

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-024-2009/10
Date of meeting: 7 September 2009



Portfolio: Housing
Subject: Housing Strategy 2009-2012
Responsible Officer: Alan Hall (01992 564004).
Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That the final version of the Council's Housing Strategy 2009-12, attached to the Supplementary Agenda, be recommended to the full Council for adoption for a period of three years;**
- (2) That further Key Action Plans be produced and updated on an annual basis for approval by the Cabinet; and**
- (3) That the Housing Scrutiny Panel reviews progress with the annual Key Action Plans after six months of approval by the Cabinet.**

Executive Summary:

The Council has consulted widely on its draft Housing Strategy 2009-12. The report gives the background to the Housing Strategy, explains the consultation process and the outcome of the consultation, and recommends the final version to the Council for adoption.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The Council's current Housing Strategy is now out of date and a new Strategy is required. An extensive consultation exercise has been undertaken on a draft version. Under the Council's Constitution, the final version of the Housing Strategy must be adopted by the full Council.

Other Options for Action:

The Cabinet could amend any of the wording within the proposed final version.

Report:

1. The Council's Housing Strategy was last produced in May 2003 and was assessed at that time as being fully "fit for purpose" by the Government Office for the East of England (GO-East). The Council was only the second local authority in the country to achieve the fit for purpose standard.
2. While there is now no requirement for local authorities to produce their own Housing Strategies, in July 2008, within its document "Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous

Communities” the Government made reference to the future of housing strategies and stated that:

“Refreshed housing strategies should:

- *fully reflect the wider vision of the authority and its partners;*
- *reflect a clear and evidenced approach;*
- *provide a strong focus on how partners will deliver their commitments, including on the infrastructure needed to support housing growth”.*

3. A Housing Strategy should set out a district’s housing plans for the medium term (i.e. the next 3-5 years). However, these plans can also be formulated with regard to the housing objectives for the long term which, in some cases, can span a period of 30 years.

4 The London Commuter Belt (LCB) Housing Sub-Region, within which the District sits, is one of the largest sub-regions in the country, comprising 5 local authorities in Essex and all 10 local authorities in Hertfordshire. The local authorities and RSLs within the Sub-Region have previously worked in partnership to produce a Sub-Regional Housing Strategy, which forms a part of the Regional Housing Strategy. Council officers have actively engaged with sub-regional working and have contributed towards the delivery of the Sub-Regional Housing Action Plan.

5. The latest Sub-Regional Housing Strategy was produced in October 2004 and the local authorities and RSLs are now working together to produce a new Sub-Regional Housing Strategy in 2009/10. In order to assist in this process, all the local authorities in the LCB Housing Sub-Region have agreed to produce their own housing strategies for their district to a common format.

Housing Strategy 2009-2012

6. The Council’s latest proposed Housing Strategy for the three-year period 2009-2012 has been produced in this common format and is attached to the Supplementary Agenda for this meeting.

7. The Housing Strategy complements the current Sub-Regional Housing Strategy, Regional Housing Strategy and also meets national housing objectives. The main aspects of national housing policy and Regional and Sub-Regional Strategies are included in the appendices to the document. The appendices also include the London Commuter Belt Strategy Grid, which summarises the strategic approach and position at district level for each of the local authorities in the Sub Region.

8. The Housing Strategy assesses the District’s current and future housing needs - having particular regard to a recently completed Strategic Housing Market Assessment produced by six local authorities in the eastern part of the LCB Sub-Region - and sets out the Council’s approach to meeting those needs. As well as taking account of national, regional and sub-regional priorities, it also links with other Council and non-Council strategies that both influence, and are influenced by, the Housing Strategy.

9. The Strategy also includes a Key Action Plan at Appendix 1, which sets out the proposed actions to be taken by the Council to contribute towards the achievement of the housing objectives over the next 1-3 years.

Consultation Exercise

10. In view of the strategic importance of the Housing Strategy, initially, a “Consultation

Draft" Housing Strategy was produced. This was considered in detail by the Housing Scrutiny Panel, which approved the document for consultation.

11. A major Consultation Exercise was then undertaken with the Council's partners, key stakeholders and the public over a three-month period earlier in 2009, closing on 5 June 2009. Around 155 partners and other organisations, with different interests in the District's housing, were consulted on the Consultation Draft. A copy of the Consultation Draft was published on the Council's website and readers invited to submit responses on line. A press release also invited members of the public to comment.

12. Having regard to best practice set out in the Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) for the inspection of local housing strategies, a one-day conference was held during the consultation period on the proposals within the Consultation Draft, to which all the consultees were invited. Presentations were given, and three workshops held, on the key issues and proposals, in order to fully brief consultees and to help inform their responses.

Outcome of the Consultation Exercise

13. Disappointingly, by the end of the consultation period, only 7 formal responses were received (with one of those respondents not making any comments). A summary of all the responses received is provided at Appendix 1, of this report which also gives the comments of the Director of Housing on each of the responses and any changes made to the final version as a result.

Other Changes Made to the Final Version

14. For information, in addition to the changes made as a result of the consultation, the following main changes have also been made to the attached final version:

- Inclusion of a list of adopted Housing Service Strategies;
- Information on gypsies and travellers has been updated to reflect the current position, including the recently-produced Essex Gypsies and Travellers Accommodation Assessment, undertaken by Fordhams Consultancy, on behalf of all Essex local authorities;
- Updated information on current affordable housing developments has been provided;
- The results of the final version of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) has been included;
- Updated information related to homelessness has been provided, to reflect the Council's latest Homelessness Strategy and the recent additional Government funding received;
- An updated Key Action Plan, including additional and revised actions and revised target dates;
- Updated figures throughout – especially those relating to 2008/9 and April 2009 (replacing figures for 2007/8 and April 2008 given in the Consultation Draft); and
- Updated chapter on Resources, providing the latest information in respect of the Council's Capital Programme.

15. The Cabinet is asked to consider and recommend the adoption of the final version of the Housing Strategy 2009-12 to the full Council (as required by the Council's Constitution) for a period of three years. It is also recommend that Key Action Plans be produced and updated on an annual basis for approval by the Cabinet, with the Housing Scrutiny Panel reviewing progress with the annual Key Action Plans after six months of approval, in accordance with its current Terms of Reference.

Resource Implications:

As set out in the Resources Chapter of the Housing Strategy.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Section 8 of the Housing Act 1985 requires local housing authorities to periodically review housing conditions and housing needs in the District.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

A number of the proposals within the Housing Strategy contribute towards a safer, cleaner and greener District.

Consultation Undertaken:

As set out in Paragraphs 10-13.

Background Papers:

Responses received from consultees.

Impact Assessments:

In view of the importance and wide-ranging nature of the Housing Strategy, an Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken, which has been taken into account in the production of the final version, and is available on request.

The key risk relating to the Housing Strategy is that the Council's Corporate Risk Register refers to the risk of failing to meet the housing need in the District. The proposals within the Housing Strategy go some way towards mitigating this risk.