

# **Cut to West Lothian's house-building budget could see a stop to affordable homes this year**

**An almost £4m cut in West Lothian's house-building budget could see a stop to affordable homes being built beyond the end of this year.**

And of all the new build projects set to be completed in the coming year the vast majority will be for Registered Social Landlords.

West Lothian, which last month declared a housing emergency, is relying on its buyback scheme to boost numbers of affordable homes for let. The waiting list has more than 11,000 names on it, and homeless presentations are surging.

Councillors on the Housing Services Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel (PDSP) heard of the 26% cut in the affordable homes budget. The confirmed budget for grant funding is now £11.674 million, a reduction of £3.576 million from a previous £15.430 million.

In a report to committee Marjory Mackie, Housing Strategy & Development Manager said: "This may impact on the delivery of projects in the programme, however the aim is to prioritise the new build council housing projects, and the Almondvale Crescent project will be included for approval in the 2024/2025 programme.

“Uncertainty of future years grant funding is a key risk as the majority of house building projects span multiple years, requiring an indication of likely future grant funding to ensure deliver-ability.

“Officers will continue to work closely with the Scottish Government to ensure funding is maximised for the West Lothian programme, however there is a real risk the affordable housing projects may slow or stop completely.”

Independent Councillor Andrew McGuire asked: “ I know there’s been a lot of political debate about this . What in practical terms does it mean? Do we know if any sites will be delayed?

Mrs Mackie said; “ Yes. We have a resources plan confirmed for 24/25 there will be some approvals. Almondvale Crescent is the only approval so far, and it has slipped from 23/24.

“Completions are in line with our programme but approvals and site starts are likely to take quite a significant hit.”

West Lothian has a total of 193 new build projects. It has committed to a further 16 by 2028. Along with buybacks completed or committed to that a total of 383 homes.

RSLs have built 641 homes and have committed to build another 714 by 2018. Those coupled with buybacks take the RSL total to 1,748.

The SNP has long criticised the administration’s poor showing in house building in comparison to RSL figures and earlier this year called for rent increases to boost funding for house building.

Councillor Robert De Bold, the SNP group depute leader asked:“If RSLs can build almost three and half times as many social homes as West Lothian can, what have they got that we haven’t?”

However in her report Mrs Mackie said RSLs are able to borrow

money, and were doing that, whereas councils cannot. In her report she added: "RSLs have access to other forms of funding for affordable housing including Charitable Bond funding for social rented homes and they will continue to be encouraged to seek alternative funding arrangements to mitigate the risk of the programme slowing down".

Councillor Tony Boyle, for Labour thanked staff for the report and said: " Under the present climate I think you are doing very well."

Chair of the PDSP Councillor George Paul told the meeting: "We have over 11,000 people waiting on housing. We definitely have a housing emergency. I've said before Councillor de Bold and I'll say it again, this is down to a lack of funding from the Scottish Government."

A report to committee concluded: "Good progress is being made in delivery of the programme across the active sites, with 899 units completed to the end of Quarter 4 2023/24, representing 55% of the overall Affordable Housing Programme minimum target of 1,621.

"However, there is an emerging risk to the programme due to the reduction of grant funding for 2024/25 and uncertainty of funding for future years."

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter