

**DECENT & AFFORDABLE HOMES PDG
26 JANUARY 2016**

HOUSING STRATEGY 2015-2020

Cabinet Member Cllr Ray Stanley
Responsible Officer Housing Services Manager

Reason for Report: To inform Members about the results of the recent consultation on the draft housing strategy document

RECOMMENDATION(S): That the Cabinet adopts the revised housing strategy once the changes set out in the report have been implemented.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The Corporate Plan is currently under review. The provision of homes features as a priority in both the existing plan and the new draft plan, which is currently out for consultation. This latest draft explains that we will focus on building more Council housing, facilitating the housing growth that Mid Devon needs, including affordable homes and planning and enhancing the built environment.

Financial Implications: All actions arising from the strategy will be met by existing and future budgets informed by service plans

Legal Implications: The Local Government Act 2003 imposes a duty on the Council to publish a housing strategy which sets out the vision and priorities for housing in the District.

Risk Assessment: Having a housing strategy in place which references other strategies and plans should help to mitigate the impact of welfare reform and the reduced availability of public sector finance. It should also help to manage the expectations of local people and other stakeholders

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The draft housing strategy was discussed at the meeting of the PDG on 6 October 2015 and it was agreed that the Council should undertake a consultation.

1.2 Members will recall that in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2003, the Council is required to publish a housing strategy which sets out our vision and priorities for housing in the District. This strategy must contain the objectives and targets and policies on how we intend to manage and deliver our strategic housing role. It also needs to provide an overarching framework against which we consider and formulate other policies on more specific housing issues.

1.3 The existing housing strategy 2010-2015 now needs updating.

1.4 The revised strategy should address all relevant issues, including homelessness and the energy efficiency of housing stock.

- 1.5 In addition, it should contain information about the current position and the context. This should include reference to wider priorities including national ones, and also local ones.
- 1.6 The strategy can also include information about how the Council manages its housing stock and performs its role as a landlord.
- 1.7 The purpose of the strategy is to provide a framework for achieving the outcomes and priorities for housing in Mid Devon. To inform this, the strategy should include information on the current and future position of all significant aspects of housing need in all tenures and on service performance.
- 1.8 The strategy should reflect the Council's role in discharging a number of statutory duties including those relating to public sector housing, homelessness and safeguarding of vulnerable children and adults.

2.0 **The Draft Housing Strategy**

- 2.1 A number of key priorities have been identified which have been included within the draft strategy. These take account of information gathered as part of the Census 2011 and the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) which was published by the authorities in the Exeter Housing Market Area. The priorities also reflect the challenging financial climate, recent changes to housing policy and ongoing welfare reform.
- 2.2 Members will recall that the priorities are as follows:

Priority One: Delivering affordable housing

- 2.2.1 In accordance with this priority, we will work in partnership with other providers to develop new homes to meet the need established in the SHMA. We will also try to develop more Council housing and to work with landlords in the private sector to bring empty homes back into use. The need for additional pitches for gypsies and travellers has been recognised within the new draft strategy and the Devon Partnership Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment has been referenced.

Priority Two: Making better use of existing housing stock

- 2.2.2 The work of the Private Sector Housing team aligns with this priority because overall housing supply is affected by property condition and investment in maintenance. The provision of aids and adaptations in both private and public sector accommodation is also important because this enables people to remain independent in their own homes.
- 2.2.3 We use Devon Home Choice to award priority for rehousing and Members of the PDG are about to review the operation of the scheme in Mid Devon. Even if changes are made to the scheme, it will still offer a consistent approach to the allocation of social housing which will enable us to make best use of the housing stock in the District.

- 2.2.4 In accordance with this priority, we have made it clear within our tenancy strategy that we expect registered providers of social housing (RPs) to use fixed term tenancies. The management of our own housing stock also supports this priority.

Priority Three: Preventing homelessness

- 2.2.5 The homelessness strategy which was adopted in 2014 contains three specific priorities and these are confirmed in the housing strategy.

Priority Four: Managing the impact of an aging population

- 2.2.6 The housing strategy acknowledges that a huge increase in the number of elderly living in Mid Devon is projected over the next two decades. The population over 65 is likely to increase by over 54% and the population aged 75 or over is likely to go up by nearly 82% in the period until 2033. We have already started to explore new ways of delivering services to older people in both public and private sector housing and to expanding existing services in support of this priority.

Priority Five: Reducing the impact of welfare reform

- 2.2.7 Work to reduce fuel poverty is important in our strategy to reduce the impact of welfare reform. In addition, partnership working with other agencies such as Wiser£Money also enables us to support those who are vulnerable.

3.0 Consultation

- 3.1 There was a consultation relating to the priorities which should be included in the strategy in 2013.
- 3.2 Members agreed another consultation on the finished draft and this latest consultation ran from 16 November 2015 to 3 January 2016. Stakeholders were emailed and these included neighbouring strategic housing authorities, other providers of social housing in the District and partner agencies such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau, the Churches Housing Action Team (CHAT) and Age UK. We sent a link to the draft housing strategy in each email.
- 3.3 The consultation documents were also uploaded to the Council's website in the section entitled: "Strategies and Policies" in the Council Housing pages and in the "Consultation and Involvement" pages and were there for the duration of the consultation.
- 3.4 Our Tenants Together group was consulted on the draft housing strategy; and we published an article about it in our Housing News 4U tenant newsletter. This will be posted to all tenants during the week commencing 11 January 2016 and the Housing Services Manager will give a verbal update to the PDG relating to any feedback received from tenants in connection with this exercise.
- 3.5 In total, we received 3 responses from stakeholders (although the comments of one respondent were made in a personal capacity rather than as a

representative of their organisation). We also received 1 response from a member of our Tenants Together group.

3.6 One of the stakeholders, The Devon Senior Voice (DSV), made a number of comments regarding the draft strategy.

3.7 The table in appendix 2 summarises the main issues received as feedback following the consultation, and our response.

4.0 **Proposed Changes to the Draft Housing Strategy**

4.1 Looking at the table in appendix 2, it can be seen that there was no suggestion that the key priorities set out in the draft housing strategy should be changed.

4.2 Some of the comments received were positive.

4.3 As a result of the consultation, it is proposed that several amendments are made to the document shown in appendix 1.

4.4 One respondent expressed concern about the future availability of funding for initiatives such as Local Welfare Assistance, floating tenancy support and other charitable provisions.

4.5 It is therefore proposed that an additional paragraph is added to page 12 within the section relating to priority 3 which is entitled: "Preventing Homelessness". This will be inserted between the paragraph relating to the employment of a Young Person's Support Worker and that which discusses partnership working.

4.6 The proposed form of wording is: "The Council is operating within a challenging financial climate given that we have been advised that our government grant will be reducing with an expected reduction of £1.7 million by 2019/20. This is likely to have an impact upon the ability of the Housing Service to prevent homelessness and to sustain tenancies. We are also aware that in this age of austerity, other partner agencies will also be operating with reduced finances and, as a result, that they may have to review their mission statements, aims and business plans, to reduce service levels or to cease offering a service. This may have a significant impact upon levels of homelessness and the choices available to those in housing need. It is therefore important that the Housing Service is flexible in its approach to prevention work and that it works in partnership, where possible, in order to keep overhead costs to a minimum. It is important to ensure that our Officers are well trained and aware of all the options available so that they can give appropriate advice and support, where necessary."

4.7 There was also some concern about a lack of local provision of supported accommodation for those assessed as having high needs in Mid Devon and for this reason it is proposed to add a further paragraph to the section relating to the prevention of homelessness. This will read: "We recognise that there is a lack of local provision of supported accommodation for those who have high needs and as part of our housing options approach we endeavour to support

such individuals to secure suitable accommodation suitable for them". If approved, this amendment would be inserted at the bottom of page 12 following the sentence which reads: "The Council also operates a mortgage rescue scheme and has a dedicated Housing Benefit Officer to fast track temporary accommodation and rent/deposit applications".

- 4.8 In response to feedback received following the consultation exercise, it is also proposed to amend the action plan to add the following:
- We will promote downsizing as a positive option for elderly tenants in our publicity to Council tenants.
 - We will consult with DSV in connection with the development of our handyman service.
- 4.9 Both actions will be listed for action by March 2016 and will be reviewed on an on-going basis.
- 4.10 Members are asked to approve these changes to the draft Housing Strategy document and to recommend them to the Cabinet.

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