

**Cabinet**

**16 January 2019**

**County Durham Housing Strategy &  
County Durham Homelessness Strategy**

**Key Decision REAL/02/18**



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**Report of Corporate Management Team**

**Ian Thompson, Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services**

**Councillor Kevin Shaw, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Assets**

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide.

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 For Cabinet to agree the Housing Strategy attached at Appendix 2 for public consultation.
- 2 For Cabinet to agree the Homelessness Strategy attached at Appendix 3 for public consultation.

**Executive summary**

- 3 The County Durham Housing Strategy has been developed to consider housing issues across County Durham. The Strategy will provide a strategic framework to inform the actions and investment of the council and its partners and has been developed to ensure the council is well positioned to maximise future opportunities for funding support.
- 4 The Housing Strategy contains a series of 'key messages' which serve to articulate the council and its partner's delivery priorities and approach to addressing housing issues. First and foremost, the Housing Strategy seeks to put people first and to focus on the housing needs of the residents of County Durham. Key messages within the Housing Strategy include:

- (a) Delivering homes to meet the needs of older people within our communities and supporting people to live independently for as long as possible;
  - (b) Raising standards across the private rented sector through seeking greater licencing powers in order to tackle poor landlords, as well as continuous engagement with landlords and the extension of the Accredited Landlord Scheme for responsible landlords;
  - (c) Working with those communities most affected by long term empty properties. This will include working with property owners and landlords with the aim of bringing empty properties back into use wherever possible;
  - (d) Maximising the delivery of affordable homes, both by securing developer contributions as part of new housing development and through close partnership working with Registered Providers and Homes England;
- 5 Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all housing authorities must have in place a Homelessness Strategy based on a review of all forms of homelessness in their area. The purpose of the Homelessness Strategy is to set out the strategic approach, key priorities and actions to work towards preventing homelessness across County Durham over the next three years.
- 6 The homelessness strategy includes three overall aims and an action plan for each aim. The aims are as follows::
- i. Aim one: To prevent homelessness through early intervention
  - ii. Aim Two: To increase access to and the supply of accommodation for those who homeless or threatened with homelessness
  - iii. Aim Three: To provide a range of support services to reduce the risk of households becoming homeless.
- 7 Following Cabinet approval, the Housing Strategy and the Homelessness Strategy will be published for a separate but coordinated public consultation for a period of six weeks commencing on 25 January 2019. Consultation will be undertaken with residents of County Durham and other stakeholders with a potential interest in the content of the document. The council will make use of its partnership structure to assist in disseminating information about the Housing Strategy. This will also provide a means to ensure engagement with the providers of specialist housing products and services.

## **Recommendations**

8 Cabinet is recommended to:

- (a) Agree the Housing Strategy for consultation on 25 January to 8 March 2019;
- (b) Agree the Homelessness Strategy for consultation on 25 January to 8 March 2019; and
- (c) Agree that any minor modifications to the above documents following Cabinet agreement and before consultation begins can be agreed by the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Assets.

## Background

- 9 The County Durham Housing Strategy has been developed to consider housing issues across County Durham. The Housing Strategy will be delivered in partnership through the Housing Forum and in discussion with the county's residents, the private sector and other agencies as appropriate. It will also provide a strategic framework to inform the actions and investment of the council and its partners.
- 10 The Housing Strategy has been developed to ensure Durham County Council is well positioned to maximise future opportunities for funding support. In this context, the Housing Strategy provides the evidence to identify issues within a housing context and a clear approach to address these issues.
- 11 Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all housing authorities must have in place a Homelessness Strategy based on a review of all forms of homelessness in their area. The Homelessness Act 2002 determines that the life of a strategy should be no more than five years and the action plan should be reviewed annually. The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018 resulted in a revised Code of Guidance, this led to the Homelessness Review in 2018, the development of this revised strategy and how best to satisfy the new duties set out in the Act around service delivery. The purpose of this strategy is to set out the strategic approach, key priorities and actions to work towards preventing homelessness across County Durham over the next three years.
- 12 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been prepared and is to be found at Appendix 4 of this report. It will be updated and kept under review throughout the consultation. The Equalities Impact Assessment confirms that the Housing Strategy (which includes the strategic approach to addressing homelessness, as set out in the Homelessness Strategy) will have potential positive impact across all of the protected characteristics, in particular for age (younger and older people), disability and sex (both male and female). The Housing Strategy notes that housing development will be supported by appropriate infrastructure provision to accommodate for the impact of the development on communities, including ensuring sufficient education and health care facilities are provided to meet needs. The consultation will be inclusive, engage with representative groups and disaggregate results where possible. In order to support engagement in the consultation, reasonable adjustments will be made for people with disabilities in order to ensure they can effectively participate in the process.

## The Scope of the Housing Strategy

- 13 The Housing Strategy considers housing related issues in County Durham and sets out the council's current and future actions and interventions to address these issues. The Strategy contains a series of 'key messages' which serve to articulate the council's and its partners housing delivery priorities and approach to housing issues. First and foremost, the Housing Strategy seeks to put people first and to focus on the housing needs of the residents of County Durham. It is this principle which guides the content of the Strategy. The Housing Strategy 'key messages' can be summarised as follows:
- (a) Delivering homes to meet the needs of older people within our communities and supporting people to live independently for as long as possible;
  - (b) Raising standards across the private rented sector through seeking greater licencing powers in order to tackle poor landlords, as well as continuous engagement with landlords and the extension of the Accredited Landlord Scheme for responsible landlords;
  - (c) Working with those communities most affected by long term empty properties. This will include working with property owners and landlords with the aim of bringing empty properties back into use wherever possible;
  - (d) Maximising the delivery of affordable homes, both by securing developer contributions as part of new housing development and through close partnership working with Registered Providers and Homes England;
  - (e) Improving the quality of the county's housing stock and wider housing environment;
  - (f) Working with partners to provide help and support to all Forces personnel, reservists, veterans and their families in trying to secure a home;
  - (g) Ensuring appropriate infrastructure is provided to accommodate for the impact of housing development on communities, including ensuring sufficient education and healthcare facilities are provided to meet community needs;
  - (h) Ensuring new housing is of a high quality design to meet the needs of our families and delivering the right homes in the right places to support sustainable communities;

- (i) Supporting rural communities by enabling sufficient housing to meet local needs;
  - (j) Introducing a strategic approach to prevent homelessness and increasing the supply of accommodation for those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and working in partnership with other stakeholders to provide support to those with complex needs;
  - (k) Maximise the opportunities available to address fuel poverty through combining advice schemes and heating improvements and targeting interventions at those most in need.
- 14 In order to support and facilitate partnership working, the Housing Strategy includes a Partnership Framework. This Framework sets out a series of aims, objectives and outcomes to provide a clear strategic context to the activities of the council and its partners. This Framework reflects the roles of the Housing Forum and the related Housing Development Group and Housing Support Group.
- 15 The Framework contains two high level aims reflect the 'people' and 'place' elements of the Housing Strategy. The first aim seeks to provide '*better housing support for County Durham residents*'. This aim is supplemented by two objectives to '*provide housing advice, assistance and support for older and vulnerable people*' and to '*improve access to housing*'. The second aim relates to the provision of '*more and better homes*' in County Durham and is linked to two complementary objectives. The first of these objectives relates to new build housing and to '*deliver of more homes to meet housing need and demand*', whilst the second relates to the existing stock in the county, and seeks to '*maintain and improve standards across County Durham's housing stock and wider housing environment*'.
- 16 The aims and objectives are associated with a series of detailed outcomes. These set out what the Council and its partners are seeking to achieve through the delivery of the Housing Strategy. The content of the Housing Strategy and related action plan has been developed around each of these outcomes. Throughout the document, case studies have been incorporated which reflect current and past approaches to delivery in line with highlighted outcome areas.
- 17 The scope of the Housing Strategy is wide ranging and in this context, the Strategy brings together content from other plans and programmes. This includes reflecting elements of the County Durham Plan and the emerging Homelessness Strategy.

## The Scope of the Homelessness Strategy

- 18 The homelessness strategy includes three overall aims and an action plan for each aim. Some examples of actions are listed below:
- iv. ***Aim one: To prevent homelessness through early intervention***
    - a) Ensure the provision of advice is available.
    - b) A range of prevention tools are available to offer people.
  - v. ***Aim Two: To increase access to and the supply of accommodation for those who homeless or threatened with homelessness***
    - a) Increase the existing supply of accommodation.
    - b) Develop a proposal for a buy to lease scheme.
  - vi. ***Aim Three: To provide a range of support services to reduce the risk of households becoming homeless***
    - a) Ensure monitoring systems are in place to understand need.
    - b) Work in partnership with agencies to access support services.

## Consultation

- 19 Following Cabinet approval, the Housing Strategy and the Homelessness Strategy will be published for a separate but coordinated public consultation for a period of six weeks commencing on 25 January 2019. Consultation will be undertaken with residents of County Durham and other stakeholders with a potential interest in the content of the document. The council will make use of its partnership structure to assist in disseminating information about the Housing Strategy. This will also provide a means to ensure engagement with the providers of specialist housing products and services.
- 20 Following the consultation, all comments made will be considered and an updated version of the strategies will be developed which will be subject to Cabinet consideration, prior to adoption.

## Conclusion

- 21 The Housing Strategy considers housing related issues in County Durham and serves to articulate the council's and its partners housing

delivery priorities and approach to addressing housing issues. The Housing Strategy has been developed to ensure Durham County Council is well positioned to maximise future opportunities for funding support.

- 22 The purpose of the Homelessness Strategy is to set out the strategic approach, key priorities and actions to work towards preventing homelessness across County Durham over the next three years

### **Background papers**

- County Durham Housing Strategy
- County Durham Housing Strategy Equalities Impact Assessment
- Durham County Council Homelessness Strategy
- Durham County Council Homelessness Review
- Homelessness Review Equalities Impact Assessment

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

The adoption of a Homelessness strategy is required by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Section 8 of the Housing Act 1985 requires local housing authorities to consider housing conditions in their area and the needs of the area with respect to the provision of further housing accommodation.

### **Finance**

The Housing Strategy is not associated with a specific budget. The Housing Strategy does however identify a series of actions. Each action will be associated with a project, which may require a funding bid once the scope of the project is determined. The Housing Strategy does not guarantee funding for projects listed.

### **Consultation**

Following Cabinet Approval, the Housing Strategy and the Homelessness Action Plan will be published for a separate but coordinated public consultation for a period of six weeks commencing on 25 January 2019. Consultation will be undertaken with residents of County Durham and other stakeholders with a potential interest in the content of the document. The council will make use of its partnership structure to assist in disseminating information about the Housing Strategy. This will also provide a means to ensure engagement with the providers of specialist housing products and services.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the Housing Strategy and Homelessness Review. The Housing Strategy will continue to be subject to Equalities Impact Assessment as it develops.

### **Human Rights**

Protocol 1 Article 1: Every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions, including their property. The Housing Strategy provides a framework to deliver housing to meet housing needs. The Housing Strategy reflects the content of the County Durham Plan Preferred Options in relation to planning and land use matters. Article 8: provides a Right to respect for private and family life. Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as

is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. The proposed strategies are considered consistent with the council's Human Rights obligations.

### **Crime and Disorder**

None.

### **Staffing**

Resource required to progress the production, monitoring, review and implementation of the Housing Strategy.

### **Accommodation**

None.

### **Risk**

Detailed risk assessments will be undertaken at the project level and as part of delivering against the Housing Strategy.

### **Procurement**

None.