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Draft County Durham Housing Strategy

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Electoral divisions affected:

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to provide an overview of the consultation on the Housing Strategy Principles and Priorities Paper (please refer to Appendix 3) and to set out the content of the draft County Durham Housing Strategy (please refer to Appendix 2).

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 26 June 2023 and 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, tailored surveys and a workshop with Scrutiny Members.
- 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 is being undertaken on the draft County Durham Housing Strategy between 30 October 2023 and 18 December 2023. The consultation is being 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 and Full Council for adoption in Spring/Summer 2024.

Recommendation

- 8 Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note and comment on the draft County Durham Housing Strategy.

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 26 June 2023 and 18 August 2023. The Housing Conversation included:
 - a) presentations to 13 Area Action Partnerships;
 - b) attendance at nine County Durham Partnership groups including the County Durham Together Partnership, the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Place and the Health and Communities Board;
 - c) a workshop for all Members of Scrutiny;
 - d) presentations to the County Durham Association of Local Councils;
 - e) a Rural Housing Event; and
 - f) online consultation events.
- 14 The Housing Conversation was also supported by a social media and communications campaign which included:
 - a) a dedicated webpage that had 1,039 pages views and 789 unique page views during the Housing Conversation;

- b) a Facebook advert that started on 28 July and had a total reach of 22,248 and an engagement of 953 (859 link clicks);
 - c) six Facebook posts that had a total reach of 16,924 people and an engagement of 166 (51 link clicks);
 - d) Facebook and Instagram stories with a total reach of 8,099 and 3,471 respectively; and
 - e) 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:
- a) residents: 368;
 - b) young people: 257; and
 - c) 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:
- a) overwhelming support for the vision, principles and priorities;
 - b) 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;
 - c) support for the delivery of homes to meet needs including homes for older people, families and affordable homes;
 - d) the importance of adaptation of houses to meet changing needs over a lifetime, illustrated by one in three respondents to the resident's survey stating that they did not think their home would meet their needs in the future;
 - e) 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;

- f) 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;
 - g) concerns raised about the impact of concentrations of private rented properties that can be associated with anti-social behaviour, empty homes and absent landlords;
 - h) support for regulation of landlords, including through selective licensing, but also an ask for more recognition of good landlords;
 - i) local schemes to improve our towns and villages was recognised as an important future priority;
 - j) 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;
 - k) recognition of the rising issue of homelessness in the county expressed by one in 10 young people agreeing that they or their family was homeless or at risk of homelessness;
 - l) 48% of those with a disability disagreed that their home allowed them to live independently;
 - m) importance of bringing empty homes back into use but also recognition that some properties are beyond their useful life and demolition may be appropriate;
 - n) agreement that good quality housing is a significant factor in supporting health and wellbeing outcomes; and
 - o) a recognition that new housing needs to be provided alongside sufficient infrastructure to accommodate the impact of the development including schools, doctors and parking etc.
- 17 A full overview of the Housing Conversation is set out within the Feedback Report (please refer to Appendix 3).
- 18 A workshop for all Members of Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee was held on 10 July 2023. The comments made have fed into the draft housing strategy and a summary of points raised and where they have been addressed in the draft as set out at Appendix 4.

Draft County Durham Housing Strategy

- 19 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.'

20 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:

- a) principle 1: everyone has a right to a warm, safe and decent home;
- b) principle 2: everyone should have access to a home that is affordable to them;
- c) principle 3: housing is the cornerstone of communities and should support improved health, community safety, educational attainment, and the local economy;
- d) principle 4: the strategy will be for the county, not the council, and will promote local solutions underpinned by community engagement;
- e) 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;
- f) 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; and
- g) 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.

21 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 that are not in order of importance:

- a) priority 1: increase the delivery of new homes including secure, affordable housing to meet housing needs together with the infrastructure required;

- b) priority 2: ensure that everyone has access to appropriate, safe and secure housing that support health and wellbeing;
 - c) priority 3: ensure high quality, energy efficient homes and effective landlord services;
 - d) 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; and
 - e) priority 5: ensure high quality placemaking, creating safe, accessible, prosperous and sustainable places to live.
- 22 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.
- 23 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.
- 24 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.
- 25 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.
- 26 The delivery of the County Durham Housing Strategy will complement activities in the following plans and strategies:
- a) the County Durham Plan, the council's Local Plan (2021- 2035);
 - b) the County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy;
 - c) the County Durham Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2020-25); and

- d) the Climate Emergency Response Plan 2 (2022-24).

Timescales and Next Steps

- 27 Consultation on the draft housing strategy is being undertaken between 30 October 2023 and 18 December 2023.
- 28 The consultation is being 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 are using a wide range of approaches including:
- a) presentations / information dissemination to Area Action Partnerships;
 - b) presentations to the County Durham Partnership groups;
 - c) online consultation events;
 - d) a social media and communications campaign; and
 - e) a presentation to Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny.
- 29 The consultation is seeking comments on the draft housing strategy. The draft strategy will then be modified as necessary and presented to Cabinet for adoption in Spring/Summer 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 deliver the Strategy.

Background Papers

- None

Other useful documents

- None.

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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 that may require a funding bid once the scope of the project is determined. The housing strategy does not guarantee funding for projects listed.

Consultation and Engagement

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 is being undertaken on the draft housing strategy between 30 October 2023 and 18 December 2023.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

A full equalities impact assessment is being undertaken for the draft housing strategy alongside the current consultation process.

Climate Change

Addressing the cause of climate change is a key thread through the draft housing strategy including Principle 8 which states that the strategy will support energy efficiency and carbon reduction in existing and new housing.

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. The council will ensure the housing strategy will be consistent with the council's human rights obligations.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

Resource is 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.

Appendix 2: Draft County Durham Housing Strategy

Please refer to the attached draft County Durham Housing Strategy.

Appendix 3: Housing Conversation Feedback Report

Please refer to the attached Housing Conversation Feedback report.

Appendix 4: Overview and Scrutiny Workshop Summary of Comments and Reponses

Comment	Where it's been addressed in the Draft Housing Strategy
Prevention of homelessness	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasis on access to early advice, support and assistance which is vital to ensure that homelessness is prevented as far as possible. 	<p>A focus on early advice has been included in Priority 2 that incorporates homelessness prevention through the Homelessness strategy. (5.19/ 5.21/ 5.24/ 5.47).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the use of empty homes to meet needs of vulnerable groups and those at risk of homelessness. 	<p>Emphasis on bringing empty homes back into use where possible incorporated as part of Principle 2 (para 4.3) and Principle 6 (Para 4.9)</p> <p>The use of empty homes to meet need of those at risk of homelessness is further addressed in the Homelessness Strategy (para 5.16), the Housing Strategy has also identified, as an action, preparing a Temporary Accommodation Strategy that would consider the option of empty homes, where appropriate (para 5.23).</p>
Delivering a comprehensive range of housing options	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A need to have the right mix of housing to meet housing demand. It was considered that there are few housing options for single people, single young people, older people, vulnerable and disabled people, 	<p>Sustainable, mixed and balanced communities are part of the Housing Strategy Vision.</p> <p>Greater detail is included in Priority 1 regarding meeting</p>

<p>although these are all groups who have increasing housing demand. New homes should be adaptable over time to meet changing needs and existing stock should be adapted.</p>	<p>specific housing needs through housing delivery (Para 5.5/ 5.7).</p> <p>Greater emphasis on a range of housing options for older and vulnerable people, children and young people, disabled people has been included (Para 5.38/ 5.39/ 5.40 – 47). This includes implementing the County Durham Plan policies regarding adaptation and M42 standards.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supported housing is essential for those people with multiple and complex needs. Supported housing requires wrap around services for vulnerable residents and families, including health services, education, welfare benefits and transport connectivity. 	<p>Support for people with multiple and complex needs is highlighted as a priority in the Homelessness Strategy that is identified as part of Priority 1 and actions for delivery (Para 5.21/ 5.24).</p> <p>The link between housing and support and care and wrap around services are emphasised in the supporting text of Priority 4 (Para 5.38- 47).</p>
<p>Climate emergency</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing should be built to the best possible standard with new technologies but, consider that the traditional view of ‘sustainable locations’ may have been overcome by new technologies supporting a reduction in travel to some extent. 	<p>Further detail and emphasis regarding climate change is outlined in the alignment of the Housing Strategy with the CERP vision for new technologies to be used on new developments (Para 3.5).</p> <p>Addressing climate change is Principle 7 of the strategy. Greater detail has been added around the maximising of opportunities for new developments to contribute to energy efficiency targets</p>

	including using new technologies (Para 4.10).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concern that insulation and newer heating technologies are not as affordable as gas. Retrofitting existing stock is key but is also expensive. Upskill the sector lined to IES to support provision and maintenance of new technologies. 	<p>The Housing Strategy sets out that it will compliment activities of other plans and strategies, including the CERP and the IES (Para 3.5).</p> <p>As part of Principle 7, detail in the supporting text has been included to address maximising opportunities to address fuel poverty, heating improvements and carbon reduction (Para 4.10).</p>
Housing and its relationship with the economy	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure developers are employing people with the correct skills to build the new homes we need. Including in relation to greener technologies and capitalising on local supply chains. 	<p>The Housing Strategy sets out that it will compliment activities of other plans and strategies, including the CERP and the IES (Para 3.5).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilise Council House Programme to create housing for communities and reuse derelict buildings and empty homes to support renewal also support the provision of executive housing to attract entrepreneurs in suitable locations 	<p>Priority 1 includes detail around the delivery of Council Housing. This includes both new build schemes and a programme of targeted acquisitions.</p> <p>Bringing Empty Homes back into use, where appropriate, is reflected as a key aim of the strategy and detailed in Principle 2 (Para 4.3) and Principle 6 (Para 4.9).</p>
Ensuring a warm, safe and decent homes to support improved education, health and wellbeing	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note issues with mould through lack of ventilation/insulation, which can be an issue with the design of buildings and older properties. 	<p>Greater detail has been added to Priority 3 regarding housing stock standards and conditions. It is acknowledged that the county has a large percentage of older housing stock. Priority 3 sets out a requirement that new stock is delivered to the highest standard with a focus on sustainability and energy efficiency.</p> <p>There is further detail given regarding the continuous review of housing conditions, inspections and working with landlords to ensure that decent homes standards from the Social Housing Act 2023 are met. (Para 5.27- 5.32).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need effective complaints / escalation procedure for tenants or a prevention procedure (such as regular inspections). 	<p>The Housing Strategy will be delivered in the context of new legislation, including The Social Housing Act 2023 (Para 2.6). In Priority 3 the supporting text outlines that the Act gives more rights for tenants (Para 5.27).</p> <p>Further detail is given regarding how we will ensure high quality landlord services and high-quality homes. This includes continuous housing condition reviews, inspections, powers under the selective licensing scheme and HMO licensing requirements (Para 5.31- 5.37).</p>
<p>Meeting the need for affordable homes</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needing to make sure people can afford housing and have sufficient disposable income to enjoy lives as well. 	<p>The impact of affordability and the cost of living is a key theme of the Housing Strategy.</p> <p>Measures to address poverty through the Housing Strategy are laid out in Priority 5 (Para 5.51-59) Addressing Fuel Poverty is detailed in Principle 7 (Para 4.10) regarding energy efficiency and Priority 3 regarding high quality homes in the rented sector (Para 5.28).</p> <p>Issues regarding the cost of living and the impact of this on affordability of homes and keeping a home warm are identified as part of the Homelessness Prevention in Priority 1 (Para 5.16).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate affordable homes into developments in a ‘tenure blind’ manner 	<p>Ensuring affordable homes are tenure blind on developments is part of Principle 5 (Para 4.8).</p>
<p>Housing issues in communities</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a high standard of maintenance in housing, gardens and open spaces, use of S.215 notices where appropriate. 	<p>Further text regarding the standard of housing in the rental sector is included in Priority 3 (Para 5.30/ 5.31).</p> <p>Greater emphasis has been added to green and open space as part of quality placemaking in Priority 5 (Para 5.48/ 5.49, 5.51-58).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns about property investors / developers acquiring properties. A concern especially in former mining communities but also in 	<p>The Housing Strategy incorporates how the CDP will be utilised to meet housing needs and ensure mixed and balanced</p>

<p>Durham City in the context of student HMOs and the impact on communities. Important to work to prevent ASB.</p>	<p>communities. This includes student accommodation (Para 5.7).</p> <p>The licensing of HMOs and enforcement for non-compliance are detailed in Priority 3 (Para 5.32/ 5.33/ 5.35/ 5.56).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to ensure that existing stock is maintained and kept up to required standards. 	<p>This is addressed in Priority 3 regarding housing stock standards and condition (Para 5.30/ 5.31/ 5.38).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that infrastructure is in place to support new housing, and ensure affordable housing is affordable, including Durham City. 	<p>Additional supporting text has been included under Priority 1 to ensure the provision of infrastructure that supports new housing (Para 5.4/ 5.6/ 5.13).</p> <p>The importance of Infrastructure in high quality place making is emphasised under Priority 5 (Para5.51/ 5.53).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second homes are an issue in some parts of the county such as Weardale. 	<p>It is recognised in the Housing Strategy that rural areas have issues that are unique to them. The provision of housing in rural areas is incorporated in the supporting text of Priority 1 to deliver housing to meet housing needs. (Para 5.4/ 5.7).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An emphasis on actions and local level actions required, with a timeline for delivery communicated to members and the community. 	<p>The steps for the delivery and monitoring of the strategy are detailed in the final section of the strategy (Para 6.1-6.4).</p>