

Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 21 September 2021



Portfolio: Housing Services

Subject: Review of the overarching Housing Strategy

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Democratic Services Officer: R Perrin

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

1. To note the outcome of the stage 1 initial consultation on the review of the overarching Housing Strategy, which is due for renewal in April 2022; and
2. To consider and give in principal approval to take the proposals for the overarching Housing Strategy 2022-2027 recommended within this report to stage 2 consultation between October 2021 and December 2021.

Report:

1. The purpose of the overarching Housing Strategy is to confirm the current identified housing needs and projected future housing needs within the district and agree the plans to address these needs over a five-year period.
2. The Housing Strategy is underpinned by the Local Plan which determines supply and demand in respect of the built environment. The strategic housing function must also take account of a complex array of social, economic and health related legislation, regulation and services relating to the people who live or want to live in the district.
3. Although the Council is not obliged to publish a Housing Strategy it does present an opportunity to align housing related priorities, legislation and regulations that span 'Communities' and 'Place' under one overarching umbrella for EFDC.
4. The current Housing Strategy was published in 2017. This full review began in May 2021 along with simultaneous reviews of the Allocations Policy, the Tenancy Policy and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, all of which are due for renewal in 2022.
5. The aim of this review is to produce a succinct cohesive vision and direction of travel for Housing Services and partner organisations for the duration of the overarching Housing Strategy 2022- 2027, and a corresponding action plan that can be monitored on a quarterly basis (and updated if necessary).
6. A series of initial consultation events were held between July 2021 and August 2021. These included bitesize briefing sessions with Members of the Council, residents, professional partners, other statutory services and staff. Desktop research has also been conducted by in-house technical experts, along with statistical analysis of national and local data and an on-line survey which closed on 30 August 2021.

7. The findings of the review are currently in draft format and will be published along-side a summary of the outcome of the stage 1 and stage 2 consultation to form the evidence base.

8. The review has highlighted the following issues and opportunities that have been expanded into proposed recommendations for inclusion in the overarching Housing Strategy 2022-2027.

Five Strategic Priorities

Several clear themes have emerged which can be readily grouped into five priorities.

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that stakeholders are consulted on the proposal to present the overarching Housing Strategy as a set of 5 strategic priorities framed within the national context, the local context, and Epping Forest District Council corporate objectives.

The proposed priorities are:

1. Increasing the supply of affordable housing
2. Promoting health wellbeing and independence
3. Economic growth and regeneration
4. Quality and standards
5. Protecting and enhancing the environment

Recommendation 2

It is recommended that stakeholders are consulted on including following points under the respective priorities.

Priority 1: Increasing the supply of Affordable Housing

The proposal for Priority 1 is to maximise opportunities to increase the supply of suitable affordable housing:

- provide a summary of the relevant points of the Local Plan for the supply of affordable housing to meet identified need
- develop a live integrated affordable housing delivery pipeline across tenure types, developers and registered providers including in-house and Qualis schemes
- strengthen the links between planning policy, strategy, developments and ECC for pre-planning application consultation / negotiations on developer contributions, viability etc
- continue to work with Homes England to maximise funding opportunities
- give specific consideration to recovering from the impact of local planning restrictions and the pandemic on new supply
- address the option of community self-build
- address first homes and the new model for shared ownership
- reference the garden towns and developing cascading lettings arrangements
- Include a reference to the allocations policy

Priority 2: Promoting health wellbeing and independence

The proposal for priority 2 is to consider health wellbeing prevention and support when its needed.

- provide assistance that enables people to live independent lives to the best of their ability

- maximise touchpoints for residents to improve their health, wellbeing and life-chances
- deliver tangible outcomes in partnership with Public Health, Community Safety, Social Care, Communities and Culture, third sector organisations etc.
- listen to, understand and respond to our residents lived experiences and aspirations
- develop a workforce that is inspired and equipped to provide a wholistic offer
- explore voluntary social prescribing of non-clinical activities in personal housing plans
- reference the Health and Social Care Bill and the emerging 'Levelling Up' agenda
- adopt the housing related aspects of the recently published National Disabilities Strategy

Priority 3: Economic growth and regeneration

The proposal for priority 3 is to strengthen the links with partners to collectively bridge the gap between the cost of housing and the ability of households on low incomes to meet these costs including:

- a feasibility study into key-worker housing for rent and affordable home ownership
- promote employment and apprentice initiatives to address local skills shortages amongst households who may also be in housing need
- support for local businesses
- the integrated plans to address fuel poverty
- prepare for the impact of the Debt Respite Scheme Regulations 2020
- reference the estate regeneration plans and the opportunities for community involvement
- reference the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022 - 2027

Priority 4: Quality and standards

Priority 4 will focus on the Council's commitment to offering high quality housing and housing related services and the recourse that is open to residents who are dissatisfied

- The Charter for Social Housing Residents
- design standards and modern methods of construction
- fire and Health and Safety
- regulating the private rented sector
- assistive technology
- disabled facilities grants

Priority 5: Protecting and enhancing the environment

Priority 5 will cover the natural environment culture and heritage that is unique to the district

- a summary of the housing related points in the Local Plan regarding climate change, sustainability net zero carbon requirements, interim air pollution mitigation strategy, tree preservation etc.
- tackling environmental health issues such as noise pollution, fly tipping, anti-social behaviour, private sector stock condition and licencing laws
- bringing empty homes back in to use
- preserving restoring and celebrating our local culture and heritage

Consistent format with the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

The critical part of the strategy will be the associated action plan as it sets out how the objectives and intended outcomes are to be delivered and measured. If a consistent style and approach is taken to the formulation of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, then

the objectives contained therein can be delivered and measured in the same way.

Recommendation 3

It is recommended that an action plan with SMART targets is produced that follows the same style and format as the proposals for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. They can both then feed into service plans, team plans and individual one-to ones.

Reason for decision:

To enable EFDC to progress to stage 2 of the consultation exercise before presenting the outcome of the reviews and respective recommendations to Cabinet for consideration and approval in Spring 2022.

Consultation undertaken:

Invitations to participate in live bitesize briefings or view pre-recorded briefings and complete an online survey were sent to:

- Council tenants and leaseholders
- partner agencies and community groups with an interest in housing in the district
- private registered providers of social housing in the district
- district, borough and city councils in the county
- EFDC staff
- Members of the Council
- clerks of parish and town councils to forward to their respective elected members.

The survey and associated information were also published on the Council website and the intranet.

The generic survey ensured every participant was asked the same set of questions. At the time of writing this report 71 participants completed the survey. The results of the survey have been analysed and will be reproduced as a report for circulation and publication as part of the review.

Resource implications: None

Legal and Governance Implications: None

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications: None

Background Papers:

The Housing Strategy 2017 – 2022

Essex County Council Housing Strategy 2021 – 2025

The Big 4 Initial Consultation – Findings (Draft) September 2021

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management: N/A

Equality: An indicative Impact Assessment is being maintained and updated as the review progresses to conclusion.