

Joint Area North Committee – 25th March 2009

11. Support for Affordable Rural Housing Schemes in Area North (Executive Decision) (Excepted Business)

Head of Service: Charlotte Jones, Head of Area Development (North)

Lead Officer: Charlotte Jones, Head of Area Development (North)

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Purpose of the Report

To seek an allocation from the Area North Reserves to provide additional funding towards the Rural Housing Enabling programme in Area North.

Recommendation(s)

That Members approve an allocation of £15,000 from the Area North Reserves to support the successful progress of schemes within the Area North Rural Housing Enabling programme, to be delegated to the Head of Area Development North, in consultation with Ward Members and the Joint Area Chairman.

Background

In February 2009, the Joint Area Committee considered a report on the progress of a number of small-scale rural housing schemes which aim to provide affordable housing in villages. Members requested that further consideration was given to provide additional capacity to support the successful completion of these schemes.

Report

The Head of Area Development has discussed the nature of current capacity with the Planning Team Leader, Strategic Housing Manager, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Well-being, and the Community Council for Somerset. A representative of the best level housing partners (a registered social landlord) has also contributed.

The following areas of work require additional capacity to assist in the progress of schemes:

- Co-ordination and data input for Housing Needs Surveys.
- Site appraisals and development of preferred sites.
- Co-ordination of local meetings, liaison between RSL's, landowners and communities.

The Planning Team Leader has advised that there is capacity within the planning team to support site appraisals, both desk based and on site. This will be directed by the Planning Team Leader as the first point of contact for the land use aspects of rural housing schemes.

Housing Needs Surveys are needed to provide evidence of need for the application of the Rural Exception Policy. The Community Council for Somerset, which hosts the Rural Housing Enablers, has limited capacity to conduct Housing Needs Surveys, and to facilitate local development of schemes.

It is recommended that a provision of up to £15,000, programmed over the next 12 – 18 months will provide resources to conduct additional Housing Needs Surveys, and for local development work. Options for how this is allocated are still being considered, but could include additional funding to the Community Council, or for temporary staffing in SSDC. There are opportunities for joint working with other areas.

The six schemes identified in the last report (Compton Dundon, Curry Mallet, Norton-sub-Hamdon, Long Load, Long Sutton and High Ham) will be the first priority, followed by further locations as agreed. The programme of Housing Needs Surveys will be agreed jointly by the Strategic Housing Manager, Head of Area Development North, Planning Team Leader and Community Council for Somerset.

An enquiries service will be provided for any parish wishing to consider developing a local scheme, supported by the Planning Team Leader, Area Development Team and Rural Housing Enabler.

This work will be monitored by the recently established officer working group for rural housing.

Financial Implications

The Area Reserve stands at £42,000, supporting this recommendation will leave £27,000.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

Key Target Areas:

- 3.2 With partners, enable the building of 597 affordable housing units by 2011.
- 3.4 With partners, enable the development of 4 housing schemes on rural communities by 2012.

Background Papers: *Area North Affordable Housing reports – October 2008, February 2009.*
