

21SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Housing Portfolio Holder

21 March 2012

AUTHOR/S: Corporate Manager – Affordable Homes

HOUSING STRATEGY 2012-2016

Purpose

1. To seek approval for the Housing Strategy. The purpose of the Housing Strategy is to set out the Council's overall vision and key aims for the housing service over the next 5 years. Putting the **HEART** into Housing encapsulates the key themes of the Housing Strategy:

Health and Wellbeing
Economic Growth and Development
Affordable Housing
Reducing Fuel Poverty and promoting energy efficiency
Tackling Homelessness

2. This is not a key decision.

Recommendations

3. That the Housing Portfolio Holder approves the Housing Strategy 2012-2016.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. Local authorities are required to have a Housing Strategy that sets out a clear vision for housing in its area for providing leadership, planning and delivery to:
 - Assess and plan for the current and future housing needs of the local population across all tenures
 - Make best use of the existing housing stock
 - Plan and facilitate new supply
 - Plan and commission housing support services which link homes to support and other services that people need to live in them; and
 - Work in partnership to secure effective and neighbourhood management.
5. Without an up to date Strategy, the Council could be criticised for not being clear on its housing vision and key aims.

Background

6. The previous Housing Strategy expired in July 2010. At that time a conscious decision was taken to postpone its renewal due to the uncertainty surrounding potential changes following the new Coalition Government and to await the Audit Commission Inspection of our Strategic Housing Service undertaken in December 2010.
7. The Government published its Housing Strategy for England in November 2011 setting out its key priorities and objectives *'to reignite the housing market and get the*

nation building again'. It was therefore timely that the Council's Housing Strategy should follow on from this to ensure that the Strategy fits with national policy and incorporates the changes proposed following social housing reform, welfare reform and changes to the planning policy framework.

8. The key recommendations from the 2010 Audit Commission inspection report have also been addressed through this strategy.

Considerations

9. The Housing Strategy is the overarching housing-related strategic document for South Cambridgeshire. The Council's strategic housing role includes the delivery of affordable housing, including supported/adapted accommodation, assessing housing needs, allocations and housing choice, preventing homelessness and providing housing advice; as well as housing in the private sector, such as understanding the condition of homes in the district, energy efficiency, empty properties and tackling fuel poverty.
10. The Housing Strategy takes account of both the national and local policy context and the District's profile in relation to housing. It sets out the key challenges facing the District over the coming year, our key aims and how we will achieve these.
11. The Housing Vision for South Cambridgeshire has been developed as part of the Strategy's consultation to encompass the key aims:

Housing Vision

To be the best housing service by providing good quality housing across all tenures that is accessible to all – that enhances residents' quality of life, their health and wellbeing, that supports economic growth and social opportunities, alongside improved energy security and reduced carbon footprints.

Key Aims

Affordable Housing Provision: To deliver a range of homes that are affordable to all and where people want to live that will support economic growth and economic activity.

Better Homes: To improve the living conditions across all tenures, to help make homes more energy efficient and to reduce fuel poverty.

Making Best Use of Existing Stock: To promote safe and sustainable communities, ensuring people are living in the right homes at a time that is right for them.

Securing housing with specialist support: To promote fully inclusive communities and to work with partners to provide support and assistance to enable independent living.

Preventing and Tackling Homelessness: To reduce homelessness through being proactive in preventative measures and ensuring there is sufficient suitable accommodation available to people who are, or who may become homeless.

Improving housing options and extending choice: To work in partnership to provide housing advice so that people understand their

housing options, help them to sustain their current home or access alternative suitable accommodation.

Monitoring and Performance: To provide an Affordable Homes Service that is transparent and accountable, that is developed in consultation with our tenants, partner agencies and the wider public and demonstrates value for money

12. The Housing Strategy provides a clear direction for the strategic housing service that supports and inter-relates with both the Council's Planning and Environmental Health policies. It forms the foundations for the Affordable Homes service delivery and will link to future Service Plans, as well as the Council's Corporate Objectives.

Options

13. The Housing Portfolio Holder is requested to consider the Housing Strategy and the proposed actions and to suggest changes or additions where required.

Implications

14.	Financial	There are financial dimensions to some of the projects within the Housing Strategy that will already have been identified and accounted for. New initiatives recommended for further investigation within the Strategy will be considered individually as part of the service planning and budget setting process.
	Legal	Some of the proposed legislative changes and new initiatives to be investigated further have legal implications.
	Staffing	Where additional staffing resources are required these have been identified within the Affordable Homes Staffing restructure report approved by the Housing Portfolio Holder in January 2012.
	Risk Management	The Affordable Homes Risk Log will be reviewed to include any risks identified for particular projects within the Housing Strategy.
	Equality and Diversity	The Housing Strategy is all encompassing for all groups. Positive outcomes within the Strategy are identified in particular to the protected characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Disability • Race • Rurality
	Equality Impact Assessment completed	Yes
		Partial EQI completed. No adverse impacts identified.
	Climate Change	Some of the projects identified within the Strategy support the Climate Change Agenda

Consultations

15. We consulted with District Councillors, parish councils, registered providers, private developers, voluntary housing organisations and the Tenant Participation Group by way of a questionnaire, asking respondents to help shape a housing vision for the Council. As part of the survey, respondents were also asked to identify what they considered were the top three priorities the Council should focus on – the key themes arising from this include:

Comments (Generalised)	Number of Respondents
More Affordable Homes	19
Making Best Use of Existing Stock	9
Homeless prevention	8
Supporting Older People	7
Fair allocation process/prioritising those in need	7
Quality, Design and Location of new homes	6
Empty Homes	5
Meeting Local Needs	5
Neighbourhood Plans/land availability	5
Working with private landlords	4
Energy Efficiency	3
Other – individual responses	14

Consultation with Children and Young People

16. The Council consulted young people through its community development with schools. Approximately 50 young people aged 14-15 were consulted, the majority of which said that they felt very strongly that there should be more affordable housing. The affordable housing should be a mix of part buy/part rent and also social rented for those that didn't earn much or were unemployed or retired. None of the young people had a problem with building new homes in existing villages or new towns as long as existing villages could cope with the extra people and new towns had plenty of facilities.

Effect on Strategic Aims

17. The Housing Strategy contributes to the Corporate Objectives and in particular the following key aims:
- (a) Key Aim (B8): Work to deliver a range of homes that are affordable to all and where people want to live that will support economic growth and economic activity.
 - (b) Key Aim (C6): Develop a sustainable process to address the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers.
 - (c) Key Aim (A11): Work with the newly elected Tenant Participation Group and other tenants to set up an independent Tenant Scrutiny Panel.
 - (d) Key Aim (C4): Work with older people to improve their independence and quality of life.
 - (e) Key Aim (C9): Work to ensure the provision of a sustainable housing service for the Council's sheltered housing residents

Conclusions / Summary

18. The Council is required to have an up to date Housing Strategy that provides leadership and direction for strategic housing. The Strategy provides the current picture of housing in the District and identifies how we plan to meet the challenges and opportunities facing housing over the next 5 years. The Strategy brings together all the good work already underway and our future priorities.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: Laying the Foundations – A Housing Strategy for England.

Contact Officer: Julie Fletcher – Housing Performance Improvement Team Leader
Telephone: (01954) 713352