

# **Report to Housing Select Committee**

**Date of meeting: 12<sup>th</sup> January 2016**

**Portfolio: Housing – Cllr D. Stallan**

**Subject: Housing Service Strategies**

**Officer contact for further information:**

**Alan Hall – Director of Communities (01992 564004)**

**Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins**



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## **Recommendation:**

- 1) That, in future, the coverage of Housing Service Strategies be reduced to the following headings, for the reasons set out in Appendix 1:
  - (a) Introduction;
  - (b) Aims and Objectives;
  - (c) Approach to Service Delivery; and
  - (d) Review of the Strategy;
- 2) That the proposed retention, discontinuation and amalgamation of existing Housing Service Strategies, set out at Appendix 2, be noted and that the future suite of Housing Service Strategies comprises 7 Service Strategies, as listed in Recommendation (4) below;
- 3) That the new Service Strategies be reviewed every five years from the date of their last review (with the exception of the Anti-social Behaviour and Harassment Service Strategy which, in accordance with legislation, must be reviewed every three years);
- 4) That, as a result of Recommendations (2) and (3) above, the new suite of Service Strategies next be reviewed at the Housing Select Committee meetings in the months shown below:

(a) Empty Properties	- March 2016
(b) Home Ownership and Leasehold Services	- January 2018
(c) Anti-social Behaviour and Harassment	- April 2018
(d) Tenant Participation	- March 2019
(e) Rent Arrears and Administration	- November 2019
(f) Older People's Housing	- September 2020
(g) Housing and Neighbourhood Management	- September 2020
- 5) That the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation be invited to consider whether or not they would like to be consulted on all, some or none of the draft revised Housing Service Strategies prior to consideration by the Housing Select Committee; and
- 6) That, following consideration by the Housing Select Committee, Housing Service Strategies be no longer reported to the Housing Portfolio Holder for approval through formal Portfolio Holder Decisions.

## **Background:**

1. At its meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2015, the Select Committee considered a report from the Director of Communities for discussion regarding the future use of Housing Service Strategies. It was noted that, over many years, the Housing Service has formulated a suite of 16 separate Housing Service Strategies that, individually, set out the detailed approach taken by the Council and its officers to various housing activities.

2. All Housing Service Strategies are produced to a common format and are currently reviewed and updated by officers every three years and then reported, in the first instance, to the Housing Select Committee for consideration. Around the same time, Housing Service Strategies relating to landlord services are also reported to the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation for their views as well. Final versions are then formally reported to the Housing Portfolio Holder for adoption.

3. The Select Committee, at its last meeting, noted that the suite of Housing Service Strategies were originally introduced at the time of the former Housing Inspectorate being set up and in anticipation of a formal Housing Inspection being undertaken. Although the Housing Inspectorate closed down a number of years ago, the production, review and updating of the Service Strategies has continued. It was noted that each Service Strategy takes some time to update, with further officer time required to report to and attend the Select Committee and Tenants and Leaseholders Federation meetings, and to produce the final report to the Housing Portfolio Holder.

4. It was explained at the last meeting that the Communities Management Team (CMT) had considered the cost/benefits of spending the significant amount of time required to update Service Strategies. As a result, it had been identified that, although the general principles set out in the Service Strategies are generally followed, they were hardly ever referred to by officers between the three-yearly reviews. Moreover, most of the actions included within the Action Plans had usually already been identified and planned prior to the relevant Service Strategy being updated and, in any event, are included and monitored at an officer level through the Communities Directorate's Continuous Improvement Regime.

5. The CMT also drew attention to the fact that this approach to strategic service planning was not adopted by any of the other Directorates, Select Committees or Portfolio Holders – therefore, it resulted in an inconsistent approach both across the Council and the Communities Directorate itself. However, the CMT recognised that the Select Committee found it useful to understand and review the Council's approach to the various housing functions, which was confirmed by members of the Select Committee at the meeting.

6. The report to the last meeting suggested five options, which the Select Committee considered, which can be summarised as follows:

- Maintain the status quo;
- Cease the production and review of Service Strategies;
- Extend the validity of Service Strategies from 3 to 5 years – with a transitional period to spread out the required updates;
- Continue with the review and updating of Service Strategies but without the Select Committee and Tenants and Leaseholders considering them, and formally be signed-off by the Housing Portfolio Holder; and
- Maintain the status quo - and recommend to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that consideration be given to all Directorates and Select Committees taking the same approach to strategic service planning.

7. When considering the options, the Select Committee had mixed feelings about reducing the number and scope of the Service Strategies but, on balance, agreed that the approach

needed to be reviewed and asked that a report be submitted to this next meeting proposing:

- How a reduction in the number of Service Strategies could be achieved;
- How the content of Service Strategies could be significantly reduced; and
- A process for reviewing Service Strategies every 5 years, instead of every 3 years.

### **Proposed Future Approach**

8. Members of the CMT found the open and frank discussion at the last meeting very useful and, in response, propose the following way forward to meet the Select Committee's desired outcomes.

9. Appendix 1 lists the coverage of the current suite of Service Strategies, through reference to the headings used for each Strategy, and then proposes which headings/content should be retained for future Strategies, and which should be either discontinued or incorporated within other headings. As a result, it is proposed that the existing 10 headings are reduced to the 4 headings set out in Recommendation (1) above.

10. Appendix 2 provides a list of all the current Housing Service Strategies, together with the date that their next updates are due (based on a three-yearly revision cycle), and proposes which should be retained, discontinued or incorporated within other retained Service Strategies. These proposals result in the number of Service Strategies being reduced from 16 to the 7 Strategies listed in Recommendation (4) above.

11. Having regard to the Select Committee's views expressed at the last meeting on the frequency of reviews, it is suggested that, in future, Housing Service Strategies are reviewed every five years instead of every three years. However, the Anti-social Behaviour and Harassment Service Strategy must be reviewed every three years, to comply with the legislative that the Council produces such a strategy every three years. Recommendation (4) sets out the months that each Service Strategy should next be reviewed by the Housing Select Committee.

12. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation has not yet been consulted on whether or not they would want to be consulted on all, some or none of the draft revised Housing Service Strategies prior to consideration by the Housing Select Committee. It is therefore suggested that they be consulted on this at their next meeting.

13. Finally, since, to a large degree, Housing Service Strategies are "operational" documents, and in order to maximise the amount of officer time that can be freed-up, it is suggested that, following consideration by the Housing Select Committee, they are no longer reported to the Housing Portfolio Holder for approval through formal Portfolio Holder Decisions.