

Individual Executive Decision Notice

Report title	Community Housing Fund bid	
Decision designation	GREEN	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Peter Bilson Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing	
Wards affected	(All Wards);	
Accountable Director	Kate Martin, Service Director, City Housing	
Originating service	Housing	
Accountable employee	Jane Trethewey Tel Email	Service Manager, Housing Development 01902 555583 jane.trethewey@wolverhampton.gov.uk, henry.gregory@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Summary

This report seeks approval to submit a bid to Homes England for £60,000 funding for a new post of Community Housing Enabler, to work jointly across City of Wolverhampton Council and Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, along the proposed Housing Growth Corridor. This role will support existing groups seeking to build, as well as developing the potential for more locally based housing development with community leadership and support. Both councils will be required to provide a contribution towards the cost of the role, estimated at £5,000 each.

Recommendations for decision:

That the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing, in consultation with the Service Director of City Housing:

1. Approve the submission of a bid to Homes England for £60,000 funding for a new post of Community Housing Enabler, to work jointly across City of Wolverhampton Council and Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council areas.
2. Approve the City Council's contribution towards the cost of the role, estimated at £5,000.
3. Agree to enter into any agreements necessary to draw down and apply the grant funding.

This report is PUBLIC
[NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED]

Signature

Date:

Signature

Date:

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Homes England released their prospectus for the Community Housing Fund in July 2018, its objectives being to:
- increase housing supply in England by increasing the number of additional homes delivered by the community-led housing sector;
 - provide housing that is affordable at local income levels and remains so in perpetuity; and
 - deliver a lasting legacy for the community-led housing sector in the form of an effective and financially self-sustaining body of expertise within the house building industry in England.
- 1.2 The prospectus defines Community-led housing as being ‘about local people playing a leading and lasting role in solving local housing problems, creating genuinely affordable homes and strong communities’. The first phase of funding provides for revenue funding for project-specific activities to support development of community-led housing proposals, and also capital funding of local infrastructure projects leading to community led housing developments.
- 1.3 There is also a specific category of local authority funding in this first phase. This is intended to allow local authorities to support community groups looking to develop community-led housing proposals in their areas; for example, to employ staff to provide advisory services, information and support to groups. This is not intended to directly fund new homes, and success is not measured by delivery of units. The Fund will not cover the total costs of a bid, and bidders must demonstrate that they have maximised other sources of funding such as joint working with local partners.

2.0 Progress, options, and discussion

- 2.1 To explore more fully the potential to bring forward community-based interest in the delivery of new homes, this bid proposes that a Community Housing Enabler post is created, working across both Wolverhampton and Walsall Council areas, broadly across the Growth Corridor. Initially this role is proposed for a period of two years, to build capacity with local groups, support their potential for success, and enable them to achieve their goals of building new homes.
- 2.2 The scope of activities the Community Housing Enabler would be expected to undertake will include:
- Meeting with existing community led groups to establish their current capacity, ambition, and strength of numbers and potential.
 - Clarifying the scope of their ambition, the sites that they are targeting and the potential of these to be genuinely developable
 - Identifying the areas in which they require support and advice
 - Co-ordinating or directly providing appropriate support and advice so that groups are enabled to progress their ambitions realistically

- Brokering support from other organisations, such as Registered Providers, Councils, training agencies, etc., to access sites, development expertise, legal advice, mentoring, training, governance or property management direction, etc.
- Assisting them in bids to the Homes England Community Led Housing Fund or other appropriate funding sources, so that they can progress their development schemes
- Providing a co-ordination function across the range of community-led housing development groups and individuals, so that they can provide a mutual support network
- Promote appropriately the opportunities that community led housing can provide, and celebrate the successes of any projects achieving delivery

2.3 This bid is proposed jointly between the City of Wolverhampton Council and Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, to provide a broadly-based geographical area to source interest, in which community groups may be able to co-ordinate and support each other too. The Community Housing Enabler would be expected to prioritise engagement, although not exclusively, within the Walsall to Wolverhampton corridor, where planning of future development proposals is being actively supported by Homes England.

2.4 The role of the Community Housing Enabler would initially be to work with groups within our Local Authority areas which have already expressed interest in progressing the development of homes for their communities, and then progress to contact with other groups to assess potential. These first groups are set out below.

Black Country Make

2.5 This group is a Community Interest Company, first established five years ago on the Heath Town estate in Wolverhampton and led by a qualified architect. He has provided training and inspiration to a range of local people and supported them in their ambitions to design, manufacture and build homes within their own communities. The group's ambition is to deliver new homes, designed and created using off site manufacture techniques, firstly in Wolverhampton and Walsall, and then expanding their method of delivery to other areas too.

Bushbury Hill Estate Management Board (EMB)

2.6 This is a group of long standing, which took over the management of an area of Wolverhampton Council's housing stock in the 1990s. The EMB is keen to explore the opportunities to bring forward new homes within the community it serves. Its board comprises tenants and leaseholders who live in the area. They are familiar with small scale infill development opportunities in their area, are aware of the type of properties that are most in demand for their community and are keen to support skills training for their residents too.

All Saints Action Network (ASAN)

2.7 ASAN has been established for over 20 years, supporting the All Saints area of Wolverhampton to benefit from opportunities for regeneration. ASAN has expressed an

interest in developing small scale opportunities for new homes in the area on in fill sites, primarily focussed on providing bungalows for the elderly.

Self-Builders

- 2.8 Both Walsall and Wolverhampton Councils have Self Build Registers on their websites, as required by regulation. Self-build groups or individuals contact the Councils from time to time seeking support or land opportunities for development. The Community Housing Enabler can advocate for these groups or individuals and explore the potential to provide serviced plots on larger developments to support their aspirations of delivering self-build homes. Walsall have 17 individuals registering an interest for self-build and would particularly welcome some resource to establish opportunities to enable these individuals to achieve their objectives.

Housing Co-operatives

- 2.9 Walsall work closely with Accord Housing Association who have some community housing experience including the establishment of housing cooperatives. Within recent years Accord established a new housing cooperative at the newbuild Remington Road sites in Beechdale, which were funded by Homes England at the time. Further co-operative living opportunities can be explored, to the benefit of some groups who may not be able to access other forms of social housing.

3.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 3.1 The Council can choose to refrain from bidding and continue to leave community groups to progress without support. The implications of this are that sites which community groups may be able to bring forwards are not developed out. Or that proposals from other developers see opposition due to a lack of community support. There is therefore a risk that the city does not maximise the potential for development, and loses out on the investment of time, energy and resources which community groups and self-builders can offer.
- 3.2 The Council could choose to work with community groups without the benefit of grant funding. But this will be at a revenue cost to the Council and will detract from the larger scale traditional development routes that the Development Team is currently delivering.
- 3.3 The Council could choose to progress the bid for this funding without partnering with Walsall Council. However, this would make our bid less attractive to Homes England, would require a larger match funding contribution from Wolverhampton, and would also fail to realise the benefits of partnership working with a neighbouring authority.

4.0 Reasons for decisions

- 4.1 The development of homes through community-led groups creates an opportunity to bring forward sites with residential potential which may not otherwise be realised. Several locally based groups have expressed interest in the potential to undertake development

for their local communities in Wolverhampton and Walsall, but this ambition tends to be difficult to realise. Also, existing resources do not allow for active promotion of community led building and there is potentially greater demand than councils currently perceive. Obstacles such as inexperience in property development, the difficulty of obtaining land, and partnering or organising so to assure good management of the homes once built, can stall progress.

5.0 Financial implications

- 5.1 The opportunity to bid for revenue funding for a post to support delivery of new homes will provide additional resources to support development. A small contribution from the Council of £5,000 is required as match funding for the bid, and will be set against a contribution from Walsall Council, who will work in partnership in the appointment of the officer. The £5,000 will be met from existing budgets.
[JM/05112018/C]

6.0 Legal implications

- 6.1 The council will be required to enter into a grant agreement to secure the funding and assure Homes England of delivery to its requirements. Legal advice will be obtained regarding the terms and conditions of the agreement, prior to signing.
[RB/02112018/Z]

7.0 Equalities implications

- 7.1 The potential to work with communities on newbuild housing schemes provides opportunity for a range of local groups to benefit from better cohesion in their neighbourhoods, as well as access to affordable new homes. Equalities Analysis will be undertaken on the housing schemes to be proposed through this route on a site by site basis.

8.0 Environmental implications

- 8.1 Any new homes arising from this activity will be delivered to modern standards of thermal performance.

9.0 Human resources implications

- 9.1 Subject to the success of the proposed grant bid, it is proposed to create a new post, titled Community Housing Enabler, to deliver the services anticipated in this report. It is envisaged that this role will be employed by the City of Wolverhampton Council, and work across both Wolverhampton and Walsall areas, in a partnership role.
- 9.2 Recruitment to the new post will adhere to the Council's job evaluation process and the Human Resources recruitment policy and procedure.

[HR/BB/JT/071]

10.0 Corporate Landlord implications

- 10.1 Corporate Landlord advice will be sought regarding any land and asset implications arising from the development proposals that eventually result from the activity arising from this proposed new role.

11.0 Health and Wellbeing implications

- 11.1 There are no direct health and wellbeing implications arising from this report. However, the development of community cohesion through community led housing initiatives, along with the delivery of new homes in the city through these initiatives, is anticipated to be beneficial to the residents participating.