

Central Bedfordshire Council

Executive - 31 March 2015

Park Homes in Central Bedfordshire – A Unique Environment and Place to Live

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This report relates to a Key Issue

Purpose of this report

1. The report introduces the draft “Park Homes in Central Bedfordshire – A unique environment and place to live 2015-2020” document and proposes that it is adopted by Executive. The document represents the Council’s offer to Park Homes residents and is based on comprehensive and significant stakeholder engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive is asked to:

1. **adopt the draft Park Homes in Central Bedfordshire – A unique environment and place to live 2015-2020 document (Appendix A); and**
2. **approve the action plan which will drive improvements to services over the next 5 years (Appendix C).**

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

2. The item was presented to the Social Care, Health and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 16th March 2015. This Committee made the following recommendations to Executive:
 - That Executive adopt the draft Park Homes in Central Bedfordshire document.

Introduction

3. Park homes are residential mobile homes that require licensing, the homes are normally owned by the resident occupier, who rents a pitch from the site operator. Residents have to pay a monthly pitch fee to the site operator; they are required to comply with rules and regulations, prescribed in legislation and by the site operator. Park homes have proved attractive to retired people wishing to release capital from the sale of a house and find a pleasant and peaceful location with a sense of community to live in. Many parks have an age restriction in place, normally 50 years or over.
4. The Council currently administers site licenses for 82 park home and gypsy and traveller sites across Central Bedfordshire with the total number of units across all sites exceeding 1200. 47 of the 82 sites are more traditional gypsy and traveller occupied mobile home sites, which are different in character and not generally recognised as “park homes”. The intention of the offer is to focus primarily on park homes sites, whilst recognising that some of the issues for older residents on gypsy and traveller sites are going to be similar in nature to residents on park homes sites.
5. The Park Homes Offer has been drawn up based on this comprehensive review of park homes residents’ needs. Following a successful engagement event in January 2014, a needs assessment was undertaken with residents, which provided a significant response from 426 residents. The issues arising from the needs assessment are particularly relevant in the context of significant changes in legislation over the previous 18 months and future changes including the implementation of the Care Act.

Key Needs Assessment findings

6. Residents are generally happy living on park homes; the overall satisfaction with living in a park home is 80%. Residents chose to live a park home as they are more affordable in comparison to a bricks and mortar property in the same area. The relative low maintenance of the property is also a desirable feature. Many residents were attracted to the peace and quiet of the park home lifestyle and the community spirit.
7. Many residents view their park home as a home for life, 32% had not considered moving from their home. 24% feel that only ill health or disability would prevent them from remaining in their homes in the future. 14% of residents felt that only a large windfall of money would enable a move from their home, perhaps leaving a feeling of being “trapped”.

8. A significant number of residents had concerns over access to information and advice on several aspects of living in park homes. 62% wanted improved access to information and 60% required information on what assistance was available to them. A third of residents wanted more opportunities for resident involvement.
9. Residents are concerned about charges applied to them (pitch fees, commission to site operators), Park Rules, Park Owners, Cold Homes, Location (in terms of isolation, lack of public transport), and Utilities supplied. Some of these concerns also surfaced during a second Residents' Forum in January 2015 and through consultation. These issues have shaped the priorities and Action Plan within the Offer document.

Options for consideration

10. Executive is requested to adopt the draft "Park Homes in Central Bedfordshire – a unique environment and place to live 2015 – 2020" Offer to enable the proposed actions to be implemented. Executive is asked to consider feedback from consultation and recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Reason/s for decision

11. The Offer document is focused on the findings of the Needs Assessment survey, which provided responses from 426 park home residents. The priorities and resulting actions planned aim to address the challenges highlighted by residents and improve the quality of life for residents.
12. The consultation did not provide a significant response but respondents were generally positive about the Offer, its vision, and the priorities. The main concern raised was whether site operators will "buy in" to the principles of the Offer or provide a barrier to change. The consultation response report is attached as Appendix B.

Council Priorities

13. The draft Offer and actions contained within support the Council's priorities *enhancing your local community* through its vision of *All park home residents will enjoy an independent living lifestyle in a unique community environment that meets the needs and aspirations of older people in Central Bedfordshire* and resulting priorities.
14. The Offer also helps *promote health and well being and protect the vulnerable*, in particular through actions that aim to improve the park home environment and experience, enabling residents to live independently in their home for as long as they wish to.

Corporate Implications

15. Sustainability – the Offer specifically looks to improving advice and assistance to residents impacted by cold homes and unaffordable heating costs.
16. Public Health - the Offer specifically looks to reduce health impacts of living in cold homes and recognises the potential impacts of social isolation where older residents can find themselves cut off from other parts of the community.
17. Community Safety – the rural nature, open access and older resident groups may make park home site more vulnerable to criminal activities. Developing the offer will need to recognise these potential impacts on residents
18. Risks - the Offer is the first of it's kind and is positive in aiming to improve the lives and experiences of park home residents. risks of failing to deliver the offer are:
 - **Reputational** – there is a risk if the Council and its partners do not progress the proposed actions, which will provide residents with a feeling of dissatisfaction with the Council. This will be minimised through the Council's new Park Homes Lead Officer within Housing Solutions service and through the newly established Park Homes Residents' Forum. The forum will be presented with an update each year.
 - **Economic** – the Council recover park homes licence fees under the Mobile Homes Act 2013. The Fees Policy adopted by Executive in March 2014 provides a clear statement of how fees are calculated and has minimised risk of challenge from both site operators and residents. In 2014/15 the Council have received 100% of licence fees due from park homes site operators without challenge.
 - **Social** - There are no perceived social risks of the Offer as it aims to improve the park home residents' living experience and environment.
 - **Legal** - there is a risk of the Council not meeting it's statutory responsibilities (Mobile Homes Acts, Care Act, etc.). This will be minimised through service planning and allocation of resources to ensure that statutory responsibilities are met.

Legal Implications

19. The Offer goes above and beyond any statutory duties the Council has in respect of park homes. It does not add any more obligations than already imposed by statute nor does it prejudice the ability of the Council to undertake those duties. Any risk of legal challenge is negligible. Any risk is from dissatisfied service users should the Council not carry out or attempt to carry out the work promised as discussed under Corporate Implications.

Financial Implications

20. There are no direct financial implications arising from the Offer as all activity will be carried out within the agreed budgets.

Equalities Implications

21. An equalities impact assessment has been completed as part of the Offer development process, and it is available as a background document.
22. The key findings of the equalities impact assessment are:
 - The Offer aims to improve the living experience and environment of park homes residents, the vast majority of which are older people (90% are aged over 60yrs, 37% aged over 75yrs).
 - In 2012 The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published 'A better deal for mobile home owners – Changes to the local authority site licensing regime - Impact assessment'. In this it stated that 'an unusual tenure arrangement, an aging resident population, and poor regulatory controls present risks that residents will be exploited by site owners. The Offer includes clarity in how the Council will administer and enforce the new duties of the Mobile Homes Act 2013.
 - Comments from consultation suggested that the Council should not view park homes as a "retirement village" but more a type of lifestyle for a broader range of older people. Consequently, the vision has been changed to remove reference to "retirement" and the Offer actions are more aligned to improving the universal offer for all park homes residents. This includes wider issues such as social isolation that were highlighted from the needs assessment.

Implications for Work Programming

23. There are no known implications that might impact on the work programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or further reports which might be considered by Members.

Conclusion and next Steps

24. The draft "Park Homes in Central Bedfordshire – a unique environment and place to live 2015 – 2020" Offer has been prepared with a focus on the results of the residents needs assessment survey and was consequently broadly viewed positively during consultation.

25. Executive is asked to adopt the draft “Park Homes in Central Bedfordshire – a unique environment and place to live 2015 – 2020” Offer to enable implementation of the proposed action plan

Appendices

Appendix A is the draft “Park Homes in Central Bedfordshire – a unique environment and place to live 2015 – 2020” Offer

Appendix B is the response to consultation

Appendix C is the Park Homes in Central Bedfordshire – a unique environment and place to live 2015 – 2020 Action Plan

Background Papers

26. The following background papers, not previously available to the public, were taken into account and are available on the Council’s website:

Equalities Impact Assessment