

Economy and Enterprise

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

27 January 2020

Housing and Homelessness strategies and delivery



Joint report of John Hewitt, Corporate Director of Resources and Ian Thompson, Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the housing and homelessness strategies and the delivery of projects and services. This will be delivered by a range of housing managers.

Executive Summary

- 2 Members will recall that the committee has received regular updates on the development of DCC's Housing and Homelessness Strategies.
- 3 This report will provide an overview of the Housing and Homelessness Strategies, the partnership structure and information from various housing managers responsible for delivery.

Recommendations

- 4 Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note and comment upon the information provided in the report and during the presentation.
- 5 The Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee includes a further update on the development of DCC's Housing and Homelessness Strategies and the delivery of regeneration and empty homes projects by Housing Solutions in its 2020/21 work programme.

Background

- 6 The Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee have previously received progress reports and presentations on the Housing and Homelessness Strategies with the last update provided to members at the meeting on 10 January 2019. The comments made by members was subsequently fed into the consultation on the strategy. When considering at the June 2019 meeting the future work programme for the committee it was agreed by members that the committee would receive a further progress update on the development of the strategy.
- 7 In addition, the committee has also received detail of work undertaken by DCC and partners in relation to housing regeneration and empty home projects working with the private sector.
- 8 A range of managers will deliver a presentation on:
- Housing Strategy
 - Homelessness Strategy
 - Housing Board and partnerships
 - Housing Solutions: performance and;
 - Service area delivery

A copy of the presentation is attached as appendix 2.

Housing and Homelessness Strategy

Housing Strategy

- 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 provides a strategic framework to inform the actions and investment of the council and its partners and includes a high-level Action Plan.
- 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 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.
- 12 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 delivery groups. To ensure the actions remain up to date the Action Plan will be subject to an annual review. Through this process, should it be recommended 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 in consultation with the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Assets.
- 13 Following Cabinet approval on the 16th January 2019, the Housing Strategy and Homelessness Strategy was subject to consultation from the 25th January to the 8th March 2019.
- 14 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.
- 15 The strategy was adopted by Cabinet in July 2019.

Homelessness Strategy

- 16 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.

- 17 A review of homelessness between 2015 – 2018 informed the Homelessness Strategy. It was found that approximately 4000 households presented as homeless or threatened with homelessness
- 18 The homelessness strategy includes three overall aims and an action plan for each aim. Some examples of actions are listed below:
- i. ***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.
 - ii. ***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.
 - iii. ***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.

Housing Solutions overview and headline statistics

- 19 Housing Solutions provides advice on a range of housing issues, from landlord disputes to homelessness. The service:
- Assists with improving properties, empty properties and housing management standards;
 - Helps clients to access a home, and;
 - Enables clients to stay at home and live independently.
- 20 To help meet these overall aims Housing Solutions is split into a number of teams who have differing focus areas:
- Homelessness
 - Gypsy, Roma and Traveller

- Home Improvement Agency
- Housing Advice Line
- Housing Regeneration
- Private Sector Housing
- Special Projects
- Strategic Support Team

21 In 2018/19 there were:

- over **12000** contacts made to the service
- **1913** properties were improved, adapted or brought back into use
- **186** properties were brought back into use
- **1007** helped to stay at home, and;
- **1036** helped to find alternative accommodation.

Service area delivery

22 An update will be provided to members regarding the delivery of the Housing and Homelessness strategies as well as an overview of service areas responsible.

23 A presentation from Housing Managers will concentrate on:

- Homelessness advice and assistance
- Housing Regeneration, Empty Homes and Home Improvement Agency, and;
- Special projects: Rough Sleeper Initiative and Local Lettings Agency

Conclusion

24 Following consideration of the report and presentation members of the committee will be aware of: the Housing and Homelessness strategies, the services and support provided by Housing Solutions; the headline homelessness statistics, the preventative approach, housing regeneration and empty homes projects/initiatives in the county.

- 25 Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny will continue to monitor the progress of the Housing and Homelessness Strategies and the work of the Housing Solutions Service in addressing homelessness in the county together with housing regeneration and empty homes initiatives. It is suggested that a further progress report is included in the committee's work programme for 2020/21.

Background papers:

Housing Strategy

Homelessness Strategy

Homelessness Reduction Act: One year on

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Compliance with legislation

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Climate Change

Not applicable

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Not applicable