

**Question at Council
24 February 2016**

7. Questions from Councillors

Under Council Procedural Rule 11, Councillor Rodney Bates has submitted the following question:

"What are the potential implications to the Council and our residents of the Planning and Housing Bill that is currently being considered by Parliament?"

Response from Cllr Charlotte Morley, Regulatory Portfolio

The Bill reflects the aspirations of the current government to ensure that anybody who works hard and aspires to own their own home has the opportunity to do so. In addition it marks the government's ambition to deliver 1 million new homes by 2020.

Measures in the Bill include:

- New affordable Starter Homes – a new legal duty will be placed on councils to guarantee the provision of 200,000 Starter Homes on all reasonably sized new development sites; these will be offered to first-time buyers at a 20% discount on market prices
- Pay to Stay – ensuring that those tenants on higher incomes who are living in social housing have a rent that reflects their ability to pay, while those who genuinely need support continue to receive it
- Measures to tackle rogue landlords – giving councils the power to blacklist, and in extreme cases ban those who don't abide by the law, while helping decent landlords recover abandoned homes quicker
- Automatic planning permission in principle on brownfield sites – to bring forward more land to build new homes quicker, while protecting the green belt
- Planning reforms to support small builders – placing a new duty on councils to help allocate land so 20,000 custom and self-built homes a year can be built by 2020
- Introduction of an approved planning officer regime that means planning applications can be processed by approved non-local authority planners with the local authority then being given 2 weeks to determine irrespective of the size and nature of the application. It is not clear how the fee income would be apportioned.
- Local Plans – providing the government with targeted powers to ensure that all Councils that have not adopted a new plan since 2004 (32% of all LPA's) get a new Local Plan in place by 2017, so they can help provide the homes their communities need. This will not affect Surrey Heath. However the introduction of a 'planning in principle' regime will also certainly lengthen and increase the cost of future Local Plan preparation and examinations.
- Ensuring high value assets are managed effectively – ensuring the sale of high value council assets that can be used to support people into home ownership
- There will also be a duty for local authorities to prepare annual statements on the efficiency and sustainability of their buildings to ensure that these are in the top quartile of energy performance. Where this is not the case we may be required to dispose of those buildings
- A duty to prepare a report of surplus land holdings. This will apply to residential land held for more than 6 months and non-residential held for more than two years. The government will be able to direct disposal of such land.

The definition of what constitutes surplus land and the relevant start date for the periods of time will be set out in regulations to follow.

The Bill is currently heading toward the Committee stage off the House of lords and so we can expect further changes. The issues addressed within the Bill will have substantial implications for Local Authorities, however at this stage it is recognised that much will depend on how the finer detail of the duties and schemes set out within the Bill are translated in policy and secondary legislation.

As details of the Bill emerge any supporting secondary guidance and legislation will be reported to Executive as appropriate. An item setting out a response to the consultation on proposed changes to New Homes Bonus has been prepared for the 1st March Executive. An item on the recently published consultation on proposed changes to the planning system is currently being drafted for 22nd March Executive.