

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 29 September 2009

Portfolio Holder: Councillor David Stallan

Item: 12

1. HOUSING STRATEGY 2009-2012

Recommending:

That the Council's Housing Strategy 2009-2012, attached to the Supplementary Agenda, be adopted for a period of three years.

Background

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. There is now no requirement for local authorities to produce their own Housing Strategies. However, in July 2008 within its document "Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities" the Government made reference to the future of housing strategies. The Government stated that refreshed strategies should fully reflect the wider vision of the authority and its partners; should reflect a clear and evidenced approach; and should provide a strong focus on how partners will deliver their commitments, including the infrastructure needed to support housing growth.
3. A housing strategy should set out a district's housing plans for the medium term (ie the next three-five years). However, these plans can also be formulated with regard to the housing objectives for the long term.
4. The London Commuter Belt Housing Sub-Region, which includes this District is one of the largest sub-regions in the country, comprising five local authorities in Essex and all 10 local authorities in Hertfordshire. The local authorities and registered social landlords 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. 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 the registered social landlords 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 sub-region have agreed to produce their own housing strategies for their districts to a common format.

Housing Strategy 2009-2012

6. This Council's latest proposed Housing Strategy for the three year period 2009-2012 has been produced in the required common format. The Strategy complements the current Sub-Regional Housing Strategy, Regional Housing Strategy and also meets national housing objectives.
7. 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 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.
8. The Strategy includes a key action plan which sets out the proposed actions to be taken by the Council to contribute towards the achievement of the housing objectives within the next one to three years.

Consultation Exercise

9. A consultation draft Housing Strategy was produced and approved by the Housing Scrutiny Panel for consultation.
10. A major consultation exercise was undertaken with the Council's partners, key stakeholders and the public over a three month period earlier this year. Approximately 155 partners and other organisations were consulted. A copy of the consultation draft was also published on the Council's website with an invitation to submit responses on line. In addition a press release invited members of the public to comment. A one-day conference was held during the consultation period to which all the consultees were invited. Presentations were given and workshops held on the key issues and proposals in order to fully brief consultees and to help inform their responses.
11. Disappointingly only seven formal responses were received in relation to the consultation draft. As a result of those responses an additional action has been added to the action plan to work with Abbess Beauchamp and Berners Roding Parish Council and Hastoe Housing Association to provide an affordable rural housing scheme in the parish utilising the Council's planning exceptions policy. Also an additional section has been added on "community-led plans and village design statements" which includes reference to the Thornwood Village Design Statement. Reference in the Key Issues sub-section of the Gypsies and Travellers section to the "Call for Sites" has been clarified to explain that the exercise is being undertaken for any proposed development sites but this is also being used to identify potential gypsies and travellers sites. Statistical information provided by Essex County Council has been included and reference made to the possibility of a need for one or more extra care housing schemes. Finally a new sub-section has been added referring to the limited information available and the need to liaise with the North Essex NHS Mental Health Foundation Trust on provision for people with mental health problems.

Other changes made

12. Further changes have also been made to the Housing Strategy to take account of updated information in relation to the accommodation needs of gypsies and

travellers, current affordable housing developments, homelessness, updated figures and resources.

Recommendation

13. We are recommending the adoption of the final version of the Housing Strategy as required by the Council's Constitution for a period of three years. However, the key action plans will be produced and updated on an annual basis with the Housing Scrutiny Panel reviewing progress after six months of approval in accordance with its current terms of reference.
14. We recommend as set out at the commencement of this report.