

## Appendix **A**

### Keep it REAL programme

#### Expression of interest

Please return the completed form to [localism@local.gov.uk](mailto:localism@local.gov.uk) by **5pm on Friday 27 January 2012**.

**Council:** Central Bedfordshire Council  
**Contact name:** Tony Keaveney  
**Contact job title:** Assistant Director Housing  
**Contact email:** [tony.keaveney@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:tony.keaveney@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)  
**Contact phone:** 0300 300 5213

**Name of sponsoring Executive Member: Councillor Mrs Carole Hegley, Executive Member for Social Care, Health and Housing**

**Please confirm that this Eol has been approved by the Chief Executive:**  
Yes. Richard Carr supports the submission of this Eol.

#### **Please describe the challenge or issue for which you are seeking**

**support:** We are particularly looking for the kind of 'wicked issue' that can't be solved simply through a technical or managerial fix; has to deal with complex and changing circumstances; requires behavioural change; for which there is no existing solution or where the solution needs to be identified at the same time as addressing it; or where information is incomplete or hard to make sense of.

Central Bedfordshire is an area that will, during the course of the next twenty years, see significant housing and employment growth, as well as inward migration. That is, inward migration of households from Hertfordshire and London, seeking relatively cheaper market housing than they are able to afford in the wider south east. The 'wicked issue' that Central Bedfordshire Council will tackle during 2012/14 relates to the freedoms and flexibilities of the Localism Act, applied to the Housing Allocations scheme for Central Bedfordshire, in the context of –

- Welfare reform;
- Pressing Housing Need, at a time of economic uncertainty;
- The new affordable rent regime, which has affordability implications;
- Break with a 'home for life' – introducing 'fixed term' tenancies;
- Re-definition of the purpose of social housing, potentially a 'move away from' the imperative to create new, economically mixed, balanced communities;
- Successfully delivering large scale, sustainable development;
- Fundamental review of access routes into social housing; and re-assessment of Priorities – potentially to create Local allocation schemes across (within) Central Bedfordshire, within a coherent District wide Allocation scheme that meets the most pressing Housing Needs.

Central Bedfordshire is an area of relatively high housing need, evidenced through Housing Market assessments and also the demand for social housing. The Council is

ambitious to meet local housing need, as a theme of an overarching ambition to secure economic prosperity; jobs; and to improve social mobility. Many households are unable to afford homes locally and yet some households feel excluded from being able to access social housing because they don't have a particular problem (issue) that will give them a sufficiently high priority, to enable them to access social housing. There is increasingly a perception that social housing is available solely to people who are vulnerable; or, who experience crisis situations. For example, homelessness. There are tensions, and for many people, the private rented sector is their main option. But accommodation is expensive. There is a widely held view that access routes into social housing, on the basis of Need, do not benefit ordinary, 'hard working' families.

There has been a consistent drive, in recent years, toward community led regeneration. Interventions include a successful and nationally recognised Arts led project. But success (in terms of the outcomes for an area), in recent years, is questionable. It is difficult to evidence social mobility in some areas; and it could be argued that current access routes to social housing act against socio-economic mobility and have perpetuated deprivation; including child poverty, and also levels of crime and the fear of crime, in some areas.

The potential to use social tenancies more flexibly creates an inherent tension between meeting Need and the aim of creating healthy, socio-economically mixed neighbourhoods. By limiting the length of a tenancy to the time it takes the tenant to establish themselves in the labour market and improve their economic circumstances, you potentially lose an opportunity to improve the socio-economic mix of the neighbourhood.

A further dimension to the local situation is the mis-match between the local labour market and the cost of housing. Our Strategic Housing Market Assessment found that house prices were relatively high, reflecting our position relative to the wider job market of the south-east, and a high level of out-commuting of residents into relatively well-paid work. By contrast, the local labour market is low-paid, affording limited opportunities for those who are less skilled or less mobile to find work which will allow them to compete in the housing market.

In the context that is described above, the Council is considering how to develop an allocations framework, to reflect local priorities in a meaningful way (and potentially, in different ways, in each locality, across Central Bedfordshire). This could mean a departure away from the single Allocations scheme for the area. And yet, the Council will not constrain or fetter its ability to meet statutory obligations, to those vulnerable people and families who are the main component of demand for social housing.

Central Bedfordshire is, in relative terms, an affluent area; though there are areas where the indicators of multiple deprivation are amongst the most deprived in the region. The Council is ambitious to promote health and wellbeing, and to protect the vulnerable; as part of an over-arching vision that Central Bedfordshire should be a 'great place to live and work'. There are significant and far reaching Equalities implications, that in the context of the change agenda, presents Risk which will need to be managed tightly.

Important to that emerging vision is an ambition to review access routes to social housing and potentially to re-define the purpose of social housing, ending the

'tenancy for life', and to move towards the use of social housing as a spring-board into employment and training, social and economic mobility.

There is a degree of unease, at the prospect of fundamentally re-casting the purpose of social housing (in terms of who has priority to access what is essentially a scarce resource) if to do so might mean that households who are vulnerable, or in difficult circumstances, are to face prolonged difficulty. But it is also true that the Council is ambitious to tackle persistent, area based deprivation, in particular child poverty.

Whilst inevitably, there is the potential for a somewhat parochial debate that is related to homes for local people, the more compelling lever of change is about enabling or creating social mobility that is within – and so benefits – an area. That is, social mobility that benefits a whole area rather than the opportunity for any one individual to leave an area. It is about helping an area, to help itself; and using Housing allocations as one lever of change. There is the potential to use flexible tenancies to support households in times of their particular need; and using the allocations scheme to reward families who are working; or seeking to enter the labour market.

To sum up, our wicked issues are to:

- Find a way to use flexible tenancies judiciously, so that they act as a springboard to promote socio-economic mobility; help to make best use of the scarce social housing resource for people in the greatest need; and do not act to undermine new, as well as existing communities, by skewing the socio-economic balance and inadvertently holding back the people in those areas. In particular, to tackle problems related to child poverty where it is most persistent.
- Find a meaningful way to reflect local priorities within the Council's Allocations Scheme, in the context of high demand and a housing market which is out of kilter with the local labour market.

**Please describe why you feel your issue would benefit from external support and challenge from Keep it REAL:**

- The draft allocations COG makes explicit that councils should have regard to their obligations under the equalities legislation in framing their allocations schemes. Council members and officers would benefit from assistance to develop their ability to apply equalities legislation in this situation.
- A key issue is understanding our communities; their aspirations, at a time of economic hardship and welfare reform, in particular to know how best to help those households who are more vulnerable, face particular issues, or who experience isolation. How do we deepen our understanding of those communities, in terms of the levers of change to promote social mobility (using enabling, rather than direct interventions)? How do we use that understanding to frame an allocations scheme which doesn't have unintended consequences, which might conflict with local priorities or the policy intent? The concern is that potentially, the policy shift might actually result in an

exacerbation or intensification of social deprivation in some areas.

- Participatory democracy in terms of a complex debate where the Policy levers and the outcomes are not straightforward. How do we work with all our residents to make sure that they are enabled to influence what is likely to be fundamental change in the local Housing system. Initially, external facilitation would assist in defining the purpose of change and the specific policy objectives.
- An allocations scheme which aims to encourage and support employment is likely to be more successful if it is allied to other initiatives to improve the position of our less-well-off residents in the labour market. Outside challenge and input would assist us in developing a vision, in collaboration with our communities.
- Delivering new, large scale, sustainable development is essentially about creating new places that don't exist now, and creating new communities to live in those places. What are the implications of the change being considered by the Council, in terms of successful Place-making?

**Please indicate which organisations are involved in working on your**

**issue:** This might include other councils from all tiers, local and national civil society organisations, public service organisations, and the private sector.

Housing Associations, as key partners of the Council. In particular, the Members of the Bedfordshire Homefinder Scheme.

Town and Parish Councils. Please note, a twelve week consultation is about to commence, with regard to a proposed new Local Lettings Policy, which will include engagement with all Town and Parish Councils.

Engagement with Local lettings agencies and Private landlords, through the Council's Landlord's Forum.

Engagement with the Council's Development partners, in terms of the delivery of new build, sustainable development across several major sites and urban extensions. There is a well established Place-making approach, that is rooted in community involvement and Planning for Real.

Voluntary sector, in particular the Supported Housing providers and voluntary sector advocacy and advice groups – e.g. Citizens advice.

**Please indicate what nationally relevant learning could be shared from the proposed work:**

How to use Housing allocations to act against and potentially reverse persistent, estate based deprivation (including child poverty) in the context of Welfare Reform, using levers that are essentially 'enabling' rather than direct intervention, so as to achieve social mobility on an area basis; and to provide a springboard to better economic prospects, on an area basis. Put bluntly, we know that physical regeneration schemes can be costly – but do not necessarily change the

fundamentals of what a 'Place is like', or the life chances of people living in the area.

If a way is found to implement the Localism Act freedoms in Central Bedfordshire, that truly reflects local priorities, strengthens participatory democracy and acts to promote socio-economic mobility; then this will act as a real-world case study of the potential of the Localism approach to harness the latent strength to be found in relatively deprived and weak communities.

Working closely with local communities, as to their priorities, to share learning as to how to develop separate and discrete Local Allocation schemes, that operates effectively within a District wide scheme, where overall Housing Need is being met; whilst retaining the attributes of a Choice Based lettings scheme.