



*Working for Affordable Homes in Devon*

# Devon Strategic Housing Group Members Newsletter

Spring 2006

**Welcome** to the Spring Edition of the DSHG Newsletter. The aim of this newsletter is to keep Council Members informed about the activities of the Group and to flag up recent successes, emerging issues and ideas. This follows the Briefing on Affordable Housing for Members that was circulated at the end of 2005. The Newsletter summarises some of the main activities of the Group but does not try to include an update on all activities as this would result in a report! Please let either Mary or Katy or your Housing Manager know if this is useful or pass on any ideas for improvement.

Simon Sherbersky  
Chair of Devon Strategic Housing Group

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## News Round Up

### **Increase in Grant for Devon**

£70 million allocated for Devon as part of the National Affordable Housing Programme, this is approximately 65% more than for 2004/06. DSHG has recently issued a joint press release to highlight this success. Now we need to deliver! DSHG also plans to continue provide evidence of Devon's Housing Need and work on an updated version of 'Devon's Housing Evidence' will start in July 2006.

### **Affordable Housing Task Group Set up.**

A small, focused task group was set up in January with a brief to focus on actions that help delivery of new affordable housing. This Task Group has an Action Plan, details of which will be highlighted at the meeting with Members on 20<sup>th</sup> April in Exeter. This includes work on section 106 agreements, initiatives to improve design quality and a range of activities to look at how we can improve delivery.

### **[www.dshg.org.uk](http://www.dshg.org.uk) - A New Web Site to be launched for DSHG**

To improve communication and enable staff to keep in touch via a message board, access reports and develop linkages to housing initiatives across Devon DSHG will be launching a web site at the start of Summer 2006. The web site is currently under development but the address has been registered as [www.dshg.org.uk](http://www.dshg.org.uk).

### **DSHG takes a lead in Affordable Housing for the Local Area Agreement.**

DSHG have been actively involved in supporting Devon Strategic Partnership (DSP) in this important piece of work and are leading a Task Group to take the work forward. As LAAs expand across the country it is hoped that the experience of DSHG can benefit the Unitaries if they start to think about LAAs. DSHG is also in close contact with Ruth Bagley, DSP's Affordable Housing Champion, to look at how we can ensure consistency between the Devon Community Plan. We also want to link up with Torbay and Plymouth's Community Plans to see where we can identify shared objectives and actions.

### **A Second Rural Housing Enabler to start in May 2006**

Sue Hitchcock joins Sue Southwell on 2 May doubling Devon's capacity for this important function. A Devon Rural Housing Partnership meeting is planned for 8 May and there is an opportunity for LA Officers to meet the new RHE and to feed into the work programme. DSHG and the Rural Housing Partnership are working closely together to support each others work.

### **SW Regional Development Agency Support Feasibility Study for a Rural Housing Model.**

This is a model where enabling landowners to invest in affordable housing in an innovative way. DSHG is working alongside the consultants who are developing this concept. We are looking at 2 potential pilots in Devon.

### **Mystery Shopping and Actions to Improve Homeless Services Across Devon**

DSHG and Shelter have recently completed a mystery shopping exercise which will help develop more consistent responses to homeless applications across Devon and more work is planned to build on the results. Many thanks to Devon Homeless Managers Group for all their work and cooperation in this initiative. Other work underway includes more consistent monitoring of prevention work, this will help inform future service development. Free law training provided by ODPM has been organised and Katy Shorten is also looking at ways to expand the successful Supported Lodgings scheme for vulnerable young, homeless people.

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### **In the Pipeline**

DSHG has several projects in the pipeline which we hope to tell you more about in our Summer Newsletter. This includes a Master Class for Senior Housing Managers and Planners, a Design competition for Rural Housing developed by Housing Associations and a Report on Improving Consistency in Devon's Homeless Services.

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### **And Finally...**

#### **All Change for Strategic Housing Managers**

DSHG wishes Andrew Fiske (SHDC) all the best for his move to East Hants, he will be a hard act to follow. DSHG also wishes Eve Fitzgerald all the best for her retirement. Eve has brought invaluable knowledge about the private housing sector to the Group and will be missed.

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