

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 22 JULY 2008

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND HEALTH

8. HOUSING STRATEGY 2008-2011

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

'D' RECOMMENDATION - that (A) the Executive be recommended to adopt the East Herts Housing Strategy 2008-11, and the accompanying Action Plan and New Affordable Homes Commissioning Brief; and

(B) an annual report to Community Scrutiny Committee to monitor progress of the action plan, be submitted.

1.0 Purpose/Summary of Report

1.1 To present to Members, for consideration and comment and recommend for adoption, the Council's new Housing Strategy (Appendix 'A8', pages 8.6 – 8.80), action plan (Appendix 'B8', pages 8.81 – 8.89) and Affordable Homes Commissioning Brief (within Appendix 'A8', pages 8.62 – 8.64).

2.0 Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/Objectives

2.1 **Promoting prosperity and well-being; providing access and opportunities**

Enhance the quality of life, health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable.

Fit for purpose, services fit for you

Deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation.

Leading the way, working together

Deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public.

3.0 Background

3.1 The Housing Strategy for East Herts is the high level strategic document that sets the direction for housing within the district from 2008 to 2011 whilst having regard to longer term housing challenges and wider housing agendas.

4.0 Report

4.1 The Council published a Fit For Purpose (FFP) Housing Strategy that ran from 2003-2006. This Council was one of the first local authorities in the Eastern Region to achieve this rating set by the government office. By the time this strategy expired the government was due to publish guidance on future requirements. This has never materialised primarily because many local authorities had still to achieve FFP. The Council published an interim one year update to the strategy whilst waiting for this guidance.

4.2 During this period of uncertainty as to the Governments requirement the Health and Housing Service continued to develop the Housing Service through the Service Planning route and has delivered some strong strategic projects such as the new Choice Based Letting Scheme and the Review of the Community Alarm Service.

4.3 In January 2007 GO-East provided some suggestions for the likely expectations for a Housing Strategy, central to which was a strong Sub Regional input rather than a purely local focus. The letter stressed the need for districts to demonstrate how they are engaging with their sub-regional neighbours in the production of sub-regional housing strategies and sub-regional working. As funding from the Regional Board is devolved to a sub-regional level it is important that districts are as closely aligned and able to influence sub-regional priorities as much as possible in order to benefit from future funding.

4.3 As the guidance was unclear with regards to the production of a local Housing Strategy Officers agreed to work with the London Commuter Belt (LCB) Housing Strategy Group to produce individual local strategies to an agreed template and agreed strategic priorities. The individual Local Housing strategies could then be easily amalgamated into an overarching Sub-Regional Strategy. The strategy and its accompanying action plan would be a local document with local priorities and actions but with a sub-regional content. The agreed timetable for completion of the local Housing

Strategy is September 2009 and early 2009 for the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy.

- 4.4 Officers of the Council have been working on the East Herts Housing Strategy following the agreed template and timetable. The aims and objectives of the Strategy will be delivered, with our partner agencies, through the Action Plan which has been grouped by three Strategic Objectives, agreed by the Sub-Regional Housing officers group. These Strategic Objectives are:
1. Maximise the delivery of a range of new affordable homes to meet diverse needs
 2. Improve the condition of the housing stock both public and private
 3. Building sustainable and thriving neighbourhoods and communities and ensure that vulnerable people are supported in the community
- 4.5 The Strategy is for a three year period but will be reviewed annually. The annual review will be an opportunity to measure progress being made on the actions and new targets or actions can be identified and included for following years.
- 4.6 In addition the Strategy may require updating once the outcome of the Strategic Market Housing Assessment is known, which is due late 2008, and the Stock Condition Survey which is due for completion 2009/10. The economic housing climate may also require that the Strategy be modified during its lifetime.
- 4.7 In order to deliver the range of new affordable homes Members are asked to consider revision to the New Affordable Home Commissioning Brief in the following terms:
1. The relevant revisions are to be found in the sections headed Tenure Structure, Social Housing Grant and Special Needs Requirement.
 2. The document also reflects the planning policies the Council adopted in April 2007 and changes made by The Housing Corporation in relation to the size and quality standards of affordable housing, adopted April 2008.

It is necessary to consider these revisions in light of the changing market in housing development. Currently mortgage lenders are not lending on Fixed Equity tenures and Staircased Shared Ownership is proving increasingly difficult to sell for the same reason.

There is increasing pressure on land values to provide the funding for affordable housing and mechanisms are available to assess the viability of schemes where the developer states this is an issue. As a consequence the public purse should be one of last resort to assist in the provision of affordable housing.

There is increasing evidence of need for providing specialist housing for the most vulnerable and some sites are capable of delivering such accommodation.

In all instances it is current good practice to give warning of such requirements when developers are considering purchasing sites and to have a New Affordable Homes Commissioning Brief available enables more productive negotiations.

5.0 Consultation

5.1 A draft copy of the Strategy has also been sent to internal partners and a wide range of external voluntary, statutory and charity organisations, including our partner housing associations that are likely to have an interest in the content of document. A draft copy has also been posted onto the Council's website for consultation.

5.2 Any substantive changes to the document as a result of the consultation will be included in the report to Executive.

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 None

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 None

8.0 Human Resource Implications

8.1 None.

9.0 Risk Management Implications

9.1 None

Background Papers

None

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