

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel

**DATE:** 5<sup>th</sup> September 2019

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**WARD(S):** All

### **PART I FOR COMMENT AND CONSIDERATION**

#### **Key Worker Housing**

##### **1. Purpose of Report**

This report provides scrutiny with an update on key worker housing and progress made via a pilot scheme currently underway.

##### **2. Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

The Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel is requested to note this report and the ongoing work with this particular group.

##### **3. The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**

###### **3a. Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

Housing is one of the key priorities of Slough's Joint Wellbeing Strategy (SJWS). It contributes to reducing inequalities in health through access to high quality housing. There are clear links between housing and the JSNA priorities around improving health conditions so people can manage their own health and wellbeing and live independently in their communities. Slough is also committed to providing the public services required by residents. It is recognised, however, that securing key workers is adversely impacted by the high cost of housing in the Borough.

###### **3b. Five Year Plan Outcomes**

Outcome 4 of the Five Year Plan states: "Our residents will live in good quality homes".

Key workers may not qualify under the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme for social housing and are therefore more likely to rely on the private rented sector for rented homes. This is why the pilot is offering homes through the Council's housing company, James Elliman Homes.

###### **3c. Housing Strategy**

Slough's Housing Strategy 2016-2021 sets out the council's shared vision and priorities to provide sufficient, good quality, affordable housing.

The strategy includes a priority to deliver homes that people can afford, which is supported by the provision of affordable properties that are suitable for key workers. The current Housing Strategy is now out of date and the Council has commissioned consultants to refresh/rewrite the strategy. This is due for completion around December 2019.

#### 4. **Other Implications**

##### (a) Financial

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

##### (b) Risk Management

There are no risk management implications arising from this report.

##### (c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights or other Legal Implications directly arising from this report. However, it must be noted that those households who may be allocated accommodation under the key worker scheme, may not attract sufficient priority if they were to be allocated accommodation through the normal housing register route.

##### (d) Equalities Impact Assessment

The Council has a public sector duty under the Equalities Act 2010 to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and to promote equality of opportunity to all persons and to those who share a protected characteristic under the legislation. It is considered that an equalities impact assessment is not necessary for this report.

##### (e) Workforce

There is likely to be a positive impact of any key worker accepting a property under this scheme. Although James Elliman Homes can only offer assured shorthold tenancies, the type and quality of accommodation is genuinely of a better standard than that in the private sector. Successful tenants will also resolve their housing need issues and they will, it is assumed, be happier in their work place.

#### 5. **Supporting Information**

5.1 Slough has one dedicated Intermediate Rent Scheme for key workers. It is located at Regional House, High Street, Slough. This scheme is owned and managed by A2 Dominion Housing Association with all nomination rights for vacancies, in the first instance, to Slough Borough Council. The scheme has been running for approximately ten years.

5.2 The Housing Service is currently trialing a pilot scheme for key workers who are:

- Qualified teachers or social workers (although we have only been dealing with teachers at present) employed by Slough Borough Council;
- have a contract or offer of employment for at least twelve months and
- must be employed for a minimum of 18 hours per week.

- 5.3 The pilot scheme, although not confined to private sector properties, started with six new build properties. These are a mix of 1, 2 & 3 bedroom flats, at Stoke Road which are owned and managed by James Elliman Homes, the Council's housing company. Rental for these properties is calculated on Slough Living Rent, which is currently no higher than 80% of the open market rent. The Council reserves the right to end any assured shorthold tenancy should employment with the council cease.
- 5.4 The properties at Stoke Road were directly marketed through the schools, and interested key workers were able to complete a Key Worker Housing Application Form. This was on a first-come, first-served basis. To date, take up on the scheme has been minimal. There have been only two confirmed allocations. Five applicants either declined an offer of property or could not be considered for the following reasons:
- Couple asking for a 2 bedroom property with parking spaces for 2 cars – unable to help (only eligible for one bedroom accommodation);
  - Couple with 2 children – refused offer of 2 bedroom property (eligible for a two bed);
  - Couple with 2 children – refused offer of 2 bedroom property wanting 3 bedrooms with parking (eligible for a two bed);
  - Single applicant with 2 children – refused offer of 2 bedroom property (eligible for two bed) and
  - Couple with 2 children – refused offer of 3 bedroom flat as wants house only.

## **6. The Scheme Going Forward**

- 6.1 Although the scheme is still in its pilot phase, a number of things should be noted about the Stoke Road properties. The properties were marketed to teachers in August 2018 and they only became ready to occupy in June 2019. There were big delays associated with snagging, landscaping and other legal issues. As a result of this, a number of the original key workers had found their own accommodation or were unable to be contacted.
- 6.2 The administration of the scheme has been difficult. Schools only wanted to be responsible for minimal administration and therefore a basic system was put in place, which enabled the scheme to progress. Housing did not want to be responsible for managing a key worker waiting list, with the issues of managing demand and expectations.
- 6.3 Given the information available from the refusal of some of the properties at Stoke Road, key workers seem to have expectations, which may be seen to be reasonable but not so in the context of social housing. The properties at Stoke Road were bought from the Developer as the Section 106 Affordable Housing Contribution for the general scheme. These were bought through the Council's Housing Company, James Elliman Homes, who will offer Assured Shorthold Tenancies and will also manage them.
- 6.4 The properties had white goods supplied, which is something not available in Council owned properties. The properties are in the private sector but they represent better quality than would be generally available in the private sector within the price range, which is on average £680 (Slough Living Rent) a month. Taking into account the key

workers who accepted these properties, were couples, this represents very affordable access to accommodation.

- 6.5 James Elliman Homes has bought 15 different flats on the same Stoke Road Development although a different phase. These properties are likely to be available at the beginning of October 2019, however, there is a site visit being organised to ensure the same issues of delay are not experienced as previously. There is an intention that at least 10 of these units are made available for key workers depending on take-up. Officers will broaden the pool of key workers available by extending the scheme to social workers in Adults and Communities and the Children's Trust.

## **7. Conclusion**

- 7.1 The pilot Key Worker Scheme launched last year has not had much success but this was due in the main to the development at Stoke Road being delayed for almost a year. Coupled with some administration issues with schools, officers believe that the issues have now been resolved and will wait and see the outcomes of the next phase of properties, which will become available in October 2019.
- 7.2 Unfortunately, our experience is that key workers, like those households on the housing register have high expectations. Some have seen this as an opportunity to leave the private sector and move into a council property. This being the case, however, officers must ensure that, given the different priority system, that offers to key workers are as consistent and as fair as possible.

## **8. Appendices Attached (if any)**

None.