



Introduction

Wheatley Group is pleased to offer comments on West Dunbartonshire's Local Housing Strategy 2017 – 2022 First Consultative Draft.

General Comments

The agreed memorandum of understanding between West Dunbartonshire Council and the Wheatley Group does not feature in the draft strategy. We suggest that the document references the strategic ambitions that the Council and Wheatley Group have agreed, including the delivery of a significant affordable housing programme.

Generally, we suggest that the final strategy could usefully include an assessment of the dynamics of local housing systems and proposed actions geographically. It could be more future looking, including forecasts and actions for the future.

We suggest that the strategy could more clearly set housing within the broad context including education, planning, leisure and transport; as customers have consistently told us that these elements are very important to them. For example, Wheatley's beyond4walls research with young people, and customer feedback, highlighted that poor transport links can have negative consequences for access to job and training opportunities as well as access to vital health, social work and advice services. Other research with older tenants highlighted that they can feel isolated and cut off where there are poor transport links.

The tackling poverty agenda could feature more clearly as a priority with associated actions.

The final actions should be SMART with associated outcomes and measures so that success can be measured.

Has the introduction clearly enough set out the purpose of the Local Housing Strategy?

Yes.

Are all the key relevant policies/ plans included here?

Yes. However, the timelines for West Dunbartonshire Council's Strategic Plan (2012 – 2017) and Single Outcome Agreement (2014 – 2017) do not tie with the Local Housing Strategy so it would be useful for the document to explain more clearly how the LHS and other planning processes link, support and inform each other.

Do you think we have given enough opportunities for people to comment on the draft?

Cube Housing Association's Board would welcome the opportunity for a presentation and discussion on the strategy and Cube's role in helping to deliver the ambitions. Cube's West Dunbartonshire Tenants Panel provides an opportunity for engagement with local residents on the strategy and we would be happy to help organise a session with them.

Do you agree that the five themes remain appropriate?

It would be useful to understand the evidence and rationale behind the five themes, and to see progress to date against each of the themes along with an indication of the volume of future activity required to achieve the desired outcomes. We are particularly interested in understanding the impact of these priorities and actions on Cube customers in West Dunbartonshire.

Do you agree that it remains important to have a focus on regeneration on housing estates?

Yes.

Do you have any other ideas for Housing Regeneration Priority Areas?

Cube has a particular interest in Haldane, Castlehill, Westcliff and Queens Quay and we therefore agree that these areas are of significant importance.

It would be useful to see progress to date in each of the areas, and to identify actions in relation to each.

Our existing new build programme can be summarised as the delivery of 520 homes across nine sites.

Housing Need and Demand

It would be useful to understand the breakdown of projected households in West Dunbartonshire by household size and type. Housing list and other analysis could help to build a richer picture of housing need in the area. The adjusted housing estimate of 748 for social/ below market rent is lower than the housing supply target of 960. Greater understanding of housing need and supply will help us to build the right homes in the right place. We are happy to work with the Council to understand the required type and size of housing, linked to household incomes and circumstances, as part of our strategic partnership.

In partnership with the Chartered Institute of Housing, Wheatley has recently carried out research into mid-market rent housing, including current and prospective customer and market research. We are happy to share the findings from this research to help inform future programmes.

Page 32 sets out some exciting new housing developments. We suggest that Wheatley Group's programme features here alongside the other housing associations, and that the programme is included as a key action.

Other actions which could be considered include:

- Within the integration of health and social care, supporting people into appropriate housing with care and support;
- Linking housing with jobs, employment and economic growth.

Promoting Good Quality Housing

None of the regional and national RSLs with stock in the area are featured in the table on page 36 showing the percentage of homes meeting SHQS. 100% of Cube homes meet the standard. We are happy to share Cube's five year investment plan which will further improve our stock.

There is no mention of the digital agenda. The role of housing and the people who live in social rented housing in particular have a key role to deliver this agenda. This includes developing skills for citizens to use technology in their homes, promotion of the Internet of Things e.g. smart energy meters, and the contribution that digitalisation makes to regeneration and the wider economy through having digital skills to increase employability.

The design standard could be reviewed to consider links with the Health and Social Care Partnership, with respect of requirements for wet showers for example.

We would ask for this strategy to consider how the Council can support and promote the localisation of energy generation in response to the Scottish Government 2015 Community Energy Policy. Wheatley Group is developing an approach to self-managed district heating and renewable energy generation to off-set conventional energy market costs for tenants, and we are happy to share our approach and learning from this innovation. The Group successfully used its leverage to secure an

energy discount deal for our customers with Scottish Power. We offer customers a fuel advice service, as well as money and welfare benefits advice.

Given the growth of the private rented sector, there should be a specific action relating to engagement with the sector. It would be useful to see rent levels compared to the Local Housing Allowance, to understand the role of the PRS in West Dunbartonshire.

Regarding empty homes, it would be very useful to see a map of empty properties in West Dunbartonshire, to identify where they sit in relation to our communities. If appropriate, we would be keen to explore the potential for an acquisition fund with the Council.

Other actions for consideration are:

- New products for older people including dementia friendly design;
- The next version of the SHQS and what this means for the future.

Homelessness and Housing Options

All people who present as homeless have their support needs assessed as part of the housing options/homeless assessment based a defined process and scale/matrix. This includes pre tenancy support, to prepare them for their new home. Housing Options should be at the heart of this process to tailor support and services to those who need them. Wheatley Group is keen to extend the Housing Options approach, process and support which we have developed in Glasgow to West Dunbartonshire.

We believe that welfare reform will particularly affect young people over the next five years and could fundamentally change supply and demand of housing for this group. How this issue will be addressed could be a key theme across the identified priorities.

Sustainable and Supportive Communities

The role of community benefits should be strengthened in the strategy to maximise the use of community benefits through all contracts including investment contracts. Apprenticeships and access to opportunities in the construction phase of new housing for communities should be highlighted in the strategy to help complete the circle for sustainable communities. Opportunities should be targeted to homeless and low income households.

The contribution of digital access to employment and economic growth should be mentioned. Wheatley Group has a 'Click and Connect' centre in Balloch Library which provides digital skills and access in a community setting. A recent evaluation of our click and connect centres found that those who use them benefit greatly in terms of digital skills and access, as well as wider benefits associated with social interaction and building connections.

The strategy should set out anti-social behaviour, crime and environmental issues and how these will be tackled. Wheatley Group is keen to extend our innovative partnership approach with the Fire and Rescue Service and Police Scotland – the Community Improvement Partnership – to West Dunbartonshire. We are happy to share the detail of this approach and our learning with the Council and other partners.

Cube Housing Association has a Locality Plan for West Dunbartonshire which has been developed with local people and therefore reflects their needs. We are happy to share this with partners to help identify shared and joint priorities and actions.

Addressing Particular Housing Needs

It would be useful to see a map of current accommodation based supported housing across the council area, with analysis of gaps in current and future provision.

Analysis of demand for adaptations, and a plan for delivery of adaptations for the future, in partnership with RSLs, would be welcomed.

Wheatley Group is developing its range of products for older people – our ‘Living Well’ products. Through our care company Loretto Care, we would be keen to understand how we can support delivery of strategic priorities, given the increased need for specialist and supported housing in light of demographic changes and the policy context around prevention, reshaping care, and the new Health and Social Care Partnership.

There also needs to be consideration of the role that RSLs play in supporting customers to sustain tenancies including low level tenancy supports, linked to the Wheatley Group and Chartered Institute of Housing ‘Frontline Futures’ study.

The link to the Housing Support budget should be clearly made.

Actions could include:

- Innovative models for delivery
- The role of assistive technology
- Security in funding for housing support services
- How to address the growing need for specialist accommodation as part of the overall target for new housing.

Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

The strategy should set out how area based regeneration will be evaluated; a framework for evaluating success.

Conclusion

Wheatley Group is happy to discuss any of the points above, and to continue to work collaboratively with the council and other partners to deliver strategic priorities for West Dunbartonshire. Contact details for further discussion are provided below.

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