

**7 December 2020**



## **Housing Update**

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### **Joint report of John Hewitt, Corporate Director of Resources and Amy Harhoff, Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth**

#### **Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

#### **Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To provide Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee (E&E OSC) with an update on: the Housing and Homelessness Strategies; rough sleeping in the county and the response to COVID; work undertaken with the private housing sector, working in partnership with Registered Providers and progress of the Selective Licensing scheme.

#### **Executive Summary**

- 2 Members will recall that the committee has received regular updates on the development and delivery of DCC's Housing and Homelessness Strategies, work undertaken with the private housing sector and Registered Providers with the last update provided to committee at the meeting on the 27 January 2020. In addition, the committee has commented on the Selective Licensing scheme and received progress updates on its development with the last update provided to members in March 2020, with comments from Overview and Scrutiny fed back during the Selective Licensing scheme consultation period.
- 3 This report will provide an overview of the Housing and Homelessness Strategies for context and update on the partnership structure. The report also provides information from various housing managers responsible for delivery.
- 4 The County Durham Housing Strategy was adopted by Cabinet in July 2019. The Strategy was developed to consider housing issues across County Durham. It provides a strategic framework to inform the actions and investment of the council and its partners. The Housing 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.

## Recommendations

- 5 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.
- 6 That the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee includes a further update on the development of DCC's Housing and Homelessness Strategies, delivery of regeneration and empty homes projects, work undertaken with Registered Providers and the operation of the Selective Licensing scheme in its 2021/22 work programme.

## Background

- 7 The E&E OSC have previously received progress reports and presentations on the Housing and Homelessness Strategies, work undertaken in relation to housing regeneration and empty home projects working with the private sector and work undertaken with Registered Providers. The last update was provided to members at the E&E OSC on the 27 January 2020. In addition, the committee has also received updates on the development of the proposed Selective Licensing scheme and provided comments as part of the consultation process which helped to inform the proposed scheme.
- 8 When considering the future work programme at the E&E OSC meeting 23 July 2020, it was agreed by members that the committee would receive a further progress update on the Housing and Homelessness Strategies, work undertaken in relation to housing regeneration and empty homes projects, detail of partnership working with Registered Providers and the further progress of the Selective Licensing scheme.
- 9 Arrangements have been made for a range of Housing Solutions managers to attend the meeting and deliver a presentation focusing on:
  - Housing Strategy
  - Overview of homelessness and response to COVID
  - Partnership working with Registered Providers
  - Private rented sector
  - Selective licensing

A copy of the presentation is attached as appendix 2.

## **Housing and Homelessness Strategy**

### *Housing Strategy*

- 10 The County Durham Housing Strategy was adopted by Cabinet in July 2019. The Housing Strategy was developed to consider housing issues across County Durham. It provides a strategic framework to inform the actions and investment of the council and its partners and includes a high-level Action Plan. 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 contains four high level objectives for the Council and its partners. These are as follows:
  - a) To provide housing advice, assistance & support for older and vulnerable people;
  - b) To improve access to housing;
  - c) To deliver more homes to meet housing need and demand; and
  - d) To maintain and improve standards across County Durham's housing stock and wider housing environment.
- 12 The Housing 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' 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;

- 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) The Council will seek to improving the quality of the county's housing stock and wider housing environment
- f) Support will be provided to all Forces personnel, reservists, veterans and their families in trying to secure a home;
- g) Appropriate infrastructure will be provided to accommodate for the impact of housing development on communities;
- h) New housing will be of a high-quality design
- i) Rural communities will be supported by enabling sufficient housing to meet local needs
- j) 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 will be introduced
- k) Fuel poverty will be addressed through combining advice schemes and heating improvements and targeting interventions at those most in need.

### *Homelessness Strategy*

- 13 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.

14. The homelessness and rough sleeping strategy includes four overall aims and an action plan for each aim.
  - 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*
  - iv. Aim Four: To address Rough Sleeping through prevention, intervention, recovery and education.

### **Housing Solutions overview and headline statistics**

15. 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.
16. In 2019/2020 there were:
  - over **13,118** contacts made to the service
  - **2046** properties were improved, adapted or brought back into use
  - **212** properties were brought back into use
  - **541** helped to stay at home, and;
  - **993** helped to find alternative accommodation.

### **Selective Licensing**

17. Consultation for the selective licensing proposals closed on 2 August. Nearly 1,200 questionnaire responses were received, with 59% agreeing that the Council should ensure the private rented sector is properly managed. 45% agreed with the selective licensing proposals.
18. Following consultation, a move was made to analyse data at Lower Super Output Area level (from Middle Super Output Areas presented at consultation). The change to smaller areas reduced the scheme coverage from the 74% proposed at consultation.

19. Cabinet approved the proposed designated areas for selective licensing on 16 September. 42% of the county's total estimated private rented sector homes are included in the final proposals (or 32% by area, 104 from 324 Lower Super Output Areas in County Durham).
20. Cabinet also approved a fee per property licence of £500, with discounts given:
  - £60 per property licence for early application,
  - £55 per licence if the applicant is accredited with the council or the National Residential Landlords Association, and
  - £35 discount per subsequent property application, if the landlord has multiple properties.
21. A submission to the Secretary of State is being prepared, with a decision expected back in Spring 2021. If the scheme is approved, a three month notice period will be given before licences are issued.

### **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 delivery.
23. A presentation from Housing Managers will concentrate on:
  - Performance of Housing Solutions and the homeliness service
  - The response to COVID
  - The private rented sector and how this has developed over the last year
  - Selective Licensing

### **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 and the preventative approach undertaken; housing regeneration and empty homes projects/initiatives undertaken and proposed in the county; partnership working with Registered Providers and progress made in relation to the proposed Selective Licensing scheme.

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, the various housing regeneration and empty homes initiatives undertaken in the county, partnership working with Registered Providers and the operation of the Selective Licensing scheme in the county. It is suggested that a further progress report is included in the committee's work programme for 2021/22.

**Background papers:**

Housing Strategy

Homelessness Strategy

Cabinet papers – key decision, Selective Licensing (16 September 2020)

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **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