

**Economy and Enterprise
Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**



22 April 2024

**Draft County Durham Housing
Strategy and Delivery Plan**

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

Electoral divisions affected:

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to provide an overview of the responses received to the consultation on the Draft Housing Strategy and to set out the latest draft of the County Durham Housing Strategy (please refer to Appendix 2) and a draft Twelve Month Delivery Plan (please refer to Appendix 3).

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 Draft Housing Strategy, between 30 October 2023 and 18 December 2023. The council engaged with residents and interested parties through its partnership structure, online engagement events, tailored surveys and a presentation to 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 and partnership working came through the consultation. A number of changes were made to the Draft Housing Strategy as a result of the consultation, and these can be seen in a tracked changes version of the draft at Appendix 2.

- 5 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 A key response to the consultation, including from Overview and Scrutiny, was the need for a Delivery Plan to be included in this version of the Housing Strategy. It was always the intention to prepare a Delivery Plan following adoption of the Strategy but to address this response a twelve-month delivery plan has been prepared and attached to the Housing Strategy (Appendix 4). A more long-term Delivery Plan will still be prepared following adoption.
- 7 The Housing Strategy will be presented to Cabinet and Full Council for adoption in July 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 and Delivery Plan.

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 and Rough Sleeping Strategy. It will also support the council's Climate Emergency Response Plan and Inclusive Economic Strategy.

Consultation Overview

- 12 The Principles and Priorities paper was the first stage in the preparation of the Housing Strategy in June to August 2023. The responses to this consultation were used to inform a draft Housing Strategy which was subsequently consulted on from 30 October 2023 and 18 December 2023. The consultation included:
 - a) presentations to 13 Area Action Partnerships;
 - b) attendance at a number of 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 presentation and discussion at Overview and Scrutiny;
 - d) presentations to the County Durham Association of Local Councils;
 - e) online consultation events; and
 - a) the consultation was also supported by a social media and communications campaign which included a dedicated webpage, a Facebook advert and a number of Facebook posts, Instagram stories and a number of tweets on X/Twitter.
- 13 Whilst a range of views came through the consultation and those detailed points have informed the revision 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) strong emphasis on the importance of partnership working with partners keen to be involved in the development of the strategy and the delivery plan;
- c) new development should be focused on brownfield sites to stop building on greenfield sites or in the countryside;
- d) ensure appropriate infrastructure is built alongside new housing to support new housing development;
- e) support for strong focus on affordable housing. Affordable housing should be recognised as a product of choice, with affordable rental a tenure of choice;
- f) better access to affordable housing, including social housing and private rented, in particular for single people, younger people and larger families;
- g) support for the links between housing on health and well being, more emphasis needed on impact of poor housing on health;
- h) continue to improve partnership working with RPs to enable further regeneration of communities and high quality placemaking;
- i) more focus needed on provision of suitable affordable housing for students;
- j) concerns about the impact of student housing in and around the city centre;
- k) explore the need for additional licensing in Durham;
- l) concerns about the cost of living and poverty and affordability of housing;
- m) energy efficiency and reducing carbon emissions should continue to be a focus in the delivery of the Housing Strategy;
- n) need more emphasis regarding the impact of poor housing on health;
- o) housing standards in the private, social and student rental sector was a concern, particularly regarding damp, mould and condensation;

- p) need for more meaningful engagement with members of the community and harder to reach groups in decision making; and
- q) more clarity needed on how priorities will be achieved and timescales.

14 A presentation to Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee was held on 18 December 2023. The comments made have fed into the revised draft of the Housing Strategy and a summary of points raised and how they have been addressed is included in the presentation accompanying this report.

Draft County Durham Housing Strategy

15 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.'

16 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; and
- 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.

17 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:

- 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; and
- priority 5: ensure high quality placemaking, creating safe, accessible, prosperous and sustainable places to live.

18 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.

19 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.

20 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.

- 21 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.
- 22 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).

Delivery Plan

- 23 A key response to the consultation, including from Overview and Scrutiny, was the need for a Delivery Plan to be included in this version of the Housing Strategy. It was always the intention to prepare a Delivery Plan following adoption of the Strategy but to address this response a twelve-month delivery plan has been prepared and attached to the Housing Strategy (Appendix 3). A more long-term Delivery Plan will still be prepared following adoption.

Timescales and Next Steps

- 24 Following the Overview and Scrutiny meeting the Housing Strategy and the Delivery Plan will be finalised and presented to Cabinet and Full Council for adoption in Spring/Summer 2024.
- 25 Following the adoption of the County Durham Housing Strategy, the council will work with partners to develop the detailed Delivery Plan and associated monitoring framework to deliver the Strategy.

Background Papers

- None

Other useful documents

- None.

Authors

Mike Allum

Tel: 03000 261906

Graeme Smith

Tel: 03000 263610

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

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 7 and Priority 3 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 Tracked Changes County Durham Housing Strategy

Please refer to the attached draft Tracked Changes County Durham Housing Strategy.

Appendix 3: Draft Twelve Month Delivery Plan

Please refer to the attached Draft Twelve Month Delivery Plan.