

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 27 OCTOBER 2009

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER OF HOUSING AND HEALTH

6. HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLAN UPDATE

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

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**Purpose/Summary of Report**

- The report highlights successful performance on the first year of the Housing Strategy Action Plan 2008-2011. The report also presents to Members, for consideration and comment, a review of the Action Plan.

**RECOMMENDATION FOR : COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

(A)	that the successful progress on the Housing Strategy Action Plan 2008-2011 be noted; and
(B)	Members consider and comment on the additional target and proposed new action.

1.0 Background

1.1 The Council adopted its current Housing Strategy for 2008-2011 in October 2008. The Housing Strategy for East Herts sets the direction for housing within the district from 2008 to 2011 whilst having regard to longer term housing challenges.

1.2 It was agreed at the Community Scrutiny Committee meeting of 22 July 2008 and the Executive of 9 September 2008, that an annual report should be presented to Community Scrutiny Committee to monitor progress against the action plan.

## 2.0 Report

2.1 The current Housing Strategy 2008-2011 was adopted by the Council on 1 October 2008. The aims and objectives of the Strategy are being delivered by officers of the Council, along with our partner agencies. The Housing Strategy Action Plan has been grouped into three Strategic Objectives. These Strategic Objectives are:

- 2.1.1 Maximise the delivery of a range of new affordable homes to meet diverse needs
- 2.1.2 Improve the condition of the housing stock both public and private
- 2.1.3 Building sustainable and thriving neighbourhoods and communities and ensure that vulnerable people are supported in the community.

2.2 These objectives have been adopted across the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region and will be included in the London Commuter Belt Housing Strategy which is due to be published shortly.

2.3 The Strategy is a three year one but the Action Plan will be reviewed annually. The annual review is an opportunity to measure progress being made on the actions and also for new targets or actions to be identified and included.

2.4 The Corporate Housing Strategy Group, which consists of officers from the Housing Service, Private Sector Housing and Planning Policy meet quarterly to agree how to progress and monitor the actions on the plan.

2.5 The Council and its partners have made significant progress on the actions in the plan. Essential Reference Paper B (Pages 6.8 - 6.17) details progress on each action in the Housing Strategy Action Plan. This report highlights three significant actions that have been successfully achieved, since July 2008.

## 3.0 Key Successes

3.1 **Action 1. Increase supply of affordable housing including affordable rented housing and shared ownership - Carry out a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) with partner Local Authorities.** Officers from both the Housing Service and

Planning Policy have worked with five other neighbouring local authorities to commission this technical piece of work that will provide evidence and inform the future housing requirements for the Local Development Framework and Housing Strategy. There will be a future report to Executive, following publication of the report in October 2009, detailing the headline information arising from the study.

- 3.2 **Action 6. Continue to secure funding that provides the optimum mix of affordable housing in terms of type and tenure, in the right location.** The current housing market has meant that the amount of private development has slowed dramatically and therefore the number of new affordable homes becoming available. To mitigate this loss the Council needs to react quickly to new housing opportunities and so has set-up a joint officer and Member Affordable Housing Panel with officers from both the Planning and Housing Services. The Affordable Housing Panel has allowed the Council to react quickly to approaches made by Registered Social Landlords and Developers, to ensure we are able to take full advantage of the best opportunities for affordable housing in the current economic conditions.
- 3.3 Decisions agreed to date include the building of the affordable housing provision in London Road, Buntingford, agreed to go ahead first and in one location on this large site rather than pepper-potted. This is because the developer had decided not to develop the open market housing until the market conditions improve. The decision has secured the affordable housing provision without the delay. In addition a higher grant level than the Council's Schedule of Rates has been approved to secure 16 units of affordable housing at Millfields, Sawbridgeworth.
- 3.4 **Action 16. Undertake a house condition survey in 2009/10.** This is a comprehensive survey of a representative sample of the housing stock in the District carried out every five years. The conclusions and data from the study are used to inform future policy and direct resources for maximum benefit. The field work has been completed and the first draft report is due November 2009, for presentation to Council at its meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2009. All have been achieved within budget.

#### 4.0 Other Related Activities

- 4.1 Complementing the Housing Strategy Action Plan other successful initiatives have included bringing the management of both Hillcrest and Thele House homeless hostels back in-house in November 2008. The Council can now make better use of this resource and have decommissioned Thele and refurbished Hillcrest into eleven units of good quality self contained accommodation. The Housing Options Team directly manage all aspects of Hillcrest hostel and the average length of stay for hostel residents, who were owed a duty, from November 2008 to March 2009, was 15 weeks compared to 22 weeks for the previous 6 months.
- 4.2 The current economic crisis has led to an increase in demand for a number of services provided by the Council including the Housing Options Service. To try to help the residents of East Herts who are facing housing or debt difficulties, officers have updated and significantly expanded the Housing Advice pages of the Council's website and produced a leaflet detailing the range of local and national agencies giving free housing, money and debt advice. This leaflet is on our website and is used by both the Council's Housing Options and Benefits Services.
- 4.3 Linking to the Housing Strategy Action Plan, officers organised and held, in September 2009, a Housing Liaison meeting for all the Housing Associations working in the District and other significant partners such as the Homes and Communities Agency and the County Council. The meeting enabled the Council to consult and exchange information with our significant stakeholders in housing. Agenda items included the LSP Sustainable Community Strategy Action Plan for Housing and also the Local Development Framework.
- 4.4 Both the Head of Health and Housing and the Housing Strategy and Policy Manager are currently joint Ambition leads for Housing on the LSP's Sustainable Community Strategy. Four actions have been developed and consulted on for the first year of the Action Plan. The Council's Community Projects Team Leader will put forward the actions at the Local Strategic Group and Board meetings in October 2009.

## 5.0 Additional Action and Target

- 5.1 The Corporate Housing Strategy Group have reviewed the Action Plan for the coming year and incorporated one additional target and one new action for the Action Plan. The additional target is under Action 18 shown on Essential Reference Paper 'B' (Pages 6.8 - 6.17), 'Ensure that housing policies and practices promote equalities and diversity'. Following on from the Gypsy and Traveller technical study, carried out by Consultants, the new targets states 'Through the LDF, seek to deliver Gypsy and Travellers pitches and Travelling Showperson plots in accordance with the Regional Spatial Strategy for East Herts'.
- 5.2 A new action has been added under the third Strategic Objective as Action 26 at the end of Essential Reference Paper 'B' (Pages 6.8 - 6.17). In summer 2008, the Council put in a joint bid with other local authorities in the London Commuter Belt (LCB), to East of England Regional Assembly for money to install energy efficiency measures in private sector residents' homes to reduce fuel poverty and carbon dioxide emissions. Benefit entitlement checks will be included. The bid was successful and the LCB was awarded £6.6M. Therefore an action has been added to the Action Plan to 'Reduce levels of fuel poverty, particularly for vulnerable groups' with a target to install fuel efficient measures in 340 homes per annum over two years.

## 6.0 Implications/Consultations

- 6.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within Essential Reference Paper 'A' (Page 6.7).

## Background Papers

Minutes of the Community Scrutiny Committee 22 July 2008.

Minutes of the Executive 9 September 2008

East Herts Housing Strategy 2008-2011

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## ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

<p>Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives (delete as appropriate):</p>	<p><b>Promoting prosperity and well-being; providing access and opportunities</b>  <i>Enhance the quality of life, health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable.</i></p> <p><b>Fit for purpose, services fit for you</b>  <i>Deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation.</i></p> <p><b>Pride in East Herts</b>  <i>Improve standards of the neighbourhood and environmental management in our towns and villages.</i></p> <p><b>Caring about what's built and where</b>  <i>Care for and improve our natural and built environment.</i></p> <p><b>Shaping now, shaping the future</b>  <i>Safeguard and enhance our unique mix of rural and urban communities, ensuring sustainable, economic and social opportunities including the continuation of effective development control and other measures.</i></p> <p><b>Leading the way, working together</b>  <i>Deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public.</i></p>
<p>Consultation:</p>	<p>Extensive consultation undertaken in developing the Housing Strategy and Action Plan 2008-2011</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Financial:</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Risk Management:</p>	<p>None</p>