

Cabinet

10 July 2019

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

Key Decision REAL/0218



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 To advise Cabinet on the comments received as part of the consultation on the Housing Strategy and Homelessness Strategy.
- 2 For Cabinet to adopt the Housing Strategy attached at Appendix 2.
- 3 For Cabinet to agree that future modifications made to the Housing Strategy to align with the adopted County Durham Plan or in response to an emerging housing issue or opportunity can be agreed under delegated powers.
- 4 For Cabinet to agree that following its annual review, the Housing Strategy Action Plan can be updated under delegated powers.
- 5 For Cabinet to adopt the Homelessness Strategy attached at Appendix 3.

Executive summary

- 6 The County Durham Housing Strategy has been developed to consider housing issues across County Durham. Following public consultation between 25 January and 8 March 2019, the Housing Strategy has been updated to respond to the comments raised and to reflect ongoing project delivery.
- 7 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.
- 8 The Housing Strategy contains a series of 'key messages' which serve to articulate the Council and its partners' 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) 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;
 - (b) delivering homes to meet the needs of older people within our communities and supporting people to live independently for as long as possible;
 - (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; and
 - (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.
- 9 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.

- 10 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 are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
 - iii. Aim Three: To provide a range of support services to reduce the risk of households becoming homeless.
- 11 The Homelessness Strategy was subject to public consultation between 25 January 2019 and 8 March 2019.

Recommendation(s)

- 12 Cabinet is recommended to:
- (a) Consider the comments made in response to consultations on the Housing Strategy and the Homelessness Strategy;
 - (b) Adopt the Housing Strategy;
 - (c) Agree that any modifications to the Housing Strategy required to ensure the Strategy reflects the adopted County Durham Plan can be agreed under delegated powers by the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Assets;
 - (d) Agree that the Housing Strategy can be supplemented with additional 'outcomes' to ensure the Strategy remains up to date, with any proposed content subject to targeted consultation in accordance with paragraph 28 of this report and agreed under delegated powers by the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Assets.
 - (e) Agree that following the annual review of the Housing Strategy Action Plan, updates to reflect the outcome of this review can be approved under delegated powers by the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Assets; and
 - (f) Adopt the Homelessness Strategy.

Background

- 13 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 provides a strategic framework to inform the actions and investment of the council and its partners and includes a high-level Action Plan.
- 14 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.
- 15 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.
- 16 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been updated following the consultation and is to be found at Appendix 4 of this report. 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 a 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.

Consultation

- 17 Following Cabinet approval on 16 January 2019, the Housing Strategy and Homelessness Strategy were subject to consultation from 25 January to 8 March 2019.

- 18 To support the consultation on the Housing Strategy, 19 public drop-in sessions were held across the county and presentations were provided to Area Action Partnerships. A number of presentations, workshops and discussions were undertaken on the scope and content of the document including with County Durham Partnership groups, Overview and Scrutiny, Registered Housing Providers and other relevant groups and practitioners. In addition, a Health Impact Assessment was undertaken (appendix 5) and the Housing Strategy was subject to a Rural Proofing exercise (appendix 6).
- 19 To support the consultation on the Homelessness Strategy, presentations were provided to relevant County Durham Partnership groups and a specialised practitioner drop-in event was held. Homelessness Strategy materials were made available alongside the Housing Strategy documents at public drop-in events.
- 20 Following the consultation, comments made and main points from the workshops and other discussions have informed the updated version of the Housing and Homelessness Strategies.
- 21 Whilst a full schedule of comments, responses to these comments and, notes of discussions are set out in the Housing Strategy Statement of Consultation (appendix 7), a summary of main comments on the consultation on the Housing Strategy are as follows:
- Support for the 'key messages' as set out in the document;
 - Agreement over the importance and prominence given in the document to meeting the housing needs of older people;
 - Increase the content in the Strategy in relation to support, adaptations and housing products for people with disabilities;
 - Support for approaches to raise quality standards in the Private Rented Sector;
 - Support for focus on empty homes including opportunities to address absentee landlords as part of this issue; and
 - Greater opportunities to develop the linkages in the document to cross cutting themes, including Health.
- 22 In response to the consultation and amongst other things, an additional section has been included in the Housing Strategy relating to support, adaptations and housing products for people with disabilities; a section on 'health' as a cross cutting theme has been introduced; and health and housing related case studies have been developed and included in the document.

23 Key comments received as part of the consultation on the Homelessness Strategy include:

- Support for the three aims set out in the strategy;
- Agreement for a more “joined up working approach from all partners”;
- Support for a clear action plan to be developed for rough sleepers;
- A lack of support services available for young people in particular; and
- Consideration of the health impact of poor housing and homelessness.

The County Durham Housing Strategy

24 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 and its partners’ housing 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. It is this principle which guides the content of the Strategy. The Housing Strategy ‘key messages’ can be summarised as follows:

- Delivering homes to meet the needs of older people within our communities and supporting people to live independently for as long as possible;
- 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;
- 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;
- 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;

- Improving the quality of the county's housing stock and wider housing environment;
- Working with partners to provide help and support to all Forces personnel, reservists, veterans and their families in trying to secure a home;
- 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;
- 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;
- Supporting rural communities by enabling sufficient housing to meet local needs;
- Introducing a strategic approach to preventing 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; and
- Maximise the opportunities available to address fuel poverty through combining advice schemes and heating improvements and targeting interventions at those most in need.

25 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.

26 The Framework contains two high level aims that 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 the '*delivery 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*'.

- 27 The aims and objectives are associated with a series of detailed 'outcomes'. These outcomes 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.
- 28 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 Homelessness Strategy and the emerging County Durham Plan. In respect of the County Durham Plan, the Housing Strategy reflects content on the quantity of homes required and proportion of affordable homes to be delivered across the County amongst other things. It is recommended that once the County Durham Plan is adopted, any modifications to the Housing Strategy required to ensure the Housing Strategy reflects the adopted Plan are agreed under delegated powers by the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Assets.
- 29 The Housing Strategy has been developed to consider issues across County Durham. It is however important that the document remains responsive to changing market conditions, national policy or other emerging housing issues or opportunities. For this reason, the Housing Strategy framework is designed to be flexible and so that it can be supplemented, where necessary, to include content to address an emerging housing issue or opportunity. To ensure the Housing Strategy remains up to date, it is recommended that additional 'outcome' sections are developed for inclusion with in the Strategy as necessary. Any proposed content would be subject to consultation with the Housing Forum, other relevant partnership groups and key stakeholders and would be agreed under delegated powers by the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Assets.
- 30 The Housing Strategy is supported by a strategic level Action Plan. Each outcome in the Strategy is associated with a series of actions to support the delivery of the Strategy. The identified actions are to be delivered in partnership through the Housing Forum and related Housing Support Group and Housing Development Group. To ensure the actions remain up to date the Action Plan will be subject to an annual review. Through this process, should it be required that the Action Plan is updated, including to reflect progress in delivering actions

or to identify new actions, then any amendments to the Action Plan will be approved under delegated powers by the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Assets.

The Homelessness Strategy

- 31 The homelessness strategy includes three overall aims and an action plan for each aim. Some examples of actions are listed below:

Aim one: To prevent homelessness through early intervention

- Ensure the provision of advice is available.
- A range of prevention tools are available to offer people.

Aim Two: To increase access to and the supply of accommodation for those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness

- Increase the existing supply of accommodation.
- Develop a proposal for a buy to lease scheme.

Aim Three: To provide a range of support services to reduce the risk of households becoming homeless

- Ensure monitoring systems are in place to understand need.
- Work in partnership with agencies to access support services.

Conclusion

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

- 33 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

- County Durham Housing Strategy Health Impact Assessment
- County Durham Housing Strategy Rural Proofing
- Durham County Council Homelessness Strategy
- Durham County Council Homelessness Review
- Homelessness Review Equalities Impact Assessment
- Durham County Council Homelessness Strategy Health Impact Assessment

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Appendix 1: Implications

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 the projects listed.

Consultation

The Housing and Homelessness Strategies have been informed by public consultation undertaken between 25 January 2019 and 8 March 2019.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the Housing Strategy and Homelessness Review. This has been updated following the public consultation.

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