

Central Bedfordshire Council

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 MARCH 2016

TITLE OF REPORT: - HOUSING STRATEGY 2016-2021

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Purpose of this report

1. This report provides the Committee with an update on progress in relation to the review of the Council's Housing Strategy
2. The report also invites comments on the draft Housing Strategy which is currently undergoing an internal stakeholder consultation before it goes out to wider public consultation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to:

1. Consider the draft document and provide feedback prior to wider public consultation.

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

3. The Housing Strategy 2012-2016 is being reviewed and brought up to date to reflect recent changes in national policy. The new strategy runs from 2016-2021 and responds to changes in housing policy at national level and changes in the housing market. It also takes into account the evidence in the recently completed Strategic Housing Market Assessment about housing needs in Central Bedfordshire. It considers how housing of all types and tenures can be delivered through the planning system and by other means.
4. In preparing for this review initial work and consultation was undertaken by consultants Three Dragons to inform the housing strategy. Following this officers have undertaken workshops with external stakeholders: one with housing providers, the other with voluntary sector. This drew out a number of issues and challenges. A further workshop was held in February with PFMT to identify a vision for housing in Central Bedfordshire and to get a better understanding of Members and Senior Officers priorities around future housing delivery in CBC. This

workshop looked at the challenges and identified some mechanisms to help tackle these as well as taking into account members priorities.

5. The revised Central Bedfordshire Housing Strategy focusses on these housing challenges and sets out a plan to help deliver a broad range of types and tenures of homes to meet them. . The strategy provides insight into the housing market and population, including what drives housing choices and how we engage with the market to deliver housing and promote economic growth. This is described, assessed and prioritised through the wide range of evidence studies, guidance, strategies and plans the Council has produced, which in turn have informed this strategy. These cover a range of specific areas, features and topics.

What is the Housing Strategy?

6. The Housing Strategy:
 - a) Sets out the council's proposed approach to address the housing challenges that we expect to affect the area, over the next 5 years.
 - b) Outlines the main national, regional and local housing priorities that will affect Central Bedfordshire over the next five years.
 - c) Will be a document focussed on enabling housing delivery across a range of types and tenures, closely linked to and implemented through the future Local Plan.
 - d) Is an overarching Housing Strategy that provides links and signposting to other strategies that are relevant to housing.

What the Housing Strategy does?

7. By providing this overview of the existing local evidence base, with associated strategies and plans, the Housing Strategy demonstrates how the Council meets a range of requirements associated with national policy and legislation, this includes:
 - The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF);
 - Laying the foundations: A housing strategy for England
 - Impact of the Localism Act 2011
 - Impact of the Welfare Reform Act 2012
 - Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) Affordable Homes Programme 2015-2018
 - Care Act 2014
 - Emerging Housing and Planning Bill
8. As national policy and legislation is regularly amended or reinterpreted, having an overview of this in the Housing strategy, which can be easily updated, helps clarify the Council's understanding of what is required to meet the housing challenges the Council faces.

How will the Housing Strategy be used and next steps

9. The Housing Strategy has a number of functions, these include, but are not limited to :
 - a. Providing the strategic housing evidence base for the housing policies in the new Local Plan for Central Bedfordshire.
 - b. Interpreting what the local evidence base means with respect to national policy and clarifying how this information is used.
 - c. Providing the strategic housing direction for the Council and support for Housing Services through the delivery of homes to meet the housing needs of Central Bedfordshire.
 - d. Providing a signpost to relevant strategies with a direct link to housing
 - e. Providing a strategic housing evidence base for other future Council plans and strategies

10. The draft strategy is currently being circulated to internal stakeholders for comment until the end of March and meetings are being held with key officers. Following internal consultation and this committee meeting, the strategy will be prepared for public consultation and will be circulated to include the previous workshop participants. It is anticipated that the consultation will start in April for a period of 6 weeks. The strategy will then be finalised before being presented to Executive (programmed for June) for formal endorsement.

Council Priorities

11. The Housing Strategy supports all of the Council's priorities, with the most relevant being:
 - a. Enhancing your local community - This strategy will enable new housing to be developed in the right locations and ensure that it is high quality sustainable housing.
 - b. Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable - Ensure that housing stock helps to cater for future demands, particularly the needs of older people and vulnerable households through the provision of appropriate homes.

Corporate Implications

Legal Implications

12. The Housing Strategy reflects how a number of legislative and national policy requirements would be applied in Central Bedfordshire. The focus of this largely relates to planning policy, in relation to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the Housing Act and the Housing and Planning Bill.

Financial Implications

13. There are a number of financial implications as a result of the Housing Strategy. These include: demand and consequent cost to the Housing revenue account (HRA), the received commuted sums for affordable housing, demand and consequent cost of housing people in temporary accommodation, Disabled Facilities Grants, and funding from external sources such as the Homes and Communities Agency - National Affordable Homes Programme.

Equalities Implications

14. The Council is strongly committed to providing everyone with the opportunity of a decent home and to providing affordable housing which meets demonstrated local needs.
15. Evidence of local need shows a continuing shortfall of affordable housing in Central Bedfordshire. A variety of demographic and social factors, coupled with pressures generated by economic growth and in-migration mean that a substantial number of households are unable to rent or buy in the open market.
16. There may be an impact on some vulnerable groups, which relate to the Welfare Reform Act, and the introduction of the Benefit cap. There are issues with the Spare Room Subsidy, for people who are disabled and require a carer to stay overnight and with a Domestic violence victim who requires a safe room within her home from the perpetrator.

Sustainability Implications

17. The Housing Strategy will ensure all new and regeneration schemes concerned with housing will aim to meet the highest levels of sustainability compatible with best value and technical feasibility.

Conclusion and next Steps

18. Comments are currently being sought on the Housing Strategy from internal colleagues, asking for their views on how the local evidence base detailed within the strategy can be used to shape and provide the focus for future policy and action.
19. Following internal consultation the Housing Strategy will go out for full public consultation.
20. Once completed, the outcomes of this process will be used to shape housing policies in the new Local Plan for Central Bedfordshire.
21. The Housing Strategy will then be taken to Executive for endorsement as technical guidance as the Council's Housing Strategy. This is in relation to a range of functions including strategic planning and development management purposes.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Housing Strategy