

Central Bedfordshire Council

EXECUTIVE

7 June 2016

HOUSING STRATEGY 2016-2021

Report of Cllr Nigel Young, Executive Member for Regeneration
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This decision relates to a key decision

Purpose of this report

1. This report is to explain the purpose of the Strategy and sets out how the Council will use the document as a strategic framework to shape planning and housing policies and help deliver the Council's housing priorities. Executive Committee is asked to review and endorse the Housing Strategy, following feedback and changes from the recent public consultation. The Housing Strategy will be used to shape housing policies in the emerging Local Plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive is asked to recommend to Council to:

1. **endorse the Central Bedfordshire Housing Strategy (Appendix 1); and**
2. **delegate authority to the Director of Regeneration and Business, in consultation with the Executive Member for Regeneration, to make any future minor amendments that may be required to the Housing Strategy.**

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

2. This item was considered by the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) on 17 March 2016. The Committee requested a briefing for all Member which was undertaken on the 8 April 2016.

3. Feedback from the Committee included ensuring developers meet the affordable requirements of the area because many local people would not be able to afford homes within the affordable housing bracket as a result of high prices. In response to a Member enquiry, the Executive Member for Regeneration confirmed that in relation to Council owned homes, the Council charged rents in accordance with government allowances.

Context

What is the Housing Strategy?

4. 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 Strategy that provides links and signposting to other strategies that are relevant to housing.

What the Housing Strategy does?

5. By providing an overview of the existing local evidence base, with associated strategies and plans, the Housing Strategy demonstrates how the Council will meet the range of requirements with respect to housing associated with national policy and legislation, which include:
 - 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.
6. 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

7. 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.

Background

8. The draft strategy was developed with an initial scoping consultation undertaken by independent consultants from September to November 2015 which drew out the housing issues both nationally and locally. This was followed by a consultation internally and externally with the voluntary sector, housing associations/registered providers, care providers, social services, house builders/developers, members and other stakeholders. In October and November 2015 workshops were held with the stakeholders mentioned above to identify the key challenges and priorities which were then used to inform a first draft of the Housing Strategy.
9. Since January officers have been working with Councillors and other service areas to further refine the draft document and the action plan. This included a number of internal workshops and consultations which identified some specific issues for CBC including:
 - The need for homes for all especially more affordable rented homes and homes for key workers to help retain skills in the area.
 - The need for housing to be built in suitable and sustainable locations near transport routes.
 - More housing designed to meet the needs of the disabled and vulnerable.
 - Ensuring adequate provision of suitable accommodation for older people to meet growing needs/demands.
 - The need to deliver economic growth & reduce demand on public services & providing suitable accommodation.

These comments amongst others have been used to structure the sections/priorities and to inform the actions plan. The draft Housing Strategy document was also considered by the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny on the 17 March, see comments above.

10. The public consultation commenced on the 22 April for 4 weeks, the comments received and suggested changes are detailed in Appendix 2. The results of the consultations with the public and stakeholders have therefore been reviewed and changes incorporated into the updated Strategy at Appendix 1.
11. Alongside the Strategy we have also developed an Action Plan Appendix 3, which details how the Council will deliver the priorities identified. This will enable the implementation of the Strategy to be monitored.

Council Priorities

12. 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

13. There can be challenges in all areas of service provision and in particular in those areas where the resource is scarce and priority is being determined between competing needs. There can also be challenges concerning development plans that impact on communities. This Housing Strategy covers a wide range of areas and so the risk of challenge could be wide as a result. However the Housing Strategy is written as aims and ambitions, setting out plans for the future and work to be undertaken so that services can be better targeted and meet the needs identified. It is therefore a useful guide to decision makers and will therefore need to bear the strategy in mind as such and if this is done challenges to this strategy should be negligible.

14. It should be noted that the Housing Strategy is separate and distinguishable from the other policies and strategies it mentions such as the Homelessness Strategy, Local Plan and national policies or legislation.

Financial Implications

15. None arising directly from this report. However, there are a number of indirect 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

16. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. 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.
17. 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 immigration mean that a substantial number of households are unable to rent or buy in the open market.
18. There are other groups who may require specialist forms of housing, including those with physical, sensory and learning disabilities. As well as requiring a percentage of homes to be built to wheelchair design standards, we will work with health and social care partners to identify what mix and location of housing is required to meet the needs of those groups.
19. 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

20. 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.

Risk Management

21. Although there are no specific risks associated with the Housing Strategy itself, the development of a comprehensive strategy helps ensure that the Council is meeting its corporate objectives, meeting statutory requirements, and enables risks to be considered and addressed with appropriate mitigating actions.

Conclusion and next Steps

22. The Housing Strategy if endorsed by the Executive will provide the housing vision and priorities for Central Bedfordshire. The Strategy will be implemented in partnership with a range of internal and external partners; these are detailed in the Action Plan, Registered Providers and through the new Local Plan.
23. We will use the Strategy to inform the housing policies in the Local Plan and this together with a delivery Plan for affordable housing will provide the basis for the Council's housing vision to be realised.

Appendices (to Follow)

Appendix 1: Housing Strategy

Appendix 2: Consultation Results

Appendix 3: Housing Strategy Action Plan