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## Report of the Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing

### Executive Board

Date: 15<sup>th</sup> November 2006

Subject: A Plan for Delivering Affordable Housing in Leeds

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Electoral Wards Affected:

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In

(Details contained in the report)

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### Executive Summary

This Report sets out the background to the establishment of the Affordable Housing Task Force, and the subsequent production of the Affordable Housing Delivery Plan, 'Making the Housing Ladder Work'. The report also forms a response to the "Right to Rent" delegation to the Council in September.

The report sets out the housing market conditions in Leeds at the moment and the issues of affordability and the economic implications of not providing sufficient affordable housing.

The concept of a 'Housing Ladder' is explained and how there are rungs of the ladder, which are missing in certain areas. The consequences of not having the right mix of housing to meet different needs, requirements and aspirations are also considered.

It describes where existing policy and procedures can be improved and puts forwards a number of proposals in order to increase the supply of affordable housing.

Executive Board is requested to support the Affordable Housing Delivery Plan and note that further exploration is needed in relation to the setting up of new vehicles to deliver affordable housing solutions.

## **1.0 Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to describe the key components of the plan for the delivery of Affordable Housing in Leeds – “Making the Housing Ladder Work” that has been developed by the Corporate Affordable Housing Task Group. Copies of the plan are now available on the intranet.
- 1.2 The report recommends Executive Board to:
- Support the principles of the Plan
  - Authorise Officers to deliver the key actions
  - Request a report on an SPV, the primary objective of which would be to deliver more affordable housing in Leeds.

## **2.0 Background Information**

- 2.1 Leeds is a vibrant, successful and modern city with a thriving quality of life and it is set to grow further in the future. In order to ensure that Leeds can develop and grow, it is essential that there is a range of good quality housing that can meet the needs, requirements and aspirations of its citizens.
- 2.2 The Council has responded to the government’s agenda to create balanced mixed sustainable communities by the development of the large scale regeneration schemes such as the PFI scheme at Swarcliffe and the proposed schemes at Holbeck Moor and Little London, together with the EASEL initiative. However members have become concerned that over recent years increasing numbers of citizens can no longer afford to buy housing or get access to social housing.
- 2.3 In response to these concerns a corporate ‘Affordable Housing Task Force’ was established in July 06, chaired by the Chief Housing Services Officer from the Department of Neighbourhoods and Housing. This group has been looking at increasing the provision of affordable housing across the City.

### **The key issues the Task Force has focused upon are:**

- How the lack of affordable housing may compromise the economic strength of Leeds
- The increasing difficulties for first time buyers
- The mismatch of the demand for social housing and its supply.
- How vulnerable groups, like the elderly and disabled are experiencing problems in getting the housing they need in the areas they want to live
- How poor quality housing in areas with high levels of deprivation can impede proposed regeneration initiatives
- How a range of high quality housing can be developed across the city for all the people of Leeds as well as the incoming population.

2.4 In September 2006 a deputation from Leeds Tenants Federation, 'Right to Rent Campaign' was heard by full Council. The campaign is calling for increased social rented housing. The Affordable Housing Delivery Plan in part responds to this campaign but seeks to cover the full range of affordable housing that can be provided in Leeds and the mechanisms to improve access to existing housing. The Plan stresses the importance of ensuring that there is sufficient affordable housing to meet current and future needs across the city.

2.5 The plan sets out the priorities and actions that will need to take place in the short, medium and long term, to increase the provision of affordable housing across the City.

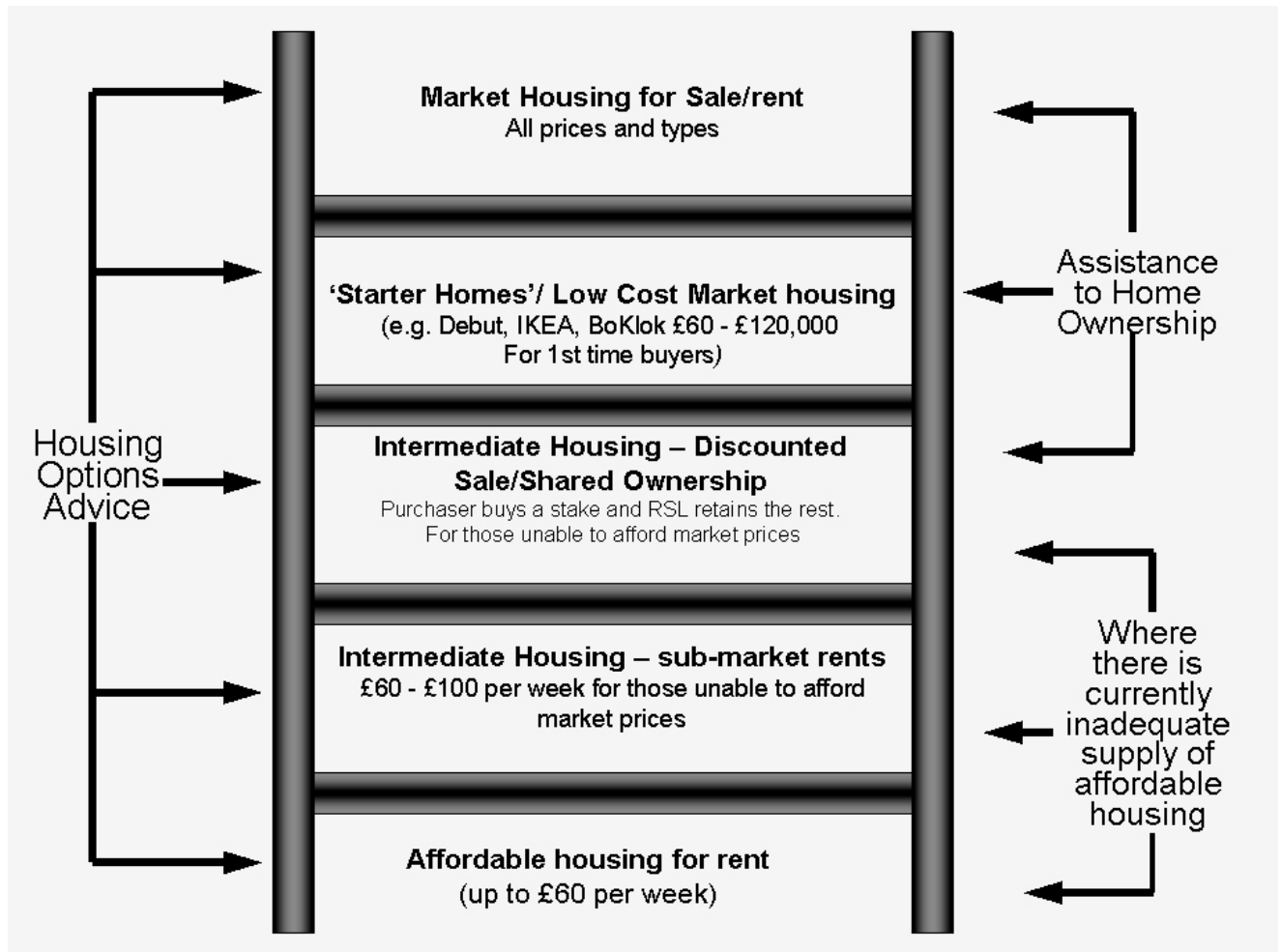
### **3.0 Affordable Housing Plan 'Creating a Housing Ladder'**

3.1 In the past affordable housing tended to be seen as being social housing for rent provided either by local authorities or Registered Social Landlords. In view of the escalation of property prices over the last five years, however, the question of the affordability of home ownership has become ever more pressing. As part of the Affordable Housing Plan, the concept of the "local housing ladder" has been developed. This seeks to establish a range of housing for sale, shared ownership and rent.

3.2 Putting an effective 'local housing ladder' in place will need a mix of 'supply side' measures to increase the supply of affordable housing and 'demand side' measures to improve access to existing housing in the market. In the Affordable Housing Delivery Plan, the 'rungs' of the ladder are explored and explained in more detail.

3.3 The Chief Housing Services Officer is presenting the aims and objectives of the Plan to key Members, Department Heads, and Partner organisations over the next 3 months. This will ensure that all those involved directly and indirectly in the provision of affordable housing will have a better understanding of the issues, and the steps being taken by the Council to increase the supply of affordable housing.

## The Local Housing Ladder



### 3.4 Why there is a Need for Additional Affordable Housing

The Plan explains how the Leeds Housing Market has not been working effectively enough to provide the range of housing which is needed. The social and personal consequences of a lack of supply are well known, manifesting themselves in extended council waiting lists, homelessness and over crowding. There is also a real threat that a lack of suitable housing as described by the “housing ladder” will hold back economic growth within the city

Economic growth will generate substantial job growth for key workers and those in low paid, short term and part time jobs, in the service, retail, leisure and catering industries. It is essential that suitable housing is available, other wise it may be difficult for employers to fill vacancies, thus restricting economic growth.

#### Other issues which the plan covers include:

- Home ownership has become increasingly unaffordable. At the moment only 4 out of 102 postcodes in Leeds have house prices affordable to those on below average incomes. The city average income for a single person is £22,000 per annum based upon 2005 figures. A single income of £18,571 or dual income of £22,414 is needed to afford the cheapest back to back of £65,000. The city wide

average for house prices according to the latest HM Land Registry information is £159,000.

- Reduction in social housing stock and lettings. There are almost 27,000 fewer social rented homes now compared to 1980. A further reduction of up to 10,000 is predicted by 2016 which will reduce the council housing stock to below 50,000.
- There is also the issue of neighbourhoods across Leeds where there is no access to housing for those on low to average incomes. Providing appropriate housing can help maintain neighbourhoods and ensure the viability of schools, shops, post offices etc and so protect the sustainability of the area.
- Regeneration issues, such as creating mixed tenure housing, promoting low cost home ownership and shared equity in areas of deprivation can help diversify demographic profiles, and enable the housing ladder to operate effectively and ensure more affluent households remain in the area.
- Statutory duties and obligations are also explored in more detail in the Plan and the consequences for not meeting these requirements are explained.

#### **4.0 Increasing Affordable Housing through Existing Routes**

4.1 There is a need to further develop existing approaches and programmes to enhance affordable housing provision and improve access for those unable currently to access housing through the open market. There is recognition that in a lot of areas across Leeds the preferred route to home ownership is through shared ownership arrangements. The following mechanisms are in operation at the moment but in order to increase provision needs to be improved and accelerated.

- **Land release (Less than best)**

Disposal of Council owned land at 'less than best' consideration is a tool open to the Council in conjunction with its partners to support the development of affordable housing. Schemes of this nature would, in the main relate to funding by the Housing Corporation through their Approved Development Programme (ADP).

The Housing Corporation has been charged by central government to increase affordable housing supply across the country. One of the mechanisms that the Housing Corporation is now using is to place a ceiling of £5,000 per plot on land values for the provision of affordable housing. This will increase the supply of affordable housing, but will be on the basis that the land owners will take a significant reduction in the value of the land.

This mechanism places difficulties on the Authority, which resulted in a below average allocation to the city for the ADP 2006/08 programme.

To attract future ADP resources, together with any other public funding for affordable housing, a more strategic commitment to making sufficient land available at less than best consideration for affordable housing is required.

This could deliver a higher overall level of grant funding from the Housing Corporation and lever in significant private sector investment to the City to improve the supply of affordable housing and also support the traditional housing market.

- **A more sophisticated ‘evidence based’ approach to delivery**

A robust and continuous housing market assessment and local housing market tracking, will form the basis for geographical focus on “hot spots” in terms of need for market restructuring or where affordability pressures are greatest.

- **Full integration of Housing and Planning in Delivering Affordable Housing**

The use of the Council’s planning powers to require a certain proportion of new developments to be affordable housing, has gradually developed as way of increasing new affordable housing across the City. Close and effective working relationships between the Neighbourhoods and Housing and Development Departments of the Council are key to increasing the supply of new affordable housing. More effective joint working between the two departments will deliver speedier responses to planning applications, streamline the project management of affordable housing schemes and improve targets for affordable housing completions.

- **Proactive approach to Council owned miscellaneous properties**

These are council owned properties which have been leased to Registered Social Landlords and supported housing agents. A number of these properties have been returned to the Council, and do not form part of the ALMO Decency portfolio. A starter home initiative is being piloted on the current void properties, and will be reported to Executive Board.

## **5.0 How Can Affordable Housing Supply Be Further Increased**

5.1 The following represent short-term priorities for action that should be considered to enable progress to be made, to enable significant change in the provision of new affordable housing:

- **Consideration of a ‘Special Purpose Vehicle’ (SPV)**

Modelling of a range of different SPV needs to be explored. This would involve less than best consideration being agreed for cleared Housing Revenue Account land, previously used as council housing, up to an agreed value sufficient to maximise Housing Corporation Grant Funding and private investment within the city, over initially a five-year period. The Housing Corporation has stated that schemes are only supported where land costs do not exceed £5k per unit.

A comprehensive and planned approach needs to be developed towards land use to lever in investment for affordable housing development. A city-wide SPV Land agency should be established to hold HRA land to an agreed value, created from clearance of council housing or regeneration schemes, to maximise the ADP and private investment in affordable housing for the city.

While the Council would need to satisfy itself that the other alternatives for the sites were less attractive, (i.e. an open market scheme or commercial use) there would be a predisposition to treat the land for affordable housing.

A pilot exercise is being undertaken to map out HRA land designated redevelopment. To date land in the region of 5.56 hectares has been identified. Over the last two years in Leeds 95 dwellings per hectare is the average number of units built on new developments, however a majority of these have been flats. For new family accommodation, per hectare, the new build rate is in the region of 50 units per hectare. The average grant per unit received from the Housing Corporation is £33,066; added to private finance per unit of £106,309, would give levered investment of £139,375 per unit.

Therefore, should the 5 hectares of land be offered for affordable housing, this would fund approximately 250 new units; the grant funding levered in would be in the region of £8.3 million and the total grant plus private finance levered in would be in the region of £34.8 million, compared to the estimated value of the land of approximately £6.4 million.

Corporate Asset Management Working Group in September 2006 considered a report outlining the proposal to develop a Special Purpose Vehicle. It was agreed in principle that developmental work commence in order to produce a report to Executive Board in early 2007.

- **Proactive Marketing and Monitoring of low cost home ownership schemes**

There needs to be increased involvement in the marketing of low cost home ownership options. This will involve establishing a database of interested persons and closer liaison with RSLs to ascertain when the schemes are ready to sell. Close monitoring will also be required as accurate clear and timely data is required in respect of delivery, type and the location of units of schemes under construction and completed.

- **Identify the missing 'Rungs' from the Ladder**

There is a pressing need to identify which forms of tenure are absent across Leeds to help fill the missing 'rungs' from the 'housing ladder'. This will assist in the provision of appropriate housing in those areas.

- **Section 106 Agreements**

More flexibility and closer monitoring of S106 agreements for affordable housing is required. A policy is being discussed in relation to the collection of commuted sums in city centre areas on developments over 166 dwellings in order to provide affordable family housing elsewhere in the city.

- **Private Developers/Financial Institutions**

It is proposed to establish closer links with private developers who specialise in starter home products and make contact with financial institutions to research financial products to support access to home ownership.

- **ALMOs and Social Housing Grant**

ALMOs are able to take part in the Housing Corporation's National Affordable Housing Programme, either bidding for social grant themselves or in partnership with others. ALMOs that do this are expected to demonstrate their capacity to manage the risks related with acquiring new stock and demonstrate that they can continue to deliver the core business. ALMOs need a three star rating to bid direct and a two star rating to bid in partnership.

- **Long Term Future of ALMOs**

As round 1 and round 2 ALMOs near the completion of their decency programmes, the government together with ALMOs and Local Authorities is looking at the longer term future for ALMOs. One consideration is over the future funding of ALMOs. It is being considered whether or not ALMO funding could be outside the Public Sector

Borrowing Requirement (PSBR). If this was achieved then ALMOs would be able to borrow money on the open market with a view to funding the development of additional affordable housing. The results of this review will be published in a white paper in early next year. The reorganisation of the ALMOs into larger units places them in a better position to take advantage of these potential freedoms.

## **6.0 Implications for Council Policy and Governance**

- 6.1 The Affordable Housing Delivery Plan is complementary to the Vision for Leeds, the Corporate Plan, Leeds Housing Strategy, the City Wide Regeneration Plan and the Corporate Asset Management Strategy.
- 6.2 The Affordable Housing Task Group is a corporate group and includes representatives from Neighbourhoods and Housing and Development Department, led by the Chief Housing Services Officer. The officers and partnership representatives of the Group are fully supportive of developments and proposals. However it is recognised by the Group that a programme of consultation needs to be carried out to include, key Councillor Members and Partner organisations including the Housing Corporation and Government Office. A detailed programme of consultation is being undertaken by the Group.

## **7.0 Legal and Resource Implications**

- 7.1 The legal and resource implications of increasing affordable housing by improving current procedures and introducing new vehicles e.g. the SPV will require further analysis and will be reported at a future Executive Board meeting

## **8.0 Conclusion**

- 8.1 The Affordable Housing Delivery Plan outlines how the housing 'ladder' is not working properly across many areas of Leeds and describes the extent of the problems facing those unable to buy or rent on the open market.
- 8.2 The Plan outlines and provides a strategic framework for improved access to existing housing and provision of new affordable housing for those unable to afford to buy or rent on the open market. It sets out the approach that will be taken in Leeds, based upon enabling access to a range of housing by operating 'local housing ladders'.
- 8.3 The Plan also features a range of actions that are needed over the coming years to enable an adequate provision of access to affordable housing to take place. It also identifies the key priorities for the short term.

## **9.0 Recommendations**

That Executive Board:

- Note the contents of the report
- Support the principles of the Plan for Delivering Affordable Housing in Leeds and the key actions required for delivery
- Note that a proposal to develop a 'Special Purpose Vehicle' in respect of cleared Council land is being developed as one of the key mechanisms to deliver affordable housing solutions on the scale required
- Agree that progress on delivering the 'Affordable Housing Delivery Plan', be reported back to Executive Board in early 2007