

Summary

Arne Holm and Hild Marte Bjørnsen

Provision of social housing in the municipality of Fjell

An evaluation

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This evaluation is intended as a brief for forthcoming strategic choices which the municipality of Fjell will be taking in drawing up the Sub-Municipal Housing Development Plan 2013–2020 (Kommunedelplan for bustadutvikling 2013-2020), especially the sections on social housing needs and challenges. The plan will enumerate for the municipality the objectives, strategies and measures related to two main themes.

- Development of Fjell as an attractive residential municipality
- Social housing needs and challenges

Of particular needs in the field of social housing, the plan also addresses the following two sub-themes.

- Housing for disadvantaged persons and groups with special needs
- How social housing is organised and mechanisms implemented

In this evaluation of the work in Fjell to provide social housing, we look at the various parties' responsibilities and roles. The provision of social housing is the responsibility of the respective departments of health, care and welfare, the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation (NAV) and Fjell Housing Foundation.

This evaluation shall provide a brief to inform the strategic choices facing the municipality in its drafting of the Housing Plan, particularly the sections devoted to social housing needs and challenges.

Against this background, we discuss:

- The organisation of social housing provision in Fjell today, the stakeholders involved and the tasks, responsibilities and tools they have at their disposition
- How the municipality utilises the available mechanisms in its work to provide social housing, including the housing stock, economic subsidies, respite care and services connected with social housing

The evaluation will also:

- Provide a recommendation on future housing needs and suggest how Fjell can exploit the resources within the organisation and incentives to ensure the best possible response to clients' needs
- Provide an overall analysis of the opportunities and challenges arising from regional cooperation and the Coordination Reform as far as they affect social housing provision in the municipality

Housing policy challenges in the municipality of Fjell

Fjell has a far higher proportion of detached homes than the average municipality, and indeed the county of Hordaland and the country as a whole. While 78 per cent of homes in Fjell are detached, the county percentage is 49, while the national percentage is 52. On the other hand, only 2.3 per cent of homes in Fjell are in blocks, that figure rising to 26 per cent in Bergen and 22 per cent nationally. This residential structure is reflected moreover in the ownership structure, where the proportion of owner-occupiers is higher in Fjell than in the county and the country as a whole; the percentage of rental units and especially cooperative housing units is lower, too.

On the other hand, Fjell is a municipality with high influx of new inhabitants and a rapidly growing population. Indeed, from 1982

to 2012, the population more than doubled, and is currently over 22,000. The population is young, with the balance between 30 to 62 years. The proportion over 80 is low.

Fjell has fewer people living alone than the county and national average, while the proportion of couples with children is higher. The residential structure appears in that sense to largely reflect the population structure as it is today.

In the evaluation we project future population growth with regard to age composition and groups experiencing difficulties in the housing market. This projection shows that the population will change gradually towards the year 2040, with a relative rise in the elderly population and of people with special difficulties in the housing market, that is, people with mental health problems, substance abusers, young people struggling to set up home, in some cases, refugees and others.

This development will require a more balanced housing market, with several smaller dwelling units and more rental homes. Developments in the housing market are discussed in Chapter 2, while the population prognosis is covered in Chapter 6.

Organisational structure and organisational challenges in social housing provision

A main theme of the evaluation is related to the organisation of social housing provision in Fjell. The organisational structure is based on a high degree of specialisation, with social housing tasks distributed across departments for health, social welfare and care. In addition, bodies outside the line organisation carry a significant responsibility. We are thinking of bodies like NAV Fjell, the Housing Board and Fjell Housing Foundation. NAV Fjell is also responsible for people with substance abuse problems and for dispersing housing-related financial assistance, such as the start-up loan and housing allowance, while the Housing Tribunal allocates municipally owned/managed housing on application.

Within the framework of this organisational structure, we have identified certain key challenges the municipality of Fjell should take note of.

Organisational specialisation increases the need for coordination

A major challenge with organisational models like the one in Fjell is to ensure the inclusion of all appropriate clients. This requires having coordination procedures which work. If this part of the organisation fails, the work to provide social housing can easily give the impression of incoherence. This seems to some extent to be the situation in Fjell. While there are good procedures in place for identifying some social housing clients, other clients are dealt with at some distance organisationally speaking from where the relevant provisions are administered. This hampers the necessary coordination of special housing needs, housing acquisition and allocation, while roles and responsibilities remain unclear.

An important question in this respect is whether the way the current organisational structure works promotes the inclusion or exclusion of the clients for whom the Fjell authorities have a responsibility. When it comes to the allocation of housing, the organisational model does not seem to be able to identify all clients with equal success. This is particularly down to how the various organisational units define their mandate and their clients.

One of the strongest impressions arising from this evaluation is that the different organisational units are so good at defining their own particular clients, it makes identifying the whole gamut of needs in the population harder. This is especially true in the allocation of housing, but applies to service delivery as well. The result is an accumulation of clients in various units in the organisation, units with less opportunity to define their responsibilities more strictly. The active daily learning (ADL) team is one of the expert groups which seems to be landed with more and more of the people who get classified as someone else's responsibility. The municipality's ADL team is an outreach service for people living at home in need of help to cope with everyday problems. The team's responsibility is to set up systems for coping at home, helping clients become as independent as possible. This involves identifying people's level of disability and monitoring them closely over time.

Many applications – too few housing units

It is first and foremost access to suitable housing that is the main challenge in Fjell. This applies whether it is housing allocated by the municipality, Fjell Housing Foundation or dwellings on the private market. In particular, agencies outside the line organisation such as NAV Fjell and the child welfare unit and those with responsibility for disabled clients have clients with unmet housing needs. At the same time, they find it hard to position themselves so as to gain access to housing managed by the authorities or Fjell Housing Foundation.

Although substance abuse, for example, is not a qualifying criterion for housing available to by the psychiatric team, allocating housing is all the same subject to considerable latitude with regard to establishing and interpreting definitions, criteria, diagnoses and needs. It is also about enabling a practical housing solution for everyone, based among other things on needs of safety, security and protection. The reason for reserving some care home units for people with undisputable mental health problems is precisely in acknowledgement of the obligation to ensure inhabitants' safety and security.

The shortage of housing means that applications for accommodation submitted to the Housing Tribunal and Fjell Housing Foundation generally fail. The reason given for failing applications for care homes is failure to meet the application criteria. Given that the private housing market is also stretched, a rejected application often creates a difficult situation, landing an agency like NAV Fjell with what is often an almost insoluble dilemma. The organisation is required to help but lacks the means of doing so, i.e. its lacks the housing to allocate. In cases where an individual is being treated for substance abuse, it will undermine the outcome of the treatment or post-rehabilitation work, where applicable.

Little access to existing homes due to the limited turnover in the municipally managed care homes and dwellings allocated by Fjell Housing Foundation

The limited turnover of residents of municipally managed care homes and of rented accommodation managed by Fjell Housing Foundation slows access to the units that are available. In other

words, there aren't any units to allocate even though the applicant meets the criteria. For care home places for the elderly, demand and supply are largely even.

Highlighting the need is important when it comes to substantiating the need for housing

Two crucial aspects of a strategy to supply housing suited to the needs of the municipality are that officials in charge of procuring housing know what is needed and have procedures for working together in a coordinated manner. Today, the various departments and agencies involved in social housing in the municipality tend to follow rather different procedures.

Housing needs without an addressee

People who are not eligible to housing reserved for certain groups have nowhere to turn but the Fjell Housing Foundation with its policy priorities, or the private housing market. In both cases, the demand for housing is enormous. At the same time, the stricter and clearer the criteria on eligibility for housing in the municipality's portfolio, the greater the number of ineligible people. It will be a challenge, given the current organisation of social housing in Fjell, to detect all the different housing needs which fall under the municipality's remit while also addressing this responsibility.

One way of overcoming the problem could be to widen the powers of the various municipal specialists. Although this would have made it clearer who is responsible for what, whether it would also have resulted in better services to clients, is an open question. Indeed, the various departments could have faced even harder priorities, to the extent that they had failed to increase capacity through streamlining and better coordination routines.

Important to differentiate between the responsibilities of the respective departments of social welfare, care and health

Generally, a municipality should always be ready to redefine and re-visit powers and responsibilities in response to changes in demand and demographic balance. The organisation of social housing in Fjell is no exception. One of the mandates it may be appropriate to inspect more closely is that of the officials in charge of social welfare, care and health services. As things stand today,

young disabled people, i.e. people under 18, are the responsibility of head of the social welfare department, while responsibility for housing them, as they enter adulthood, belongs to the head of the care services.

This can be challenging in certain situations. Care needs planning not only when it comes to housing, but also with regard to other services. Giving the responsibility for this to two different parts of the organisation requires excellent procedures of communication and coordination of clients and needs. But inasmuch as these clients are a particularly vulnerable group, communicating certain information may occasionally stall. This could put these people at a disadvantage if responsibility for them is handed over to another unit or department on their eighteenth birthday. The new department has to identify and contextualise the now officially adult person's problems in detail, something that is likely to undermine the continuity of care. Naturally, needs can change, but it is easy to lose sight of important details during this transitional phase, where responsibly is not the only thing being moved.

The function of the Housing Tribunal

Housing Tribunal is Fjell's housing allocation service for persons whose needs and problems are diffuse and difficult to pin down. This evaluation found, however, that the Housing Tribunal seems to be struggling, as we see it, with numerous internal challenges. These challenges arise from a lack of consensus on key matters such as housing eligibility criteria. The problem is currently being dealt with. Tribunal members seem to have different opinions of what needs should qualify for housing and which applications should qualify for consideration by the Tribunal. These disputes seem to undo the consistency of the Tribunal's work, but reflect also to some extent how expertise is organised in the municipality. If a Tribunal like this is to work in accordance with intentions, it is essential that its members embrace a common set of values for their work.

Discussion in the Tribunal seem to focus more on where an application belongs in the organisation, than on the responsibilities of the municipality and what can be done to accommodate applicants and clients in the best possible way.

Instead of pursuing a holistic approach to the cases, based on the municipality's overarching responsibility for social housing, it is our impression that officials seek to defend their specialities and deflect cases which in their opinion belong somewhere else. If consensus can't be achieved, unresolved cases are supposed to be submitted to a higher authority in the organisation for adjudication. That being the case, it would be natural to refer disputed or unclear cases to the heads of the specialist services, if lower levels in the organisation can't resolve the situation. This does not seem to be happening to any appreciable extent in Fjell.

The essential thing here is that even if the individual representatives of the various departments do not feel they have a responsibility for complex cases, then the municipality does. The Tribunal, in other words, is ultimately responsible that every case is dealt with substantively and that the officials and units responsible for doing so are identified. If the Tribunal's members are unable to identify a realistic way forward, they must endeavour to come up with constructive suggestions on how the case can be resolved.

The Fjell Housing Foundation as a problem solver

The Housing Foundation operates under certain constraints that limit its options. In relation to the municipality, these constraints are not only to do with access to housing; the situation of the services is also an aspect of the problem. If the municipality is unable to provide the services required by a needy person, it is also difficult, perhaps even impossible, for the Foundation to allocate housing. This is particularly evident whenever substance abuse is involved. The Foundation finds it difficult to assign a home to people with abuse problems unless NAV Fjell or the care, health or nursing services in the municipality commit to doing their part.

Social housing mechanisms

Fjell municipality has access to fewer municipally managed/owned housing units than the average for the country as a whole. The municipality has in excess of 300 units, of which a large part is rental housing allocated by Fjell Housing Foundation. The need for housing in areas such as psychiatry, substance abuse, persons with disabilities like Asperger's syndrome, moderate cases of cognitive disability, seems to outpace the supply of available municipal housing. The municipality therefore appears to have

limited scope to use its own housing in a pro-active way to advance its social housing policy aims. There are too few municipally managed units, and turnover is too slow. The problems are aggravated by the slow supply of affordable housing on the private market, whether owner-occupied or rented.

The municipality's ability to use housing and home loans as active mechanism in its social housing services is limited partly by the sluggish supply of affordable housing. While housing support is given on a strictly criteria-based assessment, the municipality has opportunities to use the start-up loan to help people to become owner-occupiers rather than tenants. This requires, however, a supply of affordable homes, without which the start-up loan cannot be awarded. A tight housing market with high prices limits in other words the application of the start-up loan as a policy tool.

Future housing needs in Fjell

In this evaluation, we also projected population growth up to the year 2040. A particularly important finding of this analysis is the steep rise in the proportion of elderly. Making use of the high alternative in Statistics Norway's population prognoses, we found a population growth of 70 per cent to 2040. This represents a net increase of more than 15,000 inhabitants. The increment is partly due to a positive birth rate throughout the period (approximately 200 per year) and partly to a positive net influx (more than 300 per year) of new residents. The proportion of residents aged 70 and older will advance from 6 per cent in 2011 to 15 per cent in 2040.

This population growth, we found, will generate a need of more than 6,600 homes. The majority of the housing stock in Fjell consists of villas/detached houses and most of the demand for housing is expected to be this type of housing in the years ahead as well. The calculations show a doubling of the number of single households up to 2040, which may affect the demand for smaller apartments. The growth in the population of the oldest residents will likely have the same effect.

By performing a purely linear extrapolation of the number of available municipal housing units, we postulate a demand for 570 homes in 2040. With regard to the expanding older population, a pure projection of the need for care homes for this age group results in as much as 83 per cent of this housing stock, and an

extrapolation of dementia patients based on current incidence rates, produces a need for 460–530 beds in institutions. Given this information, a linear extrapolation of current levels of municipal housing will barely be enough to meet the oldest age groups' need of care home places. This projection is also based on the assumption that care technology remains at the present level. Technological advances or different approaches to care mean that more dementia patients can live longer in their own homes, which of course will affect the need for institutional places for this group. It is difficult to estimate how far the needs of other groups of clients will change. Given the current time spent on waiting lists of the Fjell Housing Foundation, there will likely be a need for 200 additional homes by 2040, corresponding to seven additional homes every year. These will primarily be rental properties, and come therefore in addition to the need for care homes for the elderly.

Opportunities and challenges in regional cooperation and the Coordination Reform

The Coordination Reform highlights regional cooperation and prevention, among other things. Both are of key importance to various aspects of the municipality's provision of social housing.

In a regional perspective it would be useful for the authorities in Fjell to look in the direction of Sund, Øygarden and Askøy as useful neighbouring municipalities. Short distances should encourage local authorities to work together on social housing initiatives, while the individual inhabitant will be able to move from one municipality to another at less expense. It will therefore be interesting to observe population growth in the four municipalities in context. Different demographics could allow groups to move between municipalities.

All four municipalities, however, will be facing a steep rise in the 80+ age-group. This is likely to complicate the possibility of finding spare capacity in some of Fjell's neighbouring municipalities in the area of care services for seniors, including care homes. Although growth in the older age-groups is slower, relatively speaking, in Askøy, Sund and Øygarden, than in Fjell, the fact that growth is so strong in whole numbers reduces the likelihood of a significant surplus of available homes for the elderly, which could in the event be leased to Fjell.

So far, however, the Coordination Reform has focused on municipal responsibilities for patients ready for discharge. Decent, more or less permanent accommodation, monitored by local services, could lower hospital admissions or prevent discharge patients from taking up beds in hospital unnecessarily. Since the Coordination Reform requires municipalities to pay some of the hospital costs, this type of action will also lower municipal spending. Admission due to mental disorders is not yet included in the financing arrangements of the the Coordination Reform. Experience shows, however, that the mentally ill and substance abusers are often subject to somatic conditions, which could be prevented if safe and decent housing were available.

Different options

Fjell is a rapidly growing municipality. This growth will continue going forward, while at the same time the composition of the population will change with a greater proportion of seniors. How can the authorities use these organisational and incentive structures to give clients the best possible services and options?

- **Organisationally** it is difficult to reach everyone with a need for social housing in the municipality. This makes it important to soften the existing divisions between the different specialist groups in the organisation involved in the provision of social housing
- **Local government policy instruments** are useful for reaching all eligible people and meeting their needs. We have noted in particular that by increasing the number of housing units, it should be possible to improve performance in the area of social housing in the community.
- **Housing needs, housing provision and housing allocation** need to be seen in context. By matching housing acquisition and supply to housing needs, the authorities will be in a better position to ensure that the municipal housing stock is aligned as well as possible to the municipality's housing needs. One strategy in this connection is to gather all the different tasks together under a dedicated housing office. The authorities would then be able to see housing needs in the context of both housing acquisition and

allocation. It would highlight the priorities the municipality have had to make.

So there is an option to bring the various strands of the social housing effort together in a single dedicated department. It would mean concentrating priorities in one and the same department. Given that the municipality has an efficient and highly professional service delivery and monitoring capacity, making too many changes would be unproductive. It would make more sense to place responsibility for allocating housing with one of the technical departments. This department would also have a much clearer public image if it were organised as a separate unit, for example in the form of a dedicated housing office.

Another strategy is to retain the current structure in general, but do more to develop ways of pooling efforts in a coordinated manner. This would require a clearer definition of responsibilities and roles.

An improvement in housing supply and a clearer demarcation of responsibilities in the municipality could represent important steps in the development of Fjell as a first-class and prosperous municipality for its inhabitants.