

Local Government and Communities Committee

Strategic Housing Investment Plans

Response from Scottish Borders Council

Dear Mr Doris

Consideration of Strategic Housing Investment Plans (SHIPs)

Further to your letter dated 31st May 2017 requesting further information on our SHIP and its effectiveness and in particular the two questions posed within the letter.

1. "How do you decide on the number of specific house types, house sizes and tenures that will be delivered in your area (which may be either detailed in your SHIP or decided at a later date)."

Scottish Borders Council is a post stock transfer having successfully completed the transfer of all its Council Housing stock in 2003.

Scottish Borders Council as the strategic housing authority takes the lead on the development and preparation of its Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP). As part of the prioritisation process Council Officers in collaboration with its RSL delivery partners operate an Affordable Housing Priority Matrix process in order to provide details of proposed future projects on a standard template, which sets out what is being proposed and tenure and proposed project delivery timescales.

Individual projects are then considered by the SHIP Project Working Group with this process being chaired by a Senior Council Officer who oversees the scoring process. The scoring process is carried out by a Council Officer and each RSL partner taking on the role of 'Assessors' in order to discuss and score each project based on high level information regarding housing need at locality level which is provided as part of the process. There are currently 4 developing RSLs active in Scottish Borders plus another 6 RSLs with a Landlord role.

Each development project is scored on basis of:

- Deliverability [weighting 40%]
- Need [weighting 25%] with weighting to include very small settlements of less than 250 population and Homelessness pressures.
- Strategic fit [weighting 30%]
- Impact [weighting 5%] (social and financial)

Project proposals are scored and ranked prior for inclusion in SHIP, which is taken to the Council's Executive Committee for endorsement prior to submission to Scottish Ministers. Individual project house type and size mix can be arrived at by a number of ways. In some cases this is in response to meeting a specific identified needs assessment, eg seeking to provide extra care housing within a specific locality, or supported housing development to meet a particular service identified through joint

need , or health and social care client group planning and service commissioning plans, eg for Learning Disability Service.

To illustrate this approach, the Council has carried out an extra care housing needs assessment which has led to the development of ambitious strategic housing investment intention to work with 2 selected RSL delivery partners to develop 6, and potentially 7, new build extra care housing developments for older people in key settlements throughout Scottish Borders. These have been identified in the Council's current SHIP 2017-22.

The Council has recently commissioned consultants to develop an Integrated Strategic Plan for Older People's Housing, Support and Care Needs which will inform future SHIP investment intentions and prioritisation decisions in due course.

The Council is leading the procurement and appointment of consultants to carry out a master-planning study in order to regenerate the Upper Langlee area of Galashiels, and finally the Council is considering undertaking a Young People's Housing and Accommodation Needs Study. All of which will provide an enhanced strategic context which will inform the consideration and prioritisation decisions for inclusion of projects in future SHIPs.

Similarly the Council's Strategic Housing continues to work to support the Learning Disability Service to deliver supported tenancy based models through a needs assessment and commissioning group approach which has delivered new build housing, a shift from registered residential models of care to a supported tenancy model, and has also enabled some people on expensive out of area placements to be able to return to live in Scottish Borders.

In such cases in addition to project template and related processed referred to above additional documents may be developed to set out particular details in terms of numbers, house types and "essentials and desirables". This can be further supported by Planning Briefs or relevant additional site specific documents if necessary or available.

In working up project proposals and test layouts our experience has been that our developing RSLs routinely consider their housing "list" registrations, common housing register and housing management and letting information . In addition the Housing Strategy team consolidate and provide analysis of different choice based lettings processes to provide housing "pressure" information at locality level. Scottish Borders is a rural area with the exception of 6 small towns the rest is classed as "accessible rural" or "remote rural". The RSLs also routinely contact the local patch Social Work Office in order to help identify people with particular needs. Having done so, the RSLs need to carry out financial modelling through test layouts as part of their project design and feasibility process. Financial viability is a big consideration in development of the mix of house types and sizes and can be a key factor in whether a development can progress further.

Finally the formal Planning Application and Consent process can also be a big factor in what is ultimately built, as regards what houses and sizes and where individual blocks can be located on any given site. The Council's current Local Housing

Strategy 2012-17 set an annual target of 103 affordable homes, and has a target of 10% of subsidised units to be built to wheelchair standard. However much of Scottish Borders is hilly so meeting this target can be especially challenging on some sites.

Almost all of Scottish Borders Council's area is covered by a single Local Housing Allowance which we understand to be the lowest in Scotland. This makes it very difficult for RSLs to deliver financially viable affordable housing projects for mid-market rent. Annual rent increases across the RSL sector are pushing rents on a converging course with the Local Housing Allowance. Therefore RSLs are more content to deliver housing for social rent rather than for mid-market rent. This is consistent with meeting needs identified in the findings of the SESPlan commissioned Housing Need and Demand Assessment 2 study.[HNDA2]

That aside the Council has collaborated with private sector house builders and developers to produce almost 100 new build homes through participation in the National Housing Trust Round 1 initiative and the National Housing Trust Local Authority Variant initiative. However these have been more opportunistic in nature and on sites where the developers have opted to work with the Council in preference to working with an RSL.

2. "How do you monitor and evaluate whether SHIP, and projects finally delivered meets the requirements of the local area and also contribute towards the Scottish Government target of 50,000 affordable homes by 2021?"

As mentioned above the Local Housing Strategy 2012-17 set out an annual affordable housing target, and this has been increased to 128 per annum reflecting needs identified in the HNDA 2 study. Delivery of affordable housing to meet local needs is tracked and formally reported annually to the Council through a report to the Council's Executive Committee and through other inter agency strategic planning and commissioning processes and also through the Community Planning Partnership processes/structures.

As individual projects are being developed through the design process and securing the necessary statutory consents, provision of houses for general needs and particular needs are identified over time and are reflected in turn in Tables within successive SHIP submissions to Scottish Ministers.

Delivery of these is tracked and reported as outlined above. In addition, the delivery of projects identified in SHIP is programmed and Scottish Government grant is managed through the Quarterly Programming Meeting chaired by Scottish Government which brings the developing RSLs and the Council's Strategic Housing Representatives together, and this provides an overview of the programme and delivery of the individual projects. Scottish Government has processes in operation in order that it may capture and record affordable housing delivery in order to provide official statistics and reports to Scottish Government.

It is understood that Scottish Government continue to require RSLs to carry out a post completion scheme audit, rather than an evaluation. That aside there has been instances where independent evaluation has been carried out, eg the Dovecote Court Extra Care Housing Development in Peebles, which was the first such

development to be provided through new build within Scottish Borders. However such evaluation requires resources and so this is not the norm. More modest work post completion work has been done on occasion often prompted by RSL or Member concerns regarding specific matters eg allocations.

We continue to monitor our homelessness data and over the past few years the trend indicates a reduction in the number of homeless applicants. Albeit, we would like to see this reduced much further and this year owing to the increased new affordable house building programme we plan to undertake a closer look at the impacts of the number of new homes and the corresponding homelessness applications to ascertain what impact this increase of new homes is having.

I hope the above information is helpful and if you have any further questions or information requirement please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

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