

Housing Strategy Workshop 14.10.24.

Report by Michael Hanley.

1. Stephen Cordon and Caroline Wagstaff (WAFC officers) discussed housing strategy in terms of WAFC principles (ambitious, inclusive, needs-led etc).

2. Strategy

Northern Housing Consortium

Patrick Murray (PM): Discussed the new Labour government's five mission statements to rebuild Britain.

1. Kickstart the economy, 2. Energy superpower: Great British Energy, 3. Take back our Streets, 4. Break down barriers to Opportunity, 5. Rebuild the NHS.

The new government will be tenure focused. The Right to Buy will be reviewed, especially the discount levels for the buyer. There will be a New Towns Taskforce and reform of the planning system with changes to the National Planning Policy Framework and to housing targets. Land use will be looked at: brownfield sites and the greenbelt will be revisited. Also changes to grant funding.

Tom Kennedy: WAFC needs an increase of 85% in rural affordable housing. The current target is 277, this will need to increase to 1430. Capacity of planning departments will need to increase. The new government requires local authorities to review their greenbelts. Also there will be a push to have more devolution which will encourage more economic development. There will be encouragement for communities to buy community assets such as pubs. There will be much greater emphasis on strategic planning.

The Renters Reform Coalition have been campaigning to abolish section 21 (no-fault) evictions (which will happen). There will be increased protection for the tenant. The landlord will not be able to sell the rented property in the first year of the tenancy. There will be no back-door (above-market rent) evictions. There will be a right to request to keep a pet. No children policies will be outlawed. Local authority enforcement will be strengthened.

The Warm Homes plan will provide £6 billion to upgrade five million homes. There will be a new Decent Homes standard. There will be new strict standards for landlords to respond to defects with more prompt repairs.

There will be an Affordable Homes Programme. Currently there is less funding for the Warm Homes plan, previously £1.2 billion. The actual fund will be announced at the coming budget, as will local government funding.

Dan Hudson (WAFC officer, Local Plan lead): There is no green belt in Cumbria.

N Hughes (NH, LD): Asked about local authorities buying land for social housing and whether there would be government funding.

PM: The government target is 1.5 million homes. This is very ambitious. The target for an area should take into account the local needs.

Cath Whalley (Director of Adult Social Care, CW): Increased house building would be a factor in the support structure. We have large numbers of elderly retiring to Cumbria.

3. Adult Social Care

CW: We have an aging population. 40% of the council's budget goes to Adult Social Care. There will be a shift from the elderly to young people in the future with increased diagnosis of mental

health and autistic spectrum disorders. There has been increased life-limiting illness in the elderly. There is increasing pressure to treat patients in their homes. There is a need to attract care workers but they find it difficult to find affordable homes.

4. Local Plan

Dan Hudson (DH, Director of Local Plan): Discussed how WAFC will change over the next 15 years.

The development sites, environmental and heritage sites, the necessary infrastructure. The Local plan will be one of the strongest roads for change.

This sets out how much new housing is needed and where it goes. How to integrate with existing settlements. It sets out specific types of housing and design of new housing.

With the new government, there has been a 520% increase in the government target (housing) for WAFC. This is very challenging. Planning for this will be very difficult. It might result in "planning by appeal" with a risk of increased chaos.

Discussed SHENA: Strategic Housing and Economic Needs Assessment. This looks at the housing market and overall needs for housing (especially affordable housing) in relation to employment sites. It identifies sites. With affordable housing, the viability needs to be checked and there are viability experts who do this.

5. How to Succeed.

Jeremy Hewitson: Need for higher quality housing at the right price with increased energy efficiency. Also specialist housing for the elderly and people with disability.

Affordable Housing Grants: site development, upgrading homes.

Community Housing Fund: open to community organisations.

Discount Sale Schemes: 40% discount on certain house sales in Eden: currently 200 properties are included in the scheme. They are sold to local people in need of affordable housing (average house price: £228k).

Challenges: Second homes and holiday lets. These impact on property prices and reduce housing stock. There has been a doubling of council tax on second homes.

6. Homelessness

Amanda Brierly: Homelessness has been increasing locally and nationally. Partly due to Section 21 (no-fault) evictions. Also increased drug and alcohol dependency, relationship breakdown (especially in the elderly homeless). Also large rent increases and defaulting on mortgage payments due to higher mortgage rates.

Claire Watters: The department (for homelessness) intervenes with landlords to persuade them to keep the tenant. Also support for people subjected to domestic abuse is provided. Also to rough sleeps (people who sleep outside). There is a severe weather emergency protocol and proactive outreach (Rough Sleepers' Charter).

Help is provided to tenants regarding their tenancy agreement. Also the department works with the Third Sector for additional support and housing.

Top Challenges

Care leavers, hospital discharges, victims of domestic abuse, people with mental health issues or drug misuse, asylum seekers and refugees (mainly in Barrow where they are housed locally), domestic abuse perpetrators, prison leavers, key workers.

7. Council Housing

Rebecca Halton: Most of WAFC's council housing is in Barrow. There are 188 properties there. Rent and service charges are the main source of income. The council provides a high quality of service.

Other providers: Eden Housing, South Lakes Housing and other housing associations. Demand far outstrips supply.

8. Childrens' Services

Mil Vasic: Discussed policies regarding children leaving care homes. The cost of care for young people is very high, currently £16 million per annum but costs will continue to rise.

9. Climate Change

Hannah Girvan: 19% of carbon emissions are related to housing: heating, electricity, construction, maintenance. The plan is to reduce emissions by 75% (Future Homes Standard). There is a need to improve the energy efficiency of our homes (insulation, air-sources heat pumps). Recently there has been a big increase in solar panels. We have already seen a 1.2c rise in average world temperatures

Recently the Met Office has published advice so we need to take climate change risk management seriously in Cumbria.