

Changes to Wyre Forest District Councils Housing Register

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to outline to the Planning Inspector the data on numbers on the Housing Register and to consider related factors. Homelessness remains high and there are undoubtedly issues regarding affordability within the District so the Council is not expecting a decrease in the demand for affordable housing, rather that it reinforces support for the current policy position of 90 affordable housing units per annum which is a balance between the overall demand and likely supply.

2. Housing Needs Assessment 2018

In 2018 the Housing Needs Assessment utilised data from the Council's Housing Register to inform the understanding of the level of need for affordable housing in the district in line with PPG guidance at the time. At the time the data was analysed there were just over 3400 households on the Housing Register.

3. Housing Register

The Housing Register number fluctuates continuously as new applicants join, households are housed or rehoused and other cases are removed because they resolve their own housing issues or are no longer eligible etc. The allocations policy allows the Council to close applications that have been inactive for 12 months or more.

The Housing Register data is captured in the Local Authority Housing Statistical return on the 31st March every year and shows the following trend;

2018 – **3426**

2019 – **3564**

2020 – **2836**

The current total of 2308 is following an increase in the frequency of the process to review the register to ensure that only those eligible and actively seeking housing are registered. This commenced on a monthly basis in 2020, following a restructure to the team. This has led to a stabilisation of the numbers but at a lower level than 2018.

The Allocations Policy was substantially changed following the Localism Act 2011 and came into force in 2014. Since that date there have only been minor changes to the policy following statutory instruments that allowed for armed forces, and then their former spouses / partners, to join housing registers regardless of having a local connection. These changes have given greater access to the housing register.

4. Accounting for the change

The Council believes there are three primary reasons for the reduction in numbers.

- a) Relating to the number of 100% affordable housing schemes that Council has delivered in conjunction with the Registered Provider partners thereby increasing the opportunities for rehousing for those in the greatest need. These amount to nearly 200 units of accommodation from April 2018 up until March 2021.

- b) The Council has increased its service offer to private sector landlords and those applicants on the housing register who can accessing the private rented sector (PRS) with some additional support (including those owed duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) since 2018. This includes a specialist PRS officer and a support officer, additional funding and ongoing help to landlords. This has led to 70 households being accommodated on average each year (from 2018 onwards) from the Housing Register.
- c) In June 2018 the Housing Register, Housing Advice and Homelessness service, which had originally been contracted out at the time of stock transfer in 2000, was brought back in house from the stock transfer partner and this has enabled the Council to focus on activities including the effective operation of the Housing Register so that households no longer wishing to access social housing or with inactive housing register accounts are closed.

There will undoubtedly be other changes in the housing market and housing policy that will impact on the wider populations' ability to secure housing (without approaching the Council) for themselves including factors such as the availability of the home buy scheme and the improving economic conditions prior to the Coronavirus pandemic which may also contribute to reduced numbers.

5. Conclusion

Whilst demand for housing and housing need in its most acute form remains high in the district, it is clear that if the Housing Needs Assessment was undertaken at the current levels on the Housing Register there may be a reduced number of households in affordable housing need. However, the country is undoubtedly now in a period of economic decline following the coronavirus pandemic and Brexit, both of which may have negative impacts on the local economy. The Council believes therefore that it is wise to continue to seek a minimum of 90 affordable housing units per year.