
Meeting: Council
Date: 19th January 2012
Subject: Housing Strategy
Report of: Cllr Ken Matthews Executive Member for Sustainable Development
Summary: The report advises Members on the development of the Housing Strategy for Central Bedfordshire.

The report invites Members to approve the Central Bedfordshire Housing Strategy 2011/2012-2015/2016.

Advising Officer: Gary Alderson, Director of Sustainable Communities
Contact Officers: John Goody, Principal Housing Development Officer
Michael David, Principal Housing Development Officer
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: The Council
Key Decision Yes
**Reason for urgency/
exemption from call-in
(if appropriate)** N/A

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

Delivering a strategic approach to Housing in both meeting need and enabling affordable homes, is a key element in meeting the Council's top level priorities.

Financial:

The financial implications of the Housing Strategy were incorporated into the Capital Programme 2010 /11 previously approved by Members. There are therefore no new financial implications for the Council arising from the adoption of the Housing Strategy.

The Strategy refers to various external funding streams and in addition the Local Investment Plan has bid for grant and loan support for a number of discrete projects under the Homes & Communities Agency's (HCA's) Affordable Homes Programme. Discussions are continuing on this and grant funding will be made available to registered providers depending on the outcome of these bids. RP's will endeavour to spend the funds in accordance with the priorities within the Housing Strategy.

Legal:

Most local authorities take the view that a document setting out the key strategic housing objectives is necessary. The Strategy is essential in delivering the Council's key corporate objectives.

Risk Management:

Failure to produce a housing strategy would result in the Sustainable Communities Strategy not having a suitable and justified source of evidence. Having a housing strategy has also proved useful in attracting funding, often in ad hoc, initiative oriented bidding rounds.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

Current staff resources will be used to deliver the action plan.

Equalities/Human Rights:

Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote race, gender and disability equality and to tackle discrimination experienced by other vulnerable groups. The Council must ensure that decisions minimise unfairness and do not have a disproportionately negative effect on people from different ethnic groups, disabled people, and men and women.

As part of the development of the Housing Strategy, an Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken to ensure that the needs of vulnerable groups are fully considered. This has highlighted that access to appropriate housing is particularly important for reducing inequalities, because too often those who are most disadvantaged are more likely to be living in housing that does not adequately meet their needs. Lack of choice and quality in housing stock means that the most vulnerable communities are often housed in cramped, poor quality accommodation. The Central Bedfordshire Equalities Forum supports the priorities set out in the Housing Strategy and agrees that they reflect the key issues experienced by vulnerable groups.

Community Safety:

Development of the Housing Strategy has considered the Council's statutory duties under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Key Community Safety stakeholders, including the Community Safety partnership, have been consulted as part of the wider public consultation.

Sustainability:

All new housing schemes will aim to meet the highest levels of sustainability compatible with best value and technical feasibility.

Summary of Overview and Scrutiny Comments:

A joint meeting of the respective Overview and Scrutiny Committees considered an early draft of the Strategy in May 2010 and approved the short summary used to inform the Sustainable Communities Strategy. They asked for a number of changes to the Strategy itself relating to empty property and carbon reduction that have been incorporated in the final version of the document.

It was agreed at Executive on the 2nd November 2010 that following public consultation, the draft Strategy be referred direct to the Council for approval, subject to any amendments that may be appropriate in the light of the consultation, and that the Director of Sustainable Communities be authorised to report direct to the Council on this matter following consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Sustainable Development and Housing.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

- 1. That the Council adopts the Housing Strategy 2011/2012-2015/2016 attached as Appendix A.**

Background

1. While many local authorities have over recent years divested themselves of the landlord function to provide social housing, all district and unitary authorities have a residual role in providing a strategic housing function that plans, resources and co-ordinates the activity of all those with a role in delivering and improving housing and living conditions in its area.

An overarching Housing Strategy is an important tool in:-

- a) providing a point of reference for all external stakeholders, including the health service, the Homes and Communities Agency, housing associations, developers and local community groups and associations;
- b) Describing all the Council's activities around delivering housing services and forms the basis for engagement with all external partners and communities.
- c) Providing the context for the statutory Homeless Strategy, Private Sector Renewal Strategy and Strategic Rent Policy, which are key operational housing service policy documents;

2. The draft Housing Strategy is attached at Appendix A. Its priorities are:-

Key Strategic Priority 1: Economic development and sustainable communities

- Retaining and attracting key skills to support and promote growth within our diverse and dispersed economy.
- Sustaining existing communities and neighbourhoods and facilitating the development of mixed communities including the rural areas.
- Meeting the housing needs of local people across a broad range of household groups.

Key Strategic Priority 2: Using council assets to aid the delivery of growth and housing

- Considering use of surplus public land for housing development subject to meeting disposal criteria.
- Increasing the number of rural exception sites delivered on council owned land.
- Promotion of a variety of tenures and mix of properties in urban and rural locations for both market and affordable housing that meets identified needs.

Key Strategic Priority 3: Meeting the accommodation and support needs of Older Persons and Vulnerable People

- Reviewing the effectiveness of sheltered housing.
- Identifying the housing needs of Older Persons and Vulnerable People.
- Identifying move-on accommodation.
- Joint assessments with Children's Services.
- Improving business intelligence to drive strategic and operational delivery to young people.
- Improving quality of advice to families
- Target families in housing need with early intervention and prevention.
- Dedicated staff training for safeguarding of vulnerable people.
- Providing comprehensive support for families in temporary accommodation.
- Developing strategic and operational partnerships to embed safeguarding practice and outcomes in assessment processes.

Key Strategic Priority 4: Providing housing options for the whole community

- Enhancing the quality of housing advice, better early intervention.
- Aligning business processes to provide a seamless model of service across Central Bedfordshire.
- Embed equalities practice across the service.
- Increase customer choice and control for housing.
- Dedicated Homelessness Prevention and Mortgage Rescue Officer.
- Strengthen existing Service Level Agreement with Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB) - SLA targets.

3. Wide consultation had already taken place with a range of partner organisations such as Housing Associations and vulnerable adult user groups. This included a major event for all stakeholders in January 2010 when options and issues were examined by a wide audience including invited Members. Consultation with the Local Strategic Partnership has also taken place with the Strategic Housing Partnership and the Environment sub groups. Internal consultation has also taken place including Children's Services, ASCHH commissioning managers and planning development teams.

The Strategy has been equality impact assessed and found to meet equality standards.

The second consultation on the draft Housing Strategy started on the 4th January 2011 and went on for 12 weeks until the 31st March 2011. A formal consultation was open to the entire public and this included a web based questionnaire, a number of meetings, including a Citizen's Panel and Tenants Panel. The draft Housing Strategy was also available in all Libraries across CBC. Two open days were also held, one at Priory House and one at Watling House, where the public were invited to come in and voice their opinions and ask questions. A total of 131 consultation responses were received. Along with the Public Consultation 7 schools in total were consulted. This included 4 Middle Schools and 3 Upper Schools across the CBC area with a 189 responses received from upper school pupils and 4 workshops held with middle school pupils.

As a response to consultation various amendments were made to the draft document and approved by the Executive Member. The final document is now recommended for adoption by Council as an integral part of the Council's corporate policy framework.

4. **Conclusion and Next Steps**

Following approval of the Housing Strategy 2011/2012-2015/2016 by Council the Central Bedfordshire Council Housing Strategy will be adopted.

Appendices:

- Appendix A Central Bedfordshire Housing Strategy 2011/2012-2015/2016
- Appendix B Central Bedfordshire Housing Strategy consultation summary

