

East Herts Council Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 18 January 2022

Report by: Councillor Peter Boylan, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods

Report title: The East Herts Housing Strategy 2022 to 2027

Ward(s) affected: All

Summary

- The current East Herts Council Housing Strategy for 2016 to 2021 now requires replacement. Therefore, a new Housing Strategy for 2022 to 2027 has been drafted to respond to new legislation, changing market conditions and evolving trends in housing need. This report outlines the evidence which has been taken into account and the strategic priorities and objectives which have arisen from the identified housing-related challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:

- (A) That Overview and Scrutiny Committee provides comments and observations on the draft East Herts Housing Strategy for 2022 to 2027 for consideration by the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods prior to the presentation to the Executive.**

1.0 Proposal(s)

1.1 The draft Housing Strategy document, attached at **Appendix A**, has been produced based on extensive research and consultation. It is proposed that four strategic priorities, each with an accompanying set of objectives, will underpin the council's work over the timeframe of the strategy with regard to improving housing across all tenures and enabling more general needs and specialist affordable housing. The proposed four strategic priorities are:

- Strategic Priority 1: Deliver more affordable homes
- Strategic Priority 2: Enable a wider range of accommodation and support for our most vulnerable residents
- Strategic Priority 3: Enable high quality housing options for older people, better suited to their needs
- Strategic Priority 4: Improve the sustainability and quality of homes.

2.0 Background

2.1 Although there is no legislative requirement to produce a housing strategy, a comprehensive housing strategy gives an opportunity for the East Herts Council to:

- ensure a co-ordinated approach to housing activity in East Herts, linking a suite of policies and strategies to deliver the council's ambitions
- maximise opportunities and resources to meet housing needs and aspirations, using council resources and partnership opportunities
- promote the role of housing in delivering corporate priorities and wider objectives including health and wellbeing and sustainable economic growth

- ensure that East Herts Council meets its housing obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and meets a diverse range of housing needs.

2.2 The East Herts Council Housing Strategy for 2016 to 2021 has now run its course. New challenges, however, have arisen for which strategic priorities and accompanying objectives need to be set. Evidence has been gathered which shows the district is experiencing considerable housing-related challenges including the need for a greater number of affordable homes, the need for a wider range of accommodation and support for our most vulnerable people, a greater range of accommodation for older people and improved sustainability and quality across all housing tenures.

3.0 Reasons

3.1 As noted above, the council's existing housing strategy is now out-of-date. It is therefore imperative to produce and publish a new, revised strategy.

3.2 The absence of new housing strategy would arguably fetter the council's ability to enable and guide partners on bringing forward the number of type of affordable homes most in demand while also missing the opportunity to lay out to partners and residents alike the council's aspirations regarding sustainability and standards across all tenures of housing.

3.3 To this end, the proposed Housing Strategy clearly states the council's four overarching priorities, with a series of more specific objectives listed under each. The proposed priorities and objectives are as follows:

Strategic priority	Objectives to address the priority
Deliver more affordable homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase the supply of new homes offered with (a) social rents or (b) affordable rents at or very near to between 50% and 60% of market rents • enable a range of low cost home ownership products in the district • improve the focus on housing needs in our rural communities • assist households in accessing the private housing market • gather and publish up-to-date housing need and supply data
Enable a wider range of accommodation and support for our most vulnerable residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work collaboratively with partners to maximise housing and support options for rough sleepers • explore the provision of supported accommodation for single people with complex needs • further develop services for households affected by domestic abuse • work with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) on the provision of housing for adults with learning and/or physical disabilities
Enable high quality housing options for older people, better suited to their needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explore and keep under review the changing needs and aspirations of the older population in the district • work with partners to bring forward high quality downsizing options • work with Hertfordshire County Council and other partners on expanding the range of housing options for older residents • work with Hertfordshire County Council and other partners to explore housing options that address the needs and aspirations of people with dementia and their families
Improve the sustainability and quality of homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote maintenance, insulation and energy efficiency of homes in all tenures • promote sustainable construction of new homes • promote good quality accommodation and standards of management in the private rented sector • encourage owners to bring their empty homes back into use

4.0 Options

- 4.1 Not produce a new, updated housing strategy – NOT RECOMMENDED. The proposed East Herts Council Housing Strategy 2022 – 2027 will provide a firm foundation for partnership working with registered providers and other stakeholders.
- 4.2 Revise and publish an updated housing – RECOMMENDED for the reasons laid out in this report.

5.0 Risks

- 5.1 The proposed East Herts Council Housing Strategy 2022 – 2027 takes the form of information and guidance to its partners, rather than specific contractual obligations. Therefore, there is no risk associated with the production of a housing strategy.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

- 6.1 The draft strategy has been produced following considerable consultation including:
- a public consultation in August and September 2021 which elicited a total of 118 responses
 - a stakeholder consultation with a range of organisations including parish councils, Hertfordshire County Council, East Herts Citizens Advice Services and Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce
 - interviews with eight key registered providers who develop and manage affordable homes in the district.
- 6.2 The development of the East Herts Council Housing Strategy was overseen by the East Herts Housing Strategy Member Working Group, consisting of eight members, which met on

three occasions to provide feedback to officers as the strategy began to take shape.

- 6.3 To ensure that this strategy informs the work of the council and its partners, detailed action plans will be drawn up for each of the objectives. These will be reviewed regularly to ensure that they remain relevant to achieving the objective. Delivery of the detailed action plans will be monitored closely and progress published.

Community Safety

A number of priorities and objectives will aid community safety. Of note, *Strategic Priority 2: Enable a wider range of accommodation and support for our most vulnerable residents* will promote the wellbeing and safety of vulnerable residents living in the community.

Data Protection

No implications.

Equalities

The strategy has been drafted with reference to the council's obligations under the Equality Act 2010. It aims to meet a diverse range of housing needs, including those experienced by people with protected characteristics.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out for the draft East Herts Council Housing Strategy. Analysis has been undertaken of how each of the nine protected characteristic groups, defined under the Equality Act 2010, could be impacted by the housing-related challenges identified. An overarching purpose of the strategy is to attempt to mitigate or ameliorate these adverse impacts.

Environmental Sustainability

Strategic priority 4: Improve the sustainability and quality of homes will be furthered by the following objectives:

- promote maintenance, insulation and energy efficiency of homes of all tenures.

- promote sustainable construction of new homes.

Financial

There is nothing in the strategy which obliges the council to expend revenue or capital resources. Any future housing proposals with financial implications for the council would be subject to member decisions at the time.

Health and Safety

No implications.

Human Resources

No implications.

Human Rights

No implications.

Legal

Although there is no statutory obligation for local authorities to produce a comprehensive housing strategy, the information in the proposed strategy builds on information provided in other statutory documentation produced by the council, notably the council's Tenancy Strategy, Homelessness Strategy and District Plan.

Specific Wards

No implications.

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 **Appendix A** – the draft East Herts Housing Strategy 2022 to 2027.

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