

MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
JOINT COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY GROUP AND
GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY GROUP
THURSDAY, 17 OCTOBER 2024

Held at 6.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Rushcliffe Arena, Rugby Road, West
Bridgford
and live streamed on Rushcliffe Borough Council's YouTube channel

PRESENT:

Councillors P Matthews (Chair), L Plant (Vice Chair), M Barney, J Billin, R Butler, K Chewings, S Dellar, G Fletcher, C Grocock, R Mallender, D Mason, H Parekh, A Phillips, D Soloman, R Walker, G Williams, L Way

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

D Banks	Director of Neighbourhoods
C Evans	Head of Economic Growth and Property
D Burch	Head of Neighbourhoods
D Dwyer	Strategic Housing Manager
R Mapletoft	Planning Policy Manager
C Ratcliffe	Housing Strategy & Development Team Leader
G Whitton	Housing Solutions Team Leader
E Richardson	Democratic Services Officer

APOLOGIES:

Councillor S Ellis

5 Appointment of Chair

Councillor Williams nominated Councillor Matthews for the position Chair and this was seconded by Councillor Way.

6 Appointment of Vice-Chair

Councillor Williams nominated Councillor Plant for the position Vice Chair and this was seconded by Councillor Way.

7 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

8 Accessible Housing

Councillor Thomas presented her scrutiny request and explained the reasons for submitting it. She said that there were two main arms to the submission, one related to adapting existing housing and one related to adaptations in new

homes being built. She noted that the Council was no longer going to top up the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) which would lead to increased waiting times for access to adapted housing. She said that key questions for the Council were whether it would consider reinstating topping up the DFG in the next budget and whether there was opportunity to look at the funding pot and allocation locally. She added that it was also important to consider new housing being built and supported the Nottinghamshire Strategic Plan suggestion that that all new houses be built to the adaptable standard.

The Strategic Housing Manager and the Planning Policy Manager presented the Report of the Director for Neighbourhoods and provided a presentation overview of key features to the Group, which covered the following aspects:

- What is accessible housing?
- Understanding disabilities
- Housing needs
- Building new accessible homes
- Adaptation of existing homes
- Disabled Facilities Grant
- Rehousing as an alternative option
- Barriers to accessible housing
- Future options for change

Members of the Group thanked Officers for providing a comprehensive explanation of the different aspects of accessible housing.

Members of the Group asked a range of questions, in relation to: registered providers making financial contribution to adaptations in their properties and whether there was any reason or law or regulation to make them contribute; whether the Council received Safe and Secure grant allocation from Government; viability considerations in relation to the Greater Nottinghamshire Strategic Plan; more information about local land charges; more information about Nottinghamshire County Council top up budget; why the Council's Accessible Housing allocation was the lowest locally even though it delivered a high number of adaptations, was this due to a local of Government formula.

The Strategic Housing Manager explained that there were no regulations prohibiting registered providers from financially contributing to adaptations in their properties and that they had an equality duty to provide accessible homes where required for their tenants, which supported the argument for them to make contributions. In relation to the Nottinghamshire County Council top up budget, she advised that referrals were considered on a case by case basis at a Board meeting. In relation to accessible housing funding, she said that this was set through a 2011 national formula and that the County Council's role was to passport the allocation to the local district councils accordingly, and that to change the allocation amounts would require agreement by all the district authorities. In relation to land charges, she said that the Council had previously used £500k of capital receipts from stock transfer but had no further receipts to continue this practice.

In relation to local land charges, the Planning Policy Manager said that this was where a charge was affixed to the adapted house with whomever buying it

having to pay that cost. In relation to viability requirements on developments as part of the Local Plan Policy, he explained that adding costs for adaptations could lead to a development no longer being viable to deliver and as such it was a balance between added costs and viability, with costs based on typical scenarios from which assumptions were made for each development depending on its size and number of houses.

Members of the Group asked for clarification in relation to requirement to provide 1% adaptable housing per 100 dwellings, noting that eleven had been built in the Borough since 2019, and asked whether the target could be increased. Members of the Group also referred to the cap set at £30k as per the Government mandate from 2008 and noted that the recommendation from a White Paper in 2011 to increase it had not happened. The Group expressed disappointment that the £20k grant had been cut in Rushcliffe and asked how this compared to other local district councils.

The Planning Policy Manager explained that the 1% was not a target set through policy and said that the 1% only applied to sites over 100 dwellings and only from October 2019, which was after most large developments in the Borough had been approved. He said that a review of the percentage could be conducted as part of the Local Plan review process. The Strategic Housing Manager said that the other local authorities still offered the discretionary grant and that some did not spend all of their grant allocation and that one had introduced a waiting list.

Members of the Group asked for clarity in relation to the application process and delivery of works for adaptations. The Strategic Housing Manager said that the Council was working closely with Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing (MTVH) who were the largest housing provider in the Borough to review what DFG work had taken place historically and the cost of those works, to look at what MTVH could do to assist the Council with the shortfall in funding and to assist in bringing outstanding works forward. The Council was also considering whether it may be possible to make costs savings by using MTVH internal contractors to deliver the works rather than external contractors.

The Housing Strategy & Development Team Leader explained that applications for adaptations were usually made by tenants and that the tenants chose the independent contractors to carry out the works.

Members of the Group asked how the Council could influence standards of adaptations and the Planning Policy Manager said that this would be through the Local Plan Policy process.

The Strategic Housing Manager said that the Council had a capital programme which could be used to support registered providers and that the Council informed new housing site developers that this could be used to support their delivery of accessible housing.

Members of the Group asked about the locations of adaptable dwellings and the Planning Policy Manager said that they were located across the Borough, in Ruddington, Radcliffe on Trent, Cotgrave and East Leake. He said that there was potential future provision at the Gamston site.

Members of the Group asked about the local funding agreement, differences in expenditure by different councils and whether the allocation amounts could be changed. The Group asked whether it would be impacted by the introduction of the Combined Authority. The Strategic Housing Manager explained there was a Strategic Oversight Group locally with representatives from the County Council and the District Councils sitting on it. She said that a report had gone to the respective Chief Executives setting out the difficulties with the funding, following which a more detailed review of the system had been requested. She said that a workshop had been held to review the process locally and that the Council had lobbied Government regarding the national allocation. She said that she would take the questions about differences in expenditure across the various District Councils to the Strategic Oversight Group and seek further analysis.

The Head of Economic Growth and Property said that the Combined Authority was not currently looking at DFG.

Members of the Group referred to community awareness and understanding of the process and how this could be improved, particularly for people who had learning difficulties and were not IT literate. The Strategic Housing Manager explained that there was currently a split between County Council and Borough responsibilities, with the Borough Council having a mandatory duty for DFG and the County Council having a mandatory duty for disabled people and children, which led to a split in processes. She noted that some counties had combined these processes. She thought it important that local authorities continued to look at ways of simplifying the process.

Members of the Group suggested that Councillors could raise awareness of DFG with their residents and the Strategic Housing Manager confirmed that there was an information sheet available on the County Council website for applicants (<https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/care/adult-social-care/social-care-publications/disabled-facilities-grant>) which provided simplified information about the process. She confirmed that a person's Occupational Therapist was the first point of contact for any adult or child DFG application and noted that there was currently an eleven month waiting list.

Members of the Group asked about costs, how they were assessed and why there were differences in delivery between developers and whether there was anything that the Council could do to increase the percentage of M4(2) adaptations.

The Planning Policy Manager explained that the cost figures had not been set by the Council but were secondary detail standard costs, with real costs often greater or lower depending on the development. He said that it may be possible to revise the percentage of adaptable housing in the future as part of the Local Plan process. He said that M4(1) adaptations were mandatory for all new housing but that making M4(2) the national standard would mean that this higher level of adaptation did not need to be applied at a local level. He suggested that the Council could write to Government asking for M4(2) to be the mandatory level for adaptation for all new housing.

Members of the Group asked whether any other local District Councils were topping up their DFG and whether they were able to carry forward their underspend. The Strategic Housing Manager said she was not aware of any other local councils topping up their DFG and said that there was no requirement for funding allocations to be paid back or redistributed. She confirmed that it would require the agreement of all local authorities for the allocation and redistribution process to be changed. The Housing Strategy & Development Team Leader said that councils with council housing stock funded their council housing through the Housing Revenue Account and so were not using their DFG budget to fund those adaptations.

Members of the Group asked about the discretionary allowance and for information about people with complex needs who could not afford to cover any costs above the grant allocation. The Strategic Housing Manager said that DFG was mandatory and that local authorities had a statutory duty to provide it and therefore the only way to manage provision when there was insufficient funding was to introduce a waiting list, as such the Council had an eleven month waiting list. The Housing Strategy & Development Team Leader confirmed that the waiting list was for all referrals and said that for works that cost more than the £30k DFG allocation, residents could look at whether there were any alternative forms of funding available to them to cover those costs.

Members of the Group asked how adapted houses were available to the people who needed them. The Planning Policy Manager said that the Council did not have any control over private sector houses and hence it tried to secure adapted properties through accessible housing provision on development sites to give the Council more control over them. He added that if M4(2) was applied to all properties all would have potential for future adaptation. The Strategic Housing Manager said that in terms of the Council's housing register, the Council had nomination rights to adapted properties and if made aware of a resident's needs and adapted properties becoming available, it would try to match them up wherever possible.

Members of the Group referred to national policy regarding DFGs and the Director for Neighbourhoods said that the Levelling Up Housing and Communities Committee had released a report in May 2024 about disabled people in the housing sector, which the Council had contributed to, which set out a number of recommendations. He said that he would share the document with the Group (please see the link here: [Disabled people in the housing sector \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk)) and hoped that it would inform future Government policy. He confirmed that the Council was working with County and District colleagues to coordinate a change locally.

The Group discussed the Council bringing back council housing stock in the Borough, in part as this would allow it to access the Housing Revenue Account. Members of the Group noted that this matter had been discussed at a recent Full Council meeting and had been rejected. The Director for Neighbourhoods said that it was not a Council policy position currently but that Members of the Group could raise it separately with the Portfolio Holder.

The Chair confirmed that the presentation slides from this meeting would be shared with Councillors.

The Chair took the Group through the Recommendations and also the four suggestions made as part of the presentation, to:

- Increase the supply of accessible and adapted homes, including wheelchair user dwellings
- Advocate for an increase in funding relative to local need to address the current funding disparities
- Review of the customer pathway and exploration of joined up systems to create efficiencies and risk sharing
- Cross sector investment (health & social care) to reduce demand on health care systems and enable people to remain independent at home

It was RESOLVED that:

- a) the Communities Scrutiny Group & Growth and Development Scrutiny Group scrutinised the information provided by officers to enhance the provision of accessible housing; and
- b) explored actions that the Council can take to meet the housing needs of residents with disabilities

Actions Table: 17 October 2024

No.	Action	Who Responsible/Update
8.	Share the presentation from the meeting with Councillors	Democratic Services have emailed a copy of the presentation to all Councillors
8.	Increase the supply of accessible and adapted homes, including wheelchair user dwellings	Officers to take forward suggestions for future versions of the Local Plan to look at increasing the number of properties adapted to M4(2) and M4(3) - Ongoing
8.	Advocate for an increase in funding relative to local need to address the current funding disparities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officers to request additional data and analysis about differences in expenditure across local councils – Update information has been emailed to members of the Joint Committee • Portfolio Holder to write to Government regarding the funding formula - The Portfolio Holder has written to the Deputy Prime Minister, Angela

		Raynor – please find information here: RBC calls on Deputy Prime Minister to end postcode lottery for Disabled Facilities Grants - Rushcliffe Borough Council
8.	Review of the customer pathway and exploration of joined up systems to create efficiencies and risk sharing	Comms Team to help advertise the DFG to ensure residents are aware that they can apply for it - Information has been publicised about an increased £200k of DFG funding: COG reviewing the £200k increased funding . Information will be shared more widely in 2025.

The meeting closed at 9.01 pm.

CHAIR