

Deputation concerning Community Housing Network (Spokesperson) – Ms. Diana Bernhardt – Brighton & Hove Seaside Community Homes

The **Community Housing Network** are a group of like-minded, local community based organisations who are concerned about the escalating unmet demand for social housing and the impact that this has on homelessness and local families in housing need. Historically, Housing Associations have aimed to house the poor but changes in funding have led to increased commercialisation of the sector creating a gap in the housing provider market for the homeless and for those who cannot afford deposits or increased rents. The community housing sector is ready to fill this gap.

For over the past 3 years, the community housing sector has successfully developed **463 new units of social rented housing in the city**. Without exception, all of these extra units have been provided without the need for subsidy from the council or the Homes and Communities Agency. These new units include:

- 416 empty properties have been brought back into use by Brighton Hove Seaside Community Homes to provide temporary accommodation for homeless people. All of the housing has been developed through private finance without the need for grant funding
- 36 new homes developed by Brighton Housing Trust through a private loan to provide much needed self-contained accommodation for people moving on from homeless hostels
- 11 studio flats for homeless people financed and developed by Brighton YMCA

Our success has been achieved through **working in partnership and thinking creatively about funding** to keep rents genuinely affordable. In addition to the housing above, work has already commenced to develop **nearly 90 additional units over the next 2 years**. Again all of these additional units will be provided without the need for grant. These additional units include a further 83 empty properties being brought back into use by Brighton Hove Seaside Community Homes and 6 new self-contained flats developed by Southdown Housing Association for homeless people moving on to greater independence.

Our achievements exceed the Affordable Housing Programme delivered by larger Housing Associations over recent years. The next 2015-18 Affordable Housing Programme plans **75** new homes, and **only 14 are proposed for rent** with the remaining 61 being for shared ownership. Whilst shared ownership may have offered an option for working people to get on the property ladder in the past, it is now beyond the reach of most people. For example, a 1 bedroomed shared ownership flat at One Hove Park is marketed at £287,500 with 25% equity of £71,875.

This context highlights the increasing gap in affordable housing for rent and the need to embrace local, community-based providers that offer innovative funding models to deliver social housing at genuinely affordable rents. This deputation therefore seeks to achieve **a level playing field** for the community housing sector by opening up existing partnerships and prioritising new and innovative delivery models that meet the city's housing aims.

In particular, this deputation is asking for:

1. Equality of Opportunity

The larger Registered Providers already have an established dialogue with the council through the Brighton and Hove Development Partnership. To provide equality, we need **a new formal mechanism** for community-based organisations (such as quarterly meetings) to present ideas and business plans within realistic timescales. The Community Housing Network can also offer different options for the transfer or leasing of land to ensure public assets are protected whilst keeping land costs to a minimum to keep rents affordable.

2. Recognition

The Community Housing Network is a collection of organisations and models that deserves to be recognised as a sector in its own right. This needs to be recognised in the Housing Strategy along with a **commitment to work in partnership** with the Community Housing Network and to establish joint ventures where these are in the best interests of the city.

3. Transparency

We need a transparent information sharing and decision making process. To maximise possibilities to innovate, we need **early information of potential publicly owned sites** and an indication of the planning and development features that the Council would support.

4. Delivery

We need a **commitment that practical solutions will be found** to overcome the barriers to community housing providers (such as recession measures for S106 contributions and options to dispose land at less than 'best consideration').

Community Homes Network Supporting Information

Terms of Reference Community Housing Network

Summary of Purpose:

- To increase the supply of community housing options to meet local need
- Provide an opportunity to share feedback and ideas to feed into the city housing strategy and to formulate joint responses where appropriate
- Provide a mechanism to gain recognition and to champion the values of the community housing sector
- Provide a forum to work in partnership with the council, facilitating information and knowledge sharing to promote the development of community housing solutions

Key objectives

- To give a voice to, and champion the values of, local community housing
- To promote innovation and partnership to unlock investment for housing
- To share knowledge, information and expertise (including feasibility studies and business planning) to deliver genuinely affordable housing
- To lobby and influence at a local level for increased recognition, equality of opportunity and a level playing field for the Community Housing Sector
- To influence local housing strategy and policy on an ongoing basis
- To act as a 'critical friend' to challenge the council to explore non-traditional ways of providing housing
- To ensure that investment generated by the network remains for the benefit of housing in the city

Membership:

Local Community housing organisations and supporters of the groups aims. Current membership list attached.

Key Links

Provides updates and promotes the work of the network to the Strategic Housing Partnership, Brighton Hove City Council and the quarterly Community Works housing conferences.

Meetings

Meetings will be chaired by Community Works representative Strategic Housing Partnership Meeting papers will be circulated one week in advance unless a shorter timescale is agreed by the Chair. If necessary, joint responses can be actions between meetings via e mail. Meetings will initially be serviced by Brighton & Hove and Hove Seaside Community Homes.

Contact List

| Organisation | Name | E mail |
|---------------------|-----------------|--|
| BHT | Andy Winter | 'andy.winter@bht.org.uk'; Shelley.reed@bht.org.uk |
| SOUTHDOWN | Neil Blanchard | 'n.blanchard@southdownhousing.org' |
| SUSSEX CENTRAL YMCA | Chas Walker | 'Chas.Walker@ymcadlg.org'; |
| BRIGHTON YMCA | Mark Wainwright | 'mark.wainwright@brightonymca.co.uk'; |
| CHIBAH | Helen Russell | 'helen@chibah.org |
| SUSSEX CO HOUSING | Julian Howell | 'info@sussexcohousing.org.uk'; |

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| SEASIDE COMMUNITY HOMES | Steve Bulbeck/Diana Bernhardt | 'steve.bulbeck@seaside-homes.org.uk' |
| BRIGHTON AND HOVE CLT | Ian Bailey | 'thebailey@hotmail.co.uk'; |
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Links to:

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|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| COMMUNITY WORKS | Laura Williams Lorraine Prince | laura@bhcommunityworks.org.uk ; lorraine@bhcommunityworks.org.uk |
| COMMUNITY WORKS REPRESENTATIVE ON STRATEGIC HOUSING PARTNERSHIP | Helen Russell | helen@chibah.org |