

## HOUSING EMERGENCY – PROJECT OFFICER RESOURCE

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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Following the declaration of the Housing Emergency, the Housing Group has met, and officers continue to work at speed to explore and develop the potential interventions that have been requested. There is an emerging need for the Council to be more consistently proactive in its approach to facilitating housing sites both affordable and private and to develop innovative proposals in sufficient detail to enable their robust justification. The existing resources of the Services involved are not able to move these forward at the speed required by the Housing Emergency. It is suggested that the allocation of a Project Officer will assist in accelerating progress.

### 2.0 RECOMMENDATION

Members of the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee are asked to:-

- i. agree and recommend to the Policy and Resources Committee that the Council recruit a Project Officer to assist in accelerating the work of the Housing Emergency with funding for this post to be drawn down from the Council's Priorities Investment Fund.

### 3.0 DETAIL

- 3.1 Following the declaration of a Housing Emergency, the Housing Group has met and officers continue to progress the work proposed in the Environment, Development and Infrastructure (EDI) Committee.
- 3.2 As a result of the Housing Emergency an increased focus is being applied to all matters which will assist accelerated delivery of improved housing options within Argyll and Bute, and this work is very broad ranging in scope. In addition, given the known difficulties in delivering the current housing land supply within the two main settlements of Oban and Helensburgh, it is likely to get more challenging.
- 3.3 There is a need for the Council to be more consistently proactive in its approach to facilitating housing sites, both affordable and private. The Council has

previously only undertaken such action sporadically, Dunbeg Kirk Road Improvement being an example. This proactive approach is necessary both because of the increasing costs and complexities of development, and the pressures the housing system is under. To do so consistently, at scale and at speed is beyond the existing staff resources of the services likely to be involved (Planning, Roads, Estates, Legal Services).

- 3.4 Immediate interventions are the proactive facilitation of existing potential housing sites through acquisition of land and provision of road improvements via potential Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO). Some housing sites exist which have already been extensively considered and explored and it is likely that the only feasible solution for each is through the CPO route.
- 3.5 The sites have planning support in principle for the delivery of housing and have been identified in various ways within our LDP and SHIP. The two sites in Oban also have notional allocations of HIF funding from Scottish Government to pay for the infrastructure improvements. Given the housing emergency, there is a fairly solid policy argument to justify pursuing a CPO route, albeit it will need to be twin tracked with ongoing discussion with the developers and landowners. However in order to pursue this it is first necessary to establish with more detailed design work that the proposed outline solutions are physically deliverable before the Council can be requested to make a firm decision to pursue a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) route, and to consider the legal process in order to establish that we have laid the necessary justification. This work can reasonably be initiated now but will require resources to pursue it.
- 3.6 It is requested that a Project Officer be appointed to concentrate on developing these matters in the first instance. The Project Officer would likely be, though not necessarily, a property professional (Surveyor / Planner / Engineer), preferable with experience of bringing forward development sites and or delivering CPOs or other land assembly exercise. If this is a temporary post it is suggested 3 years as a minimum will allow progress on some of the substantive issues. An LGE11/12 grade is considered appropriate, along with supporting budget for laptop/phone/travel, a budget of £200,000 would be required. In addition it is anticipated that there may be subsequent requests for research & capital costs as the various projects are developed, but at present there is insufficient detail to estimate these. This could be substantial depending on what works are prioritised and funding cannot be sourced elsewhere i.e. spend to save; RGD; Scottish Government and Strategic Housing Fund.
- 3.7 The continuing work of the Housing group will additionally generate numerous other work streams to support potential radical interventions in the short to medium term and the proposed Project Officer can be utilised to contribute to / lead some or all of these. Some options include:
  - Exploring a Council buy back and resale scheme of second homes or holiday lets which come to the market, adding a primary occupancy burden before resale, thus directly bringing properties back in to residential use. This could capitalize on the potential effect of short term licensing, the introduction of

planning control areas, and potential changes to the Council tax and NDR regimes.

- Facilitating private new build sites through purchase (and re-sale) or underwriting private units for sale, or delivering infrastructure: Craignure; Port Ellen, Bowmore Masterplan, and Dunbeg.
- Developing a Council civils contracting arm available to plug the gap in the local contractor market.
- Supporting specific research for Strategic Land Identification at scale near Oban & Helensburgh. PLDP2 commits us to deliver the OSDF and HSDF to identify land for growth for the next 20-40 years. Work has started in the planning policy team but will require support and funding to carry out specialist research (transport assessments, infrastructure and junction feasibilities, Flood Studies etc...). Collectively these studies will be looking to identify land for as much as 4000 units which would create the scale to justify strategic infrastructure investment (subject to separate project mandate submission).

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 Work is underway at pace by the Housing Group, as required by ELT and the declaration of a Housing Emergency. There is a need for a more consistent proactive approach to facilitating both private and affordable housing development and to continue to investigate and develop the innovative interventions that are expected, in adequate detail to robustly justify their recommendation. The existing resources of the Services involved are not able to move these forward at the speed required by the Housing Emergency, and it is suggested the allocation of a Project Officer will assist in accelerating progress funded from the Council's Priorities Investment Fund.

#### **5.0 IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Policy – The ongoing activity is consistent with current Council priorities and the Local Housing Strategy vision and outcomes which are directly aligned with the overarching objectives of the Outcome Improvement Plan, in particular Outcome 2 – we have infrastructure that supports sustainable growth.
- 5.2 Financial – The post and supporting budget will cost £200,000 over a 3 year period with a recommendation that this is funded from the Council's Priorities Investment Fund.
- 5.3 Legal – None.
- 5.4 HR – Creation of a temporary post for a period of 3 years.
- 5.5 Equalities (Fairer Duty Scotland) – The activity outlined in the report is consistent with aims and objectives set out in the local housing strategy, which is subject to an EQIA.

- 5.5.1 Equalities – Protected Characteristics – There are targets set within the SHIP to deliver housing which meet the needs of specialist groups.
- 5.5.2 Social-Economic Characteristics – The delivery of affordable housing across Argyll and Bute facilitates socio-economic opportunities for all. The SHIP links with the Child Poverty Strategy.
- 5.5.3 Islands – The delivery of affordable housing across Argyll and Bute facilitates socio-economic opportunities for all. The SHIP links with the Child Poverty Strategy.
- 5.6 Risk – Takes longer to progress with interventions to deal with the Housing Emergency.
- 5.7 Climate Change – The Council is committed to working towards net zero.
- 5.8 Customer Service – None.

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