

# **Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee**

**Date of meeting: 12 July 2022**



**Portfolio: Housing and Community (Councillor H Whitbread)**

**Subject: Review of Housing Strategy 2022-2027**

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## **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

1. That the Committee considers the draft Public Consultation Outcome Report for the Review of the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 at Appendix 1 and makes recommendations for Cabinet approval.
2. That the Committee considers the draft vision, five proposed priorities and associated aims and objectives for the draft Housing Strategy 2022-2027 contained within this report and makes recommendations for Cabinet approval.
3. That the Committee considers the proposal to delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community to approve the periodic publication of an associated Housing Strategy Action Plan and makes recommendations for Cabinet approval.
4. That the Committee considers the proposal to ensure the Housing Strategy for 2022-2027 is reviewed and updated no later than 2027 and makes recommendations for Cabinet approval.

## **Reason for proposed recommendations:**

For the Committee to make their recommendations to Cabinet for consideration and approval to enable the publication of the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 and the associated Public Consultation Outcome Report.

## **Executive Summary**

Stronger Communities Select Committee is being asked to consider the proposal set out in this report and make recommendations for Cabinet to approve the draft Housing Strategy 2022-2027 and the Public Consultation Outcome Report.

The current Housing Strategy 2018-2022 is due for renewal. Although the Housing Strategy is not a statutory requirement it provides a cohesive direction of travel for cross-cutting housing related services. The aim is to reflect and facilitate the co-ordination of activities for those services that directly impact on current and projected need for and supply of affordable housing in the District.

A review of the Housing Strategy commenced in May 2021 underpinned by a review of the Allocations Scheme, the Tenancy Policy and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (which are statutory documents). These were approved by Cabinet on 1 March 2022 to take

effective in September 2022 for the period 2022-2027.

**Other options for Action:**

- (i) Not to recommend approving the Public Consultation Outcome Report for publication.
- (ii) To make alternative recommendations to the style, content, or presentation of the Public Consultation Outcome Report before publication.
- (iii) Not to recommend the proposals for the for the Housing Strategy 2022-2027.
- (iv) To make alternative recommendations for the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 (subject to further consultation where appropriate).

**Report:**

**Purpose, style, and format of the draft Housing Strategy for 2022-2027**

The proposal is to update the style and format of the draft Housing Strategy for 2022-2027 to agree, reflect and achieve the Council's vision for affordable housing in the District over the next five years and establish five overarching housing priorities and associated aims, objectives actions and outcomes that span housing related services to achieve this vision.

Part of the aim of the Housing Strategy is to recognise, highlight and strengthen the links between Housing, Planning Policy, Public Health, Community Safety and Social Care with regards to the duties we have as both a Local Housing Authority area and a stockholding authority in respect of the need for and supply of affordable housing and housing related services.

The draft Housing Strategy reflects our commitment to community involvement health and wellbeing and working in partnership, all of which have been integral to this review and the proposal to agree a joint action plan with named partnership organisations.

The draft Housing Strategy 2022-2027 also recognises and aims to respond to evolving social policy, legislation and regulation which increasingly blur lines between traditional departmental responsibilities within national and local government.

**Consistent format with other Housing related strategies.**

The success of the Housing Strategy is the translation of the proposed vision, priorities aims and objectives within the strategy into a tangible action plan with SMART targets. These will be agreed with our partner organisations once Cabinet approval for the Strategy has been granted, and before the agreed implementation date of the Strategy.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-2027 has already been formulated to this end, and the proposals are to apply this format to the pending Development Strategy and Resident Involvement Strategy.

This approach also facilitates the golden thread from the Council's corporate plan creating the synergy required to feed into service plans, team plans and individual one-to ones.

An example of the colour pallet, style and limited number of illustrations that could be used in the report (subject to meeting with Corporate Communications approval) has been included at Appendix 2.

**Content**

The proposal is for the Housing Strategy to begin with a Forward from Holly Whitbread Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community, followed by an introduction to that sets out the national context, the local context, and Epping Forest District Council's Corporate Objectives.

The relevant up to date demographic and housing need information that will be included in the introduction is due to be published after this paper is presented to Stronger Communities Select Committee and before the circulation date for September Cabinet.

A position statement will describe the headline demographics for the District and comparative supply and lettings data over the last 3 years (available at the end of July 2022) and details of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (updated in 2017)

Reference will be made to the census data that was released on 28 June 2022 which shows the population growth in Epping Forest over the last 10 years and any additional relevant census data or analysis that is released before the report on the review of the Housing Strategy is to be submitted to APG on 10 August 2022 will also be included.

This will be followed by a brief summary of the aspects of the emerging Local Plan relating to the delivery of affordable housing in the District; including the current and projected need for different sizes and types of tenure, how this is determined and the plans to meet this need.

The report will then highlight the planned growth and development of up to 23,000 new homes in Harlow and Gilston Garden Town including the associated infrastructure, overall projected timescales for delivery, and the intended relationship between the adjoining districts for the development and letting of the affordable housing on the sites.

## **Vision**

The proposed vision for the Housing Strategy 2022- 2027 is:

**‘To work with the community to provide great places where people want to live, work, thrive and prosper in safe good quality homes that meet their needs.’**

## **Priorities**

The five proposed priorities are:

Priority 1 Increasing the supply of affordable housing

Priority 2 Ensuring quality, safety, and high standards

Priority 3 Promoting health wellbeing and independence

Priority 4 Facilitating economic growth and regeneration

Priority 5 Protecting and enhancing the environment

## **Aim and objectives**

The aim and proposed objectives for each priority is:

### **Priority 1 : Increasing the supply of affordable housing**

The aim is to maximise opportunities to increase the supply of suitable affordable housing and make the best use of existing affordable housing (both affordable rent and affordable home ownership) in the District.

## **The Councils housebuilding programme**

The Councils Housebuilding programme includes the redevelopment of x garage sites, building x properties for rent over the next x years, and the potential to develop a variety of tenure types for affordable rent and affordable home ownership.

Where possible new-build Council housing will be built to Passivhaus standards and include electric vehicle charging points (EVPs) to maximise energy efficiency. Passivhaus will also be

considered for retro-fitting existing stock depending on site suitability.

The Council's Employers Requirements for well-designed sustainable housing will be translated into a comparable design brief that other registered providers of housing will be required to follow when developing affordable housing in the District.

The Development team will actively pursue land purchase opportunities and joint ventures and have created attractive hoardings as a marketing tool to generate interest.

### **Strengthening partnerships**

We will strengthen the links between Housing, Planning and Development partners including pre- planning application discussions about in principle tenure mix and developer contributions to affordable housing to improve efficiency and prevent avoidable delays to scheme delivery.

### **Maximise funding opportunities**

We will maximise the opportunities to secure funding for affordable housing. We will continue to work with Homes England and seek to have the mechanisms in place to consider and respond to openings to submit strong bids within the required timescales (where it is appropriate and in the local interest to do so).

### **Affordable Homeownership**

Measured consideration will be given Government initiatives to increase the supply of affordable home ownership, such as first homes, community self-build and reforms to shared ownership to promote first steps into home ownership where circumstances allow.

### **Private landlords**

We will work with private landlords to increase the supply of good quality affordable private rented housing in challenging times. This includes preparing for the potential impact of the reforms introduced in the publication of the Governments white paper 'A Fairer Private Rented Sector' including the end of no-fault evictions, the introduction of a decent home standard, and changes to rights, responsibilities, and enforcement action.

### **Letting accommodation**

We will let accommodation fairly and efficiently in accordance with the updated Allocations Scheme 2022- 2027, the Tenancy Policy 2022-2027 and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022- 2027. We will make best use of available temporary and settled accommodation, aim to minimise the void turnaround time, and assist and incentivise people who want to move to smaller accommodation and/or sheltered housing.

### **Priority 2 Quality, safety and standards**

Our aim is to provide and maintain high quality safe housing and neighbourhoods that achieve or exceed both regulatory standards and tenant led measures, and that residents feel respected, listened to and have redress when things go wrong.

### **The Building Safety Act and Construction and Design Management Standards**

We will set out our commitment to ensuring compliance with the Building Safety Act 2022 Design Management Regulations 2015 and our intention to apply the Fire Safety Standards to all our general needs residential apartment blocks including those that are lower than the 11-metre threshold.

### **The Charter for Social Housing Residents**

Our draft Resident Involvement Strategy will reflect our guiding principle to put residents at the heart of our operations. We will ensure residents are aware of the Charter for Social Housing, know what they should be able to expect from the Council and that we are fully compliant with the statutory requirements that underpin the Charter.

### **Modernisation of sheltered housing schemes**

We will review and publish our plans to modernise sheltered housing and housing for older

people, including technology to support residents to remain as independent as they can for as long as they can, with access assistance if and when needed.

### **Accountability**

We will review the way we capture and publish information on how we are performing as a landlord. We will also review our complaints policy and procedure, so that we are truly accountable to our tenants and leaseholders. We will work with the Regulator for Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman to prepare for the introduction of Tenant Satisfaction Measures and ensure we have the mechanisms in place to gather and submit the necessary data returns and use the information to continuously improve service delivery.

### **Priority 3 Promoting health wellbeing and independence**

Our aim is to promote health and wellbeing to enable residents to live safe independent lives and access the appropriate housing related support if and when they need it.

#### **Shared services**

We will continue to be an active partner on the Health and Wellbeing Board and work together with public sector services to develop non-clinical activities to improve wellbeing and prevent or reduce mental and physical health problems. We will learn from the co-located shared NHS support staff including a mental health clinician and a health coach how this approach can help people improve resilience who may also be struggling to obtain or sustain settled living arrangements.

#### **Community development**

We will build on the success that our Community Culture and Wellbeing service and Estates and Land Management have achieved with local communities in some of the most deprived areas of the District. Our strategy including gardening projects, after school clubs' sports and outdoor gyms to increase activity, reduce isolation develop skills and build social support networks.

#### **Social prescribing**

We will launch a campaign and train customer facing housing staff to adopt the principles of social prescribing and incorporate social prescribing as standard practice in Personal Housing Plans for people who approach the Council for help. As part of this we will continue to develop our relationship with Voluntary Action Epping Forest to promote the potential benefits of volunteering to both the volunteer and the recipient of their voluntary work.

#### **National Disabilities Strategy**

We will review the Housing related aspects of the National Disability Strategy and create an action plan to include ensuring disabled people can fully participate in consultation, that disability is included in hate-crime policies, and that we maximise the use of the data that we collect as part of customer profiling work to help tailor services.

### **Priority 4 Facilitating economic growth and regeneration**

Our aim is to work with partners to level up the life-chances of our residents including bridging the gap between housing related costs and the ability of households on low incomes to meet these costs.

#### **Fuel Poverty**

We will tackle fuel poverty by promoting and delivering initiatives to reduce energy bills and increase the take up of financial help to meet increasing costs. This will include providing information and advice and signposting residents to services and organisations that can provide practical assistance with applying for specific schemes, acting as a delivery vehicle to administer financial assistance as where we are able to do so, and investing in energy efficient technologies for newbuild and retrofit dwellings for longer term solutions

#### **Employment, training, and apprenticeships**

Where it is appropriate, we will identify opportunities to encourage households in housing need to take up employment, training, and apprenticeship initiatives, both to improve economic wellbeing and address local skills shortages. As a large employer of mainly local residents, we are one of 30 anchor organisations across Essex that invests in training and developing our staff and supporting good health and wellbeing. We have recently secured funding for a job coach to support people experiencing multiple disadvantages into work, and along with the Develop me interactive hub will continue to pursue opportunities to link local employers with local residents who are seeking employment or training.

### **Debt management and respite**

We will review the support that is available for households in debt and the impact of the Debt Respite Scheme Regulations 2020 on the way that we help tenants to maintain their rent accounts, if they have been granted respite to ensure they receive the appropriate advice and assistance with regards to any arrears of rent for the duration of the respite, and once it has ended

### **Regenerating Council and mixed tenure estates**

We will continue with our programme to regenerate Council and mixed tenure estates as part of our More than Bricks and Mortar initiative. We aim wherever possible to develop tenure blind affordable housing, both to reduce the stigma associated with social housing and promote and enable aspirations for local people to move from rented accommodation to affordable homeownership in the same area if they are in a position to do so.

### **Keyworker housing**

We will explore the feasibility of developing more keyworker housing in specific areas where there is a community led demand and need for it to address local skills shortages. We have modified Housing Allocations Scheme 2022- 2027 to allow for local lettings plans to facilitate keyworker housing in exceptional circumstances subject to Cabinet approval.

## **Priority 5 Protecting and enhancing the environment**

Our aim is to make a significant contribution to preserving restoring and celebrating the natural environment and the culture and heritage that is unique to the District.

### **Improving green spaces**

We intend to increase the number of joint ventures with the local community to improve the look and feel of green spaces on our Council and mixed tenure estates. The strategy includes planting trees, raised flowerbeds and vegetable planters that the community can then maintain, creating outdoor spaces where families older people and single people can socialise and enjoy recreational activities

### **Climate change**

We will actively contribute to achieving the Council's targets to achieve net zero by 2030 in the design of our newbuild and retrofit achieving passivhaus standards and providing Electric Vehicle charging points where possible. We will organise campaigns to help tenants reduce carbon emissions in the home and as part of their day-to-day activities. We will encourage sustainable transport through the provision of bicycle stores and attractive well- lit communal walkways, and reduction in waste generated by our maintenance and capital works programmes

### **Environmental Health**

We will develop joint policies and strategies with the Community Safety Partnership and Regulatory Services, and the North Essex Parking Partnership to use the full range of environmental health and landlord tools available to tackle environmental health issues such as noise and air pollution, fly tipping, anti-social behaviour, the condition of private sector stock and licencing laws.

### **Raising awareness**

We will develop campaigns and exhibitions with local people in conjunction with Museums and Heritage services to raise awareness of environmental issues such as climate change and how to improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions, and social issues such as lived experiences of homelessness to understand the causes and reducing the stigma associated with housing need.

### **Next Steps**

The next step is to produce a full draft Strategy document and stage 2 Consultation document that incorporates the Committee recommendations to present to Cabinet for approval along with the associated Equalities Impact Assessment and the Legal, Governance, and Safer Cleaner, Greener and confirmed Resource implications.

### **Consultation undertaken:**

See the Draft Public Consultation Outcome Report at Appendix 1

### **Resource implications:**

The actions contained within this strategy shall largely be managed within existing and future service budgets. Any additional burdens associated with the introduction of the new post Grenfell and post pandemic statutory and regulatory requirements aimed at levelling up the sector will be addressed by the relevant Service Director through the usual business planning process.

### **Legal and Governance Implications:**

Awaiting comments

### **Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:**

Awaiting comments

### **Background Papers:**

### **Impact Assessments:**

### ***Risk Management***

### ***Equality:***