

**22 November 2023**

**Draft County Durham Housing Strategy**



**Report of Amy Harhoff, Corporate Director of Regeneration  
Economy and Growth, Durham County Council**

**Councillor James Rowlandson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for  
Resources, Investment and Assets**

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To provide an overview of the consultation on the Housing Strategy Principles and Priorities Paper and the Draft County Durham Housing Strategy (Appendix 2) as part of a seven-week consultation period from 30 October 2023 to 18 December 2023. A summary presentation will be delivered at the Board.

**Executive Summary**

- 2 The County Durham Housing Strategy is being 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. The new Housing Strategy 2024 will replace the current Housing Strategy adopted in 2019.
- 3 A consultation was undertaken on the Principles and Priorities Paper, the first stage in the preparation of the Housing Strategy, between the 26 June 2023 and the 18 August 2023. This was presented as 'the Housing Conversation' and the council engaged with residents and interested parties through its partnership structure, online engagement events and tailored surveys.
- 4 The consultation determined that there was overwhelming support for the proposed vision, principles and priorities. Amongst other things, the importance of meeting housing needs, issues with concentrations of

private rented sector housing stock and the importance of energy efficient housing came through the consultation.

- 5 The Housing Conversation has informed the development of the Draft County Durham Housing Strategy. The Draft County Durham Housing Strategy sets out the strategic direction for housing activity in County Durham and a vision to provide good quality housing that meets everyone's needs, is affordable for local people and supports the creation of great places to live. The Draft Strategy contains seven principles, which establish the foundation and rationale underpinning decisions and five priorities for action.
- 6 Consultation will be undertaken on the Draft County Durham Housing Strategy between 30 October 2023 to 18 December 2023. The consultation will be undertaken with residents of County Durham and other stakeholders with a potential interest in the content of the document.
- 7 Following the consultation, the Housing Strategy will be modified as necessary and presented to Cabinet for Adoption in Spring 2024.

## **Recommendations**

- 8 Health and Wellbeing Board is recommended to:
  - (a) Note the overview of the consultation on the Principles and Priorities Paper; and.
  - (b) Note the content of the Draft County Durham Housing Strategy and feedback any comments before the end of the consultation period.

## **Background**

- 9 The County Durham Housing Strategy is being 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 will 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 will be a comprehensive document that aligns with existing or emerging strategies including the County Durham Vision, County Durham Plan and the new Homelessness Strategy. Together with the Homelessness Strategy, the Housing Strategy will also set out the council's approach to Housing First as a way of tackling street homelessness. It will also support the council's Climate Emergency Response Plan and Inclusive Economic Strategy.

## **Principles and Priorities Paper Consultation Overview**

- 12 The Principles and Priorities Paper was the first stage in the preparation of the Housing Strategy. As part of the County Durham Housing Conversation, the council sought views on a draft vision, seven principles and five priorities.
- 13 The Housing Conversation took place between the 26 June 2023 and the 18 August 2023. The Housing Conversation included:
  - presentations to 13 Area Action Partnerships;
  - attendance at nine County Durham Partnership groups including the County Durham Together Partnership, the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Place, Health and Communities Board;
  - a workshop for all Members of Scrutiny;
  - presentations to the County Durham Association of Local Councils;
  - a Rural Housing Event; and
  - online consultation events.
- 14 The Housing Conversation was also supported by a social media and communications campaign which included:

- A dedicated webpage, which had 1,039 pages views and 789 unique page views during the Housing Conversation.
- A Facebook advert, which started on the 28 July and had a total reach of 22,248 and an engagement of 953 (859 link clicks).
- Six Facebook posts, which had a total reach of 16,924 people and an engagement of 166 (51 link clicks).
- Facebook and Instagram Stories with a total reach of 8,099 and 3,471 respectively.
- Twenty two Tweets on Twitter with a total of 23,102 impressions and a total engagement of 205 (70 link clicks).

15 The Housing Conversation was supported by three specialist surveys. A survey for residents, a survey for young people and a survey for industry. The following numbers of surveys were returned as part of the Housing Conversation:

- Residents: 368.
- Young people: 257.
- Industry: 15.

16 Whilst a range of views came through the consultation and those detailed points have informed the development of the Draft Housing Strategy, the main messages from the consultation can be summarised as follows:

- Overwhelming support for the vision, principles and priorities.
- Concerns about anti-social behaviour and crime as illustrated by 34% of respondents to the resident survey disagreeing that they thought that their area was safe.
- Support for the delivery of homes to meet needs, including homes for older people, families and affordable homes.
- The importance of adaptation of houses to meet changing needs over a lifetime, illustrated by one in three respondents to the residents survey stating that they did not think their home would meet their needs in the future.
- Energy efficiency improvements to the existing housing stock and high standards in new housing that both help the environment and reduce bills was seen as very important shown by 91% of

respondents to the resident survey stating that they wanted to live in an energy efficient house in the future.

- Financial pressures were clearly expressed, for example 27% of respondents disagreed that they thought they would be able to afford to keep their home warm in the future.
- Concerns raised about the impact of concentrations of private rented properties, which can be associated with anti-social behaviour, empty homes and absent landlords.
- Support for regulation of landlords, including through selective licensing, but also an ask for more recognition of good landlords.
- Local schemes to improve our towns and villages was recognised as an important future priority.
- Whilst recognising that meeting the needs of all groups is important the impact of student housing on mixed and balanced communities was raised by many respondents.
- Recognition of the rising issue of homelessness in the county expressed by one in ten young people agreeing that they or their family was homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- 48% of those with a disability disagreed that their home allowed them to live independently.
- Importance of bringing empty homes back into use but also recognition that some properties are beyond their useful life and demolition may be appropriate.
- Agreement that good quality housing is a significant factor in supporting health and wellbeing outcomes.
- A recognition that new housing needs to be provided alongside sufficient infrastructure to accommodate the impact of the development including schools, doctors, parking etc.

17 A full overview of the Housing Conversation is set out within the Feedback Report at Appendix 3.

### **Draft County Durham Housing Strategy**

18 The Draft County Durham Housing Strategy sets out the strategic direction for housing activity in County Durham and a vision to provide good quality housing that meets everyone's needs, is affordable for

local people and supports the creation of great places to live. The proposed vision is as follows:

‘By 2035 County Durham will be a place that has good quality homes that meet the needs of existing and future residents that they can afford. The provision and quality of housing will support economic growth, contribute to improved health, community safety and create and maintain sustainable, mixed and balanced communities. People will live long and independent lives within connected and safer communities.’

19 The Draft County Durham Housing Strategy contains seven principles. The principles establish the foundation and rationale underpinning decisions and actions to deliver the vision. The principles are as follows:

- Principle 1: Everyone has a right to a warm, safe, and decent home.
- Principle 2: Everyone should have access to a home that is affordable to them.
- Principle 3: Housing is the cornerstone of communities and should support improved health, community safety, educational attainment, and the local economy.
- Principle 4: The strategy will be for the county, not the council, and will promote local solutions underpinned by community engagement.
- Principle 5: All new homes should be accessible, tenure blind and provide flexible living for different stages in a person’s life, always aiming to allow people to be independent, including remaining in their home for as long as they desire.
- Principle 6: Existing and new communities should be physically, digitally, culturally and economically connected to support the creation of sustainable, safe, mixed and balanced communities, including bringing empty homes back into use.
- Principle 7: The strategy will support energy efficiency and carbon reduction in existing and new housing and contribute towards the council’s Climate Emergency Response Plan.

20 The purpose of the County Durham Housing Strategy is to set the context as to how the council and its partners will meet the housing challenges faced. The Draft County Durham Housing Strategy includes the following priorities for action, which are not in order of importance:

- Priority 1: Increase the delivery of new homes, including secure, affordable housing to meet housing needs together with the infrastructure required.
- Priority 2: Ensure that everyone has access to appropriate, safe and secure housing that support health and wellbeing.
- Priority 3: Ensure high quality, energy efficient homes and effective landlord services.
- Priority 4: Ensure a comprehensive range of housing options for older and vulnerable people, disabled people and children and young people, including specialist accommodation and support.
- Priority 5: Ensure high quality placemaking, creating safe, accessible, prosperous and sustainable places to live.

21 The Draft County Durham Housing Strategy recognises the importance of placemaking and how housing needs to complement and integrate with the spaces around it so that people feel part of a community and can easily access the services and amenities they need. Providing the right infrastructure is of vital importance to good placemaking. The Strategy recognises the importance of increasing the delivery of new homes, including secure, affordable housing and new council owned housing.

22 The Strategy sets out that everyone in County Durham should have fair and equal access to safe and secure housing that meets their needs. This includes addressing the specific needs of groups including children in care, children leaving care, people with disabilities, those with complex health issues and older people.

23 The Strategy seeks to support people to prevent them becoming homeless and enable them to secure and maintain, and sustain living in, good quality, permanent accommodation, with support in place where it is needed. It also seeks ensure that a comprehensive range of supported and specialist housing is available for those who need it.

24 The Strategy reflects a commitment to providing high quality homes and to work with local communities and put them at the heart of the decision-making process in a way that meets their needs and priorities. The Strategy seeks to strive to drive up standards in the private rented sector.

25 The delivery of the County Durham Housing Strategy will complement activities in the following plans and strategies:

- The County Durham Plan, the council's Local Plan (2021- 2035).

- The County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy.
- The County Durham Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2020-25).
- The Climate Emergency Response Plan 2 (2022-24).

## **Timescales and Next Steps**

- 26 In June 2023, Durham County Council Cabinet agreed delegated powers to the Corporate Director for Regeneration Economy and Growth in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Investments and Assets to prepare and consult on a draft Housing Strategy, based on the outcome and feedback received from the consultation on the Housing Strategy Principles and Priorities Paper.
- 27 Delegated authority has now been given for the approval of the Draft Strategy. Consultation will be undertaken on the document between the 30 October 2023 to 18 December 2023.
- 28 The consultation will be undertaken with residents of County Durham and other stakeholders with a potential interest in the content of the document. As part of the consultation the council will use a wide range of approaches including:
- Presentations / information dissemination to Area Action Partnerships.
  - Presentations to the County Durham Partnership groups.
  - Online consultation events.
  - A social media and communications campaign.
  - Briefing for elected Members.
- 29 The consultation will seek comments on the Draft Housing Strategy. The Draft Strategy will then be modified as necessary and presented to Cabinet for Adoption in Spring 2024.
- 30 Following the adoption of the County Durham Housing Strategy, the council will work with partners to develop a detailed delivery plan and associated monitoring framework to delivery the Strategy.

## **Background Papers**

- County Durham Housing Strategy – Adopted 2019
- Principle and Priorities Paper – Approved by Cabinet June 2023.



**Author**

Mike Allum

Tel: 03000 261906

---

## **Appendix 1: Implications**

---

### **Legal Implications**

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 final Housing Strategy will 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**

The Housing Strategy Principles and Priorities Paper was subject to public consultation for eight weeks between 26 June 2023 to 18 August 2023. Consultation was undertaken with residents of County Durham and other stakeholders with a potential interest in the content of the document. Through the consultation the council made use of its partnership structure to assist in disseminating information about the Housing Strategy.

The consultation on the Principles and Priorities Paper has informed the Draft County Durham Housing Strategy.

Consultation will be undertaken on the Draft Housing Strategy between the 30 October 2023 to 18 December 2023.

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

The Housing Strategy will be subject to Equalities Impact Assessment as it develops and a full Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken for the draft Housing Strategy alongside the consultation process.

### **Climate Change**

Principle 8 in the Principles and Priorities Paper states that the strategy will support energy efficiency and carbon reduction in existing and new housing. This Principle will inform the drafting of the Housing Strategy.

### **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

will provide a framework to deliver housing to meet housing needs. 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. We will ensure the Housing Strategy will be 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.