

Meeting:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Date:	23/02/14
	Cabinet		25/02/15
	Council		26/02/15
Subject:	Housing Strategy		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Housing, Health & Leisure		
Wards Affected:	All		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Helen Chard Housing Strategy & Enabling Service Manager		
	Email: Helen.Chard@gloucester.gov.uk	Tel:	396534
Appendices:	1. Housing Strategy		
	2. Consultation Summary		

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update Members following the consultation on the draft housing strategy, and to present the final version for adoption and implementation.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** is asked to **RESOLVE** that the report be noted, subject to any recommendations the Committee wishes to make to Cabinet.
- 2.2 **Cabinet** is asked to **RECOMMEND** that the Housing Strategy at Appendix 1 be adopted and implemented.
- 2.3 **Council** is asked to **RESOLVE** that:
- (a) The Housing Strategy at Appendix 1 be adopted and implemented;
 - (b) Progress reports be brought to Council every two years; and
 - (c) Authority to make minor revisions to the action plan be delegated to the Housing Strategy and Enabling Service Manager in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health & Leisure.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 At present, the Council is required to put in place a Housing and a Homelessness Strategy in order to meet the requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002, the Local Government Act 2003 and the Housing Act 2004. The Strategy should set

out its objectives and be based on an assessment of need within the district and outline an approach to homelessness within the area.

3.2 In July 2013, the Government prepared a Draft De-regulation Bill, which at the time of writing has progressed to its 8th sitting in the House of Lords (November 14), and this Bill contains the proposal to remove the requirement under S87 of the Local Government Act 2003 requiring local housing authorities to prepare Housing Strategies.

3.3 However, the strategy itself describes the role it plays as being to: -

- Communicate the Council's proposals so that City residents, and our partners who are involved in housing activity, can enhance our plans.
- Identify the housing priorities that require investment or attention, and share these with our partners so that we can collaborate and deliver mutually beneficial outcomes.
- Link our local priorities with national plans ensuring the availability and quality of housing in the City, supporting economic growth and prosperity.

So whilst we appear to be moving toward a relaxation of the statutory requirement for a strategy, it would appear beneficial in still fulfilling the functions above and meeting what is still currently a statutory requirement.

3.4 Since the original drafting of the Housing Strategy, significant changes have occurred as a consequence of the Care Act 2014 that alter our responsibilities in relation to care and safeguarding which come into effect in April 2015. Housing has been raised in its importance in Care legislation, so that when local authorities are involved in care and support functions, they must act to promote well-being, and this now includes an assessment of the 'suitability of living accommodation'; local authorities must also now aim to prevent need. Changes have also been made to the strategy reflecting alterations to the Joint Core Strategy and the progression of the stock transfer to Gloucester City Homes.

3.5 Consultation was undertaken and the responses from this are demonstrated in Appendix 2. As explained in the appendix, input from the general public was at a very low level, and adjustments to the strategy have arisen more as a consequence of the involvement of those involved in the housing sector. Of those who responded, there seemed to be broad support for the strategic objectives as proposed, and so they remain unchanged and are:-

- To increase the availability and quality of homes
- To have the right type of homes available for city residents
- To reduce homelessness
- To foster good community health and well-being

4.0 Alternative Options Considered

4.1 The option to not have a strategy has been considered, although given the progress with stakeholders, and the desire to promote clear objectives to our partners; and to meet what is still current legislation has determined that we progress and fulfil our obligations.

5.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 5.1 The strategy has been subjected to a period of consultation, and whilst responses were limited, of those who did, there was support for the objectives and no objections to any of the objectives. Amendments have been made to the strategy given the passage of time since the first draft and changing circumstances, and also to take account of feedback received.

6.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 6.1 Once the strategy has been approved, officers can begin more proactively pursuing the objectives, with a Council approved approach.
- 6.2 The action plan will be subject to less formal periodic review, and a more formal review of the delivery of the objectives will be undertaken annually, whereby any actions could be subject to change to ensure we achieve our desired outcomes.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 The Council has successfully secured Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) approval to retain a proportion of receipts that are generated as a result of tenants exercising their 'right to buy' on the council housing. There are specific rules regarding the expenditure of capital receipts including a condition that the money must be spent on new build. As at 28th January 15 the Council held £1,303,261 of receipts, and under the Government agreed formula this can only contribute to a maximum of 30% of the cost of a new build scheme, thereby underpinning development to the value of £4,344,205. The earmarked receipts must be spent within three years and under-pin delivery of the objectives of the Housing and Homelessness Strategy.
- 7.2 A commitment is already in place to utilise £600k, with other discussions underway.
- 7.2 Given the stock transfer that is underway between the City Council and Gloucester City Homes, we don't envisage any further receipts being generated through further 'right to buy' receipts.

(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation this report.)

8.0 Legal Implications

- 8.1 S8 of the Housing Act 1985 placed a duty upon the Local Authority to consider housing conditions and the needs of the district with regard to the provision of further housing accommodation and S3 of the Housing Act 2004 provides that it must keep housing conditions under review.

S 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 provides that the Local Authority may carry out a homelessness review for their district and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based upon the results of that review. The strategy may be published as part of an authority's wider housing strategy but only the homelessness strategy is required to be published and available for inspection by members of the public.

(Legal Services have been consulted in the preparation this report.)

9.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 9.1 There is a risk of challenge as a consequence of not meeting our statutory responsibilities and putting in place a strategy.
- 9.2 Our failure to adequately set our plans and priorities, risks those developing or offering services related to housing doing so in areas that aren't a priority for us and therefore not making best use of limited resources.
- 9.3 In relation to organisations that fund housing development including the Homes and Communities Agency, we may fail to demonstrate credible evidence or consideration regarding investment and risk not securing funding.
- 9.4 By way of opportunities, the strategy sets out a considered plan of our priorities that has been subject to public consultation. The strategy under-pins our discussions or bids with partner agencies to secure funding. Beyond the financial implications, the strategy provides an opportunity to share with our partners and the public the way in which we intend to deliver our services and secure improvements in housing standards and availability in the City.

10.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

- 10.1 A PIA was carried out and as it did not identify any potential or actual negative impact, a full PIA was not required.

11.0 Other Corporate Implications

Community Safety

- 11.1 The proposals within the Strategy are concerned with improving the approach to community safety and envisaged to have a positive impact.

Sustainability

- 11.2 The proposals within the strategy are concerned with ensuring the quality of homes are maintained and enhanced. In relation to new-build we are seeking that homes are built to high environmentally efficient standards to minimise fuel poverty and minimise carbon emissions. The strategy also concerns itself with 'lifetime neighbourhoods' and aspiring to deliver homes where residents want to live now and in the future.

Staffing & Trade Union

- 11.3 There are no staffing implications arising from the report, other than adapting from more informal approaches to resolving housing matters, to a more structured approach that should create a beneficial framework for staff.

Background Documents: Please see bibliography at the end of the Strategy