



**Meeting** West Midlands Combined Authority – Land Task and Finish Group

**Held on** 26<sup>th</sup> February 2018, in Conference Room 3, Walsall Council House,  
Lichfield Street, Walsall

**Prepared By** Councillor Ian Shires  
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**Present** Cllr Ian Shires (Walsall) (IS)  
Cllr Peter Douglas Osborn (Birmingham) (PDO)  
Cllr Peter Hughes (Sandwell) (PH)  
Nic Bliss (Confederation of Co-Operative Housing) (NB)  
Sara Woodall (Accord Housing) (SW)  
Neil Hollyhead (Walsall Council) (NH)  
Nirmal Samra (Cannock Chase) (NS)  
Brenda Drew (Notes) (BD)

**Apologies** Were received from Cllr Dean Carroll (Shropshire), Cllr Diana Holl-Allen (Solihull) and Dr Chris Handy

### Scope of the Task and Finish Group

<b>1</b>	<b>Spatial Planning</b>
	a) Where is development needed and what sites are available? What are they are what challenges do they present?
	b) Consider available brown field sites. What level of remediation work is required? What is the Social impact of investing and developing this sort of site?
	c) How do points a and b link with areas of deprivation in the WMCA Region?
	d) In non-constituent councils only, consider if development on Green Belt land is required.
	e) How can strategic planning have a community focus?
<b>2</b>	<b>Forthcoming Housing Development</b>
	a) Understand the location and numbers of housing development already approved but not being constructed.
	b) Develop understanding of why thee are delays to see if there are any common issues.
	c) Is land banking taking place? If so, where and why?
<b>3</b>	<b>What delivery vehicles/methods are required?</b>
	a) What delivery methods are currently used?
	b) What alternative means are available and how would they improve development delivery?
<b>4</b>	<b>How can homes be built differently to improve supply?</b>
	a) Can modular homes with offsite production make a viable contribution to the regions housing target?
	b) What capacity already exists for modular homes?
	c) What skills are required for modular homes?
	d) What have other regions and countries achieved with modular homes?
	e) Current constraints

Cllr Shires advised the meeting that some of the work identified as part of the original scope of the Task and Finish Group has or is being undertaken by member Councils and this will be fed back to the group.

Cllr Peter Hughes confirmed that Sandwell are looking at how homes can be built differently. He confirmed they have already visited the Accord Factory for modular/off site construction and are looking at some further options shortly.

Cllr Ian Shires said that Walsall Council had recently meet through their Scrutiny Panel with housing providers. He said that this meeting had highlighted five recurrent issues:

- a) Lack of affordable and readily available land;
- b) Universal Credit roll out and ensuring customers are prepared for changes;
- c) Benefit Reductions and impacts;
- d) Funding pressures within the sector pose challenges;
- e) Impact of Right To Buy stock replenishment.

It is envisaged that these themes would be the applicable across the wider Combined Authority.

### **Spatial Planning Theme**

Cllr Shires confirmed that meeting was to discuss the Spatial Planning theme, to understand how Councils will deliver the target number of houses, the impact on resources, and impact on/of infrastructure.

During the discussions Members highlighted that the Group requires some additional information to inform the working of the group.

<p>Housing Needs and market needs Assessment for the combined Authority Area</p>	<p>A Housing needs assessment incorporating data for the whole of the Combined Authority needs to be pulled together to identify what is required now and for planning for the future, members said that this may be different in each Council, based on the definition of need and the difference between need and aspirations.</p> <p>It was highlighted that some Councils are waiting for guidance from Government on a standard housing needs assessment but here was a discussion about whether the T&amp;F group could pull together their own .</p>
<p>Deprivation data</p>	<p>Colleagues asked for the deprivation data for the whole of the combined authority to be provided.</p>
<p>Land Banking</p>	<p>A list of all developments with planning approval that have not yet commenced across the combined authority was also requested. This would have to be provided by each planning department though the relevant council lead.</p>

It was suggested that Delma Dwight at the Black Country Consortium should be contacted as she holds a considerable amount of data regarding the Black Country. Neil Hollyhead said he will find out what documents are available and how they fit together.

### **Barriers to development**

Members recognised that barriers are different across the different Councils within the Combined Authority. For example it may be difficult to develop schemes due to local restrictions on use of land, such as greenfield or green belt sites.

A discussion was held around the need for officers to come together in some areas to push projects forward, that have been long approved where the land is in the public domain.

Councils approach to development need to include building the community / neighbourhood rather than just the houses, including flexibility in relation to nomination and tenure types.

Members discussed that the strategy needs to look at providing housing alongside business and infrastructure and that there is a key link between these strategies. For example providing housing close to transport links and close to businesses would provide people with the ability to be less reliant on a car and to use public transport.

It was suggested that a return to a more traditional Council House type of provision could be considered where the constituent members of the Combined Authority pool together to have greater potential for borrowing and share the risks and rewards of such an arrangement. Neil referred to The Land Assembly Fund which is being considered as part of Devo 2, but it is anticipated that this would be more geared around CPO, Legal Advice and Planning.

Members discussed developing a common housing standard across the Combined Authority, looking at houses that are low carbon and low running costs are also a key area to be looked at. It was suggested that the CA could develop its own Green Standard. SW was happy to be a lead for this as Accord was linked into the Green Growth Strategy

Members discussed the issues regarding Right to Buy (including the Voluntary Right to Buy Pilot) and the impact on the RSL's, and how this is affecting the levels of Social Housing Stock.

Remediation of brownfield sites, should no longer be a barrier as there is now a Remediation Fund, but it has been fed back that no one is clear on the criteria for this fund and the timing for the release of the monies had been a recent issue for Accord as they had a Homes England target for a site on site which would not be met if an application for the Remediation Fund could not be made in the current financial year

Another example given was in Sandwell where the development of a Health Centre site with 6 houses, Council has been turned down for the LEP funding for remediation costs.

A suggestion was made to look at remediation funding specifically for underground workings/mine shafts, as this is an issue across the Authority.

Colleagues outlined some of the ideas that are being considered to reduce land banking.

### **Delivery Models**

With regards to delivery models Nic Bliss outlined some of the benefits of Co-Operative style arrangements, and that currently Co-Operative housing is exempt from Right to Buy regulations. Nic shared a copy of a flyer which has been circulated to Local Councils regarding Community-Led Housing and would encourage them to look at the toolkit when it becomes available in March 2018. He would also encourage Councils look at the Community Housing Fund.

Other options include Mutual Home Ownership schemes as community-led housing can be multi tenure

### **Summary of actions**

- a) Guidance on the Voluntary Right to Buy Pilot required including particularly 1-4-1 replacement, which is due to be launched in July, but has not yet been issued. SW is on the Operational Board and will feed back.
- b) Guidance on a standard housing needs assessment, to enable consistency across all Councils. NH to progress
- c) Guidance on criteria for access and timing for bids to the Remediation Fund. IS to ask the LEP for clarity
- d) Delma Dwight to be asked to supply deprivation data for the Black Country
- e) All local authorities to be asked to supply list of approved planning applications where work has not started after a significant period

### **Next Meeting**

Members suggested that the next meeting should be to Look at delivery methods and in particular the Co-Operative Models – benefits and drawbacks . Sara Woodall invited the members to visit the Accord Co-Operative Developments in Redditch.