

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
3 December 2013

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

15

**TITLE OF REPORT : ADOPTION OF A NEW HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY
(2013-2018)**

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF HOUSING AND PUBLIC PROTECTION

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR BERNARD LOVEWELL

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval to adopt a new Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2013-2018).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Cabinet approves the adoption of the Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2013-2018).
- 2.2 That the Cabinet authorises the Head of Housing and Public Protection, in conjunction with Portfolio holder for Housing and Environmental Health, to consider and agree the updated Action Plan for the Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2013-2018) for each year of the Strategy.
- 2.3 That the Cabinet authorises the Head of Housing and Public Protection, in conjunction with Portfolio holder for Housing and Environmental Health, to make minor changes to the Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2013-2018).

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Council is legally required to produce Housing and Homelessness Strategies in order to outline its priorities regarding housing in its area and its approach to the prevention and management of homelessness.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Cabinet could decide against approving the draft Strategy, however both existing strategies are due to end this year and replacements are required in order to meet statutory requirements.

5. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 5.1 Cllr Bernard Lovewell, the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Environmental Health, has been consulted and is supportive of the proposals contained in this report.

- 5.2 Consultation was undertaken with all relevant agencies and organisations including Registered Providers of Social Housing (formerly know as Housing Associations), Hertfordshire County Council and members of the Homelessness Forum. Feedback from the consultation exercise is attached at Appendix 1.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 17th June 2013.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 Although the Council is no longer a social landlord, it retains the statutory responsibilities to provide a local housing strategy and a homelessness strategy. The Council's current Housing and Homelessness Strategies both run from 2008-2013.
- 7.2 The proposed document combines both strategies and seeks to provide a strategic framework for the Council to undertake its statutory housing functions. The production of this document is timely as there have been significant changes over recent years such as the new government in 2010 and the subsequent introduction of key pieces of legislation, namely the Localism Act 2011 and Welfare Reform Act 2012. The new government has also introduced spending reforms that have severely reduced the national budget for affordable housing.
- 7.3 The draft Strategy highlights priorities and actions for completion whilst also recognising the operating environment has changed drastically in recent years. For example, Registered Providers have received more freedoms from the regulator meaning their priorities may no longer be consistent with the Council's. In addition, the Councils own budget position and resourcing situation needs to be carefully balanced against realistic ambitions.
- 7.4 The Council is currently reviewing its Local Plan, with an emerging draft target of 10,700 new homes to be delivered in the district between 2011 and 2031. This target will be refined as the Local Plan progresses towards adoption. The Local plan will also provide the framework of policies that will determine the delivery of future housing overall, including the policy concerning the amount of affordable housing that should be delivered. This Strategy is not central in the delivery of market housing or the overall housing target, however it can play a role in the numbers, size, type and tenure of the affordable housing units that are delivered as part of new build sites as well as developments that solely deliver affordable housing.
- 7.5 Should the Cabinet agree the proposed Housing and Homelessness Strategy, its Action Plan will be updated each year, with the individual actions being delivered through the annual Housing and Public Protection Service Plan. This report proposes that the updated Action Plan will be considered and agreed by the Head of Housing and Public Protection, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Environmental Health, on an annual basis for the life of the Strategy.

8. ISSUES

- 8.1 The Housing and Homelessness Strategy, attached at Appendix 2, has been divided in to four main themes. These are :
- Make the best use of housing stock;
 - Maximise new housing supply;
 - Warmer, safer, healthier homes; and
 - The management and prevention of homelessness.
- 8.2 Making the best use of existing stock is proposed as a theme in order to acknowledge the value of existing housing and to plan to utilise it to its maximum value. This is a key area as demand for housing in the district is high. This priority focuses on areas such as empty homes, houses in multiple occupation and the private rented sector in general as well as reviewing the opportunities to enable mobility in the social housing sector. It also seeks to raise awareness of home ownership schemes.
- 8.3 The theme of maximising new housing supply has been proposed as it is fundamental to meet the needs of the district. The actions include negotiation with developers to deliver the maximum viable affordable housing on new build sites as well as reviewing contributions the Council makes to enable affordable housing to be delivered such as land and capital, and assessing whether alternative models need to be developed. It also includes the development of a programme of rural housing need surveys to assess whether a demand for housing exists.
- 8.4 The theme of 'Warmer, safer, healthier homes' covers a diverse area of activities and this includes assessing the condition of private housing stock and reviewing the options to address any issues that arise. This section also includes actions that seek to review the Council's successful support for Disabled Facilities Grants in order to see whether this funding can be utilised to benefit higher numbers of people, as well as ensuring that adequate procedures are in place to tackle private sector landlords who do not fulfil their responsibilities to tenants according to the law.
- 8.5 The management and prevention of homelessness theme is a key aspect of the Strategy as it provides a framework for the Council to meet its legal requirement to prevent homelessness whenever possible. This includes actions to improve information on homelessness activity to better target limited resources and to review opportunities to increase money/debt advice. It also highlights opportunities to work more closely with the private rented sector and maintaining key partnerships with local organisations such as Herts Young Homeless, the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Black Squirrel Credit Union in order to provide the right service in a timely fashion to help to prevent homelessness.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 It is within the Terms of Reference for Cabinet to prepare and agree to implement policies and strategies other than those reserved to Council. This includes policies relating to housing matters including enabling and provision of housing and homelessness.

- 9.2 Section 4 of the Homelessness Act 2002 confirms that the District Council is the Local Housing Authority under the Housing Act 1985 Section 1 (1).
- 9.3 The Local Government Act 2003, Section 87 (1) places a statutory requirement on all Local Housing Authorities to produce a local housing strategy.
- 9.4 Sections 1 and 3 of the Homelessness Act 2002 outline the requirement of all Local Housing Authorities to develop homelessness strategies.
- 9.5 Section 1 (4) of the Homelessness Act 2002 states that the Local Housing Authority will ensure that a new Homelessness Strategy for their district is published within the period of five years beginning with the day on which their last Homelessness Strategy was published.
- 9.6 Section 1 (5) of the Homelessness Act 2002 states that a Local Housing Authority shall take their Homelessness Strategy into account in the exercise of their functions.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Should individual actions within the Strategy require funding that cannot be covered within existing budgets, they will be subject to individual external and/or internal bids for funding.
- 10.2 The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) provides annual funding for the prevention of homelessness and a provisional allocation of £88k has been made for 2014/15. This funding will be crucial in meeting the homelessness objectives contained in the proposed Strategy.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The DCLG has provided separate funding for local authorities for the prevention of homelessness since 2003. Although a provisional allocation of £88k has been made for 2014/15, this is still subject to final confirmation. Additionally, the position regarding DCLG homelessness funding is unknown beyond 2014/15. Should this funding be reduced or withdrawn all together, it puts at risk the Council's ability to meet its homelessness objectives.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The Equality Act 2010 came into force on the 1st October 2010, a major piece of legislation. The Act also created a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on the 5th April 2011. There is a General duty, described in 12.2, that public bodies must meet, underpinned by more specific duties which are designed to help meet them.
- 12.2 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of its functions, give **due regard** to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.3 The draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2013-2018) provides high level priorities that feed in to broad actions. As a result, there are no specific equality implications as yet, however, they will be reviewed when it is appropriate to undertake this activity.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 As the recommendations made in this report do not constitute a public service contract, the measurement of 'social value' as required by the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 need not be applied, although equalities implications and opportunities are identified in the relevant section at paragraph 12.

14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 There are no Human Resource implications arising from the report..

15. APPENDICES

- 15.1 Appendix 1 – Consultation report on Draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2013-2018).
- 15.2 Appendix 2 – Draft North Hertfordshire Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2013-2018).

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17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

17.1 None