

ADDENDUM

RESPONSE TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS MADE ON 23 NOVEMBER 2023

1. Explore innovative and creative ways to provide more affordable, efficient and environmentally friendly housing within East Suffolk.

As Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Housing, I am passionate about increasing the provision of good quality housing, which is affordable, efficient and environmentally friendly.

The vision set out in 'Our Direction' is that *"All homes in East Suffolk are safe, suitable, and sustainable, in communities where residents are proud to live"*.

I am committed to delivering as many affordable homes as possible, and I am actively communicating with Registered Providers to encourage more developments, particularly in some of our rural areas, which have seen a decline in social housing over the past few years.

I am working with Officers to consider innovative opportunities to utilise our arm's length companies and I am excited to be bringing a report forward to Cabinet for consideration in April.

2. Review the Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Local Plan documents in relation to affordable housing supply sooner rather than later and include environmental sustainability.

The response of the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management is set out in item 5 of the Cabinet agenda for 5 March 2024 – Statutory Five Year Review Assessment – Waveney Local Plan and Local Development Scheme Update.

3. Increase the target for providing Council housing stock from 50 to 100 units per annum.

As Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing, I am passionate about ensuring there are enough genuinely affordable homes for residents in East Suffolk. I have made a commitment that there will be an additional 500 homes delivered during this administration. However, East Suffolk Council cannot do this alone, and we will work collectively with our local Registered Providers to increase the number of affordable homes.

We are also making good progress with the project, which was created following a previous scrutiny recommendation on Empty Homes. Bringing long-term Empty Homes back into use is a priority. With an acute housing shortage, we need to ensure we do not have assets sat underutilised.

The Housing Service is currently conducting a review of its Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. I committed at Full Council on 21st February 2024 that I would host a whole day workshop for all Members this Spring / Summer, to focus on the priorities set out in the 'Sustainable Housing' theme of the 'Our Direction' Strategic Plan and I would also like to use this opportunity to discuss the options for the HRA Business Plan. Unfortunately, due to increased regulation, years of low rent increases and several years of rent reductions, the costs of running the service almost outweighs the income we receive.

The Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 is the most significant change to affect social landlords in decades. I am in full support of the expectations set out in the Act and the revised Consumer Standards, which have been set by the Regulator of Social Housing. However, we are now being asked to deliver a 'gold plated' service, on a significantly lower budget.

I am grateful that Scrutiny have repeated my own recommendation at Scrutiny when I was an opposition member two years ago, and I accept this as a target. However, since becoming the portfolio holder I have realised the parlous state of the HRA and am actively investigating new ways of building and buying new stock with the housing department to eventually achieve this target, one way or another. Watch this space.

4. Lobby Government on changing the Right to Buy Scheme so that a higher percentage of the receipts can be made available to supply more housing stock.

The Right to Buy Scheme has led to a significant reduction in Council Housing across England, which has had a catastrophic impact on the demand for housing far outweighing supply.

On Average, East Suffolk Council loses 30 Council Homes a year through Right to Buy. To replace each home lost to Right to Buy, it costs the Council a considerable amount of money, as the income received is significantly lower.

As Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing, I am in full support of the recommendation to lobby Government to change the Right to Buy Policy. I would also be supportive of the scheme being abolished like it was in 2016 in Scotland and Wales in 2019.

On 9th February, the Local Government Association (LGA) issued a position statement, which called on the Government to tackle the growing crisis of over 1 million people on housing registers across the Country and 106,000 households living in Temporary Accommodation.

The LGA sets out the following in their call to Government:

1. The control over how and when monies raised through the scheme should be used on the development, delivery or acquisition of new homes
 - a. Retain 100 per cent of receipts permanently
 - b. Combine receipts with grants or other funding pots
 - c. Restriction on per cent of new homes funded by receipts
 - d. Remove time limit on spending money

2. The power to protect a council's financial investment in both existing and new social housing stock from a loss-making transaction
 - a. Increase the tenancy requirement from three years to 15 years
 - b. For the cost floor to be an indefinite protection for properties purchased through Right to Buy, and allowing the cost floor to be increased by inflation – specifically an index based on construction cost inflation
 - c. Consideration of a complete exemption for new build properties, and those which have been retrofit or improved
 - d. Consideration of a complete exemption for new build properties, and those which have been retrofit or improved

3. The flexibility for councils to shape the scheme locally so it works best for their local area, housing market and people
 - a. For local authorities to set the discount levels at which homes can be purchased
 - b. Remove the cap on the number of homes which can be acquired using receipts

More information can be found: [Right to Buy position statement | Local Government Association](#)