

CABINET – 4 OCTOBER 2017

DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY 2018-2023

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to the overall approach and consultation arrangements for the future housing strategy, and to note the draft strategy documents prior to their submission for consultation.
- 1.2 The draft Housing Strategy is attached as Appendix 1, and a Housing Strategy Delivery Action Plan is attached as Appendix 2. Appendix 3 sets out the consultation arrangements.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 One of the key aims relating to Housing within the Corporate Plan is helping provide housing for local people.
- 2.2 The decision to develop a housing strategy has been made to respond to a number of key issues outlined in this paper. Local Authorities are not required by Government to have a formal strategy, however they are expected to have a strategic approach to housing in their local areas to facilitate a thriving housing market and consider local housing needs.
- 2.3 The Housing Strategy will influence and support the future planning and delivery of housing within the District. It will also provide an opportunity to plan for the impact of the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Bill, changes to welfare reform and future funding availability.
- 2.4 In February 2017 central government published the Housing White Paper 'Fixing our broken housing market'. It highlighted three main problems: not enough local authorities planning for the homes they need; house building that is simply too slow; and a construction industry that is too reliant on a small number of big players. The housing strategy will respond to some of the issues identified in the White Paper, specifically relating to the delivery of affordable housing in the District.
- 2.5 Delivery of a range of affordable housing choices can be achieved through the inclusion of appropriate policies in the Local Plans for the area. The housing strategy evidence will assist with this process as both the District Council and National Park Authority prepare their Local Plan reviews.
- 2.6 The Council has not had a comprehensive housing strategy for over 10 years although in September 2016 Cabinet approved a document setting out an approach for buying back council properties and increasing the council's housing stock through new development on council owned land.
- 2.7 The new build programme has already delivered 21 homes at North Milton and achieved start on site of a further 35 flats on land at Compton & Sarum House, Calmore. A further 20 new homes planned for at Stocklands, Calmore will be completed in 2019. It will be suggested that the Council's new-build programme continues to be a feature of the housing strategy.

- 2.8 The current strategy also included the Council's intention to purchase housing for social rent on S106 sites. At the time it had been understood that Registered (housing) Providers were no longer interested in providing housing at social rent levels on new developments, however it has since become apparent that partner Registered Providers are still willing and able to provide homes at social rent levels. Where this is the case, there is no need for the Council to purchasing homes for social rent on S106 sites as there would be no overall increase in affordable housing as a result and we would be competing with our partner Registered Providers. It is therefore suggested that the housing strategy directs our housing revenue account resources to achieving net gains in the overall supply of affordable housing across the range of affordable housing providers.

3. THE HOUSING STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN

- 3.1 The strategy will span a 5 year period 2018-2023 and help shape housing policies within the emerging Local Plan for the District including policies to secure housing that people can afford. It will identify a range of activities which the Council will undertake to enhance housing options and the supply of affordable housing for the benefit of local people. It will highlight actions we will take to ensure best use of existing housing stock, and the local approaches needed to respond to the challenges the housing service faces as a result of the welfare reforms which have been brought in by the Government over the last few years.
- 3.2 There have been growing concerns over the past few years about the affordability of some housing options within the District. A study was commissioned by the Council to look into this matter, looking at local incomes and local housing costs. It found that some types of 'affordable housing' remain unaffordable to large sectors of the community and that social and affordable rent accommodation are still very much needed and should continue to form a large part of future affordable housing delivery. In line with the NPPF, low(er) cost home ownership and shared ownership options are also important as they provide a stepping stones between renting and moves into home-ownership. It has been demonstrated through the study that the shared ownership products are accessible for those able to access the lower quartile of market rented homes. Starter homes are still relatively unaffordable, requiring an annual income in excess of £42kp.a.
- 3.3 The strategy will link the work across the housing service – housing options and allocations, housing management, rent collection, housing asset management, housing improvement and economic development.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Households who would not traditionally have sought affordable housing are unable to access market housing and we must ensure that we meet a range of needs and a range of affordability levels that reflects the requirements of our communities.
- 4.2 It is vital that our residents have access to quality housing options and we recognise the importance of having the right mix of housing within the District. We know that housing is expensive across the District and we want to be active in helping to provide different options for our residents and at the same time ensuring we increase the supply and quality of housing that we control.

- 4.3 The housing strategy formulation has provided the context and highlighted the need for a joined up approach. The accompanying Action Plan will provide the platform to influence and carry out the work needed to support the implementation of the Council's housing strategy.
- 4.4 The Council currently employs one officer to undertake all housing strategy and housing development work. The resource the Council has put into these activities has reduced in recent years. Developing the new housing strategy has highlighted a significant number of actions we could undertake to address the housing issues within the district more effectively. However, there will be a limit to what can be achieved with such limited staff resources. Given the priority given to the delivery of housing by central government, and the priority given by this Council to ensuring local people have access to affordable housing, it is suggested that the appointment of an additional permanent post to assist in housing strategy and housing development work be considered by the Council.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Additional funding would be required for the additional post in the Housing Development and Strategy service area. This may be part funded for a limited period by the Community Housing Fund grant received by the Council earlier this year. (See Cabinet Report May 2017.) It should be noted however that the Council has failed to be able to recruit to the temporary post agreed by Cabinet to be funded from the Community Housing Fund, and to recruit successfully a permanent position needs to be created to attract a suitably qualified and experienced candidate. This will have budget implications.

6. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are none.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The housing strategy sets out objectives of delivering good quality Council housing that is energy efficient and sustainable.

8. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The strategy is broad and aims to reach groups which have barriers accessing housing

9. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS

- 9.1 I believe the previous strategy aim of buying back council properties when they enter the housing market should remain. I would prefer if the number of 'buy backs' could be flexible but still based on buying homes that are for specific needs.
- 9.2 I am therefore supportive of the draft housing strategy.

10. SCRUTINY PANEL COMMENTS

10.1 The Panel have received an outline of the draft strategy, including the timetable and consultation process, and will comment formally when the final strategy is considered.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 Cabinet are requested to note the content of the draft strategy and to approve the overall approach and consultation arrangements.

For further information contact:

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Background Papers: Housing Strategy,
Housing Strategy Delivery Action Plan