

## **Background**

14. Phil Morgan was commissioned by Slough Borough Council to act as the Independent Tenant Advisor (ITA) for the Slough Housing Options Appraisal. He had previously carried out a review of co-regulation, resident involvement and scrutiny for the Council.
15. This was not a 'traditional' option appraisal, looking at stock transfer, housing management, PFI and retention options. Instead it was clear from the start that a wider range of options would be considered.

## **Approach**

16. The ITA role included three main objectives
  - To support Slough BC in its consultation of the Option Appraisal
  - To ensure that the consultation is informed and fair
  - To provide independent advice and guidance to the RCG

## **Resident Consultative Group**

17. The ITA drew up terms of reference and a person specification for the RCG. He interviewed 6 residents with a Resident Board member and the Information and Participation Manager (IPM). Five of these were successful, although only four attended meetings. When one dropped out a member of the Resident Board, and two tenants also joined, making six members. The ITA initially facilitated the RCG and mentored Jayde Cripps as Chair of the RCG. He also provided training on the Housing Revenue Account, Option Appraisals and Charing Skills. The IPM provided training on Slough Housing.
18. The Project Manager attended all RCG meetings providing an important route of information about the Option Appraisal. Resident Board members of the CCG also attended some RCG meetings.

## **Tenant Tests**

19. The ITA facilitated a discussion with RCG and Resident Board Members of the CCG on how tenant and leaseholders concerns were taken into account during the Options Appraisal process. They agreed five "tenant tests". The outcome of these tests against the options is included in the Savills report.

## **Commissioners Consultative Group**

20. The ITA advised on the Terms of Reference for the CCG and interviewed the prospective Resident Board members of the CCG with

the IPM. He provided mentoring sessions for the Resident Board members on the CCG, with briefings before and after mentoring session, and further briefings after CCG meetings.

21. The ITA attended CCG meetings and advised on communication and engagement, including the adoption of the Communication and Empowerment Strategy that he prepared with the support of the IPM and Communications Officer.

### **Communication and Empowerment Strategy**

22. This strategy set out two objectives:

- That tenants and leaseholders understand the issues and
- Tenants and leaseholders are involved in decision-making.

23. The strategy was drawn from Government advice and good practice and commented upon by the RCG. It set out how the Council was going to inform and engage tenants and leaseholders. This included a Newsletter, social media and a Conference, accessible to all tenants and leaseholders. It also included a Tenant Focus Group and two Leaseholder Focus Groups attended by 40 leaseholders.

24. The Strategy set out clear reasons for the Option Appraisal, Questions and Answers and the methods to be used. There were Action Plans for both the Strategy and the Conference. The ITA prepared a 2-page summary of the Option Appraisal for the Conference, with comments from the RCG and others, as agreed by the CCG. This was an important symbol of the Council's openness and transparency.

### **Tenant and Leaseholder Conference**

25. About 50 tenants and leaseholders attended a Conference on 28<sup>th</sup> October. The ITA facilitated the Conference, which covered the Option Appraisal, including the two main options under consideration, and the appointment of Osborne as the Repairs, Maintenance and Investment contractor. The inclusion of the two main options was another important symbol of the Council's openness and transparency.

26. Feedback from the Conference was good to very good.

### **Messages from the Conference and Consultation**

27. The strongest single message from the Conference was that the Council should continue to ensure it maintains its existing properties.

This was also supported by the feedback from the two Leaseholder Forum discussions.

28. There was support for new build, but that it should meet demand, be affordable and be of a good standard. The Council should consider how it gets enough land and using modern methods of construction.
29. There was a clear message that new Slough homes should be for Slough residents.
30. Institutional Investment was seen as a preferred option but there was concern about ensuring a full understanding of what was involved including the risks.
31. There was a more nuanced reaction to shared ownership including a need to provide clarity on what was involved.
32. There was support for bidding for social rent from the Government's recently announced £2bn funding for new social housing.
33. There was also concern about coverage for older and vulnerable people in new build reflected in other feedback from the Conference, the Tenant Focus Group and the RCG.
34. The RCG are aware of the Council's interest in redevelopment of sites identified through the Asset Performance Evaluation. Although not directly covered at the Conference (where it would have been premature) the RCG have flagged up that an involvement approach is drawn up before tenants and leaseholders are informed of the Council's plans.
35. Underpinning all of this was interest in transparency to and involvement of tenants and leaseholders going forward from the Conference and the RCG.

Phil Morgan  
1<sup>st</sup> November 2017