

Meeting: Executive

Portfolio Area: Housing

Date: 16th February 2005

HOUSING STRATEGY 2005-2008

(Community Services)

KEY DECISION

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1 PURPOSE

To inform Members of the latest Council Housing Strategy and Action Plan.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members agree to delegate authorisation of amendments to this document to the Executive Member and the Director
- 2.2 Members endorse the Council's Housing Strategy and Action Plan and submission to the Government Office (GO) East.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council is required to produce a Housing Strategy by GO East who will assess it to ensure it meets the national 'fit for purpose' criteria. This assessment evaluates strategies on their focus on meeting housing needs, deliverability, clarity and content.
- 3.2 The strategy seeks to balance national and regional housing priorities with local needs. In February 2002, the Deputy Prime Minister launched the Communities Plan, *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future*. This document sets out the government's long-term plans for delivering sustainable communities in urban and rural areas. Housing shortages, Decent Homes, and liveability are high priorities for Stevenage.
- 3.3 The Communities Plan designates a number of 'Growth Areas' where additional new housing would be concentrated. Stevenage, along with its neighbour, North Herts, is in the London, Stanstead, Cambridge, and Peterborough Growth Area.
- 3.4 Regional priorities are published in the Regional Housing Strategy and many of the key housing issues are relevant to Stevenage, e.g. Decent Homes, affordability, social inclusion, health equality, and sustainable environment.

3.5 Stevenage lies in the London Commuter Belt Sub Region. This includes the 10 Hertfordshire districts, and also 5 Essex districts. Like the region as a whole, the sub region has a mix of urban and rural communities, but differs from it by taking its particular character from the proximity and influence of London. The Council is active in a number of sub regional groups, which engage with strategy, homelessness, maintenance issues, and the enabling of new affordable homes.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 The strategy (Draft Copy available in Members Library) outlines plans and priorities for all housing in the town and develops a framework for those who provide housing in the social and private sectors. There are six priorities:

1. Providing Affordable Homes
2. Tackling Homelessness
3. Supporting Independence & Special Needs
4. Delivering Quality & Choice
5. Enabling Decent Homes
6. Sustainable Communities

4.2 Recent research into the housing market in Stevenage provided key information that has been fed into the strategy. In 2003 the Council commissioned David Couttie Associates to carry out an independent study of the housing requirements (needs, aspirations and demands) for the communities and households of the Borough. Key findings of the survey included:

- Affordability issues due to the local house price/income relationship
- An ageing population
- Requirement for a more balanced housing stock
- Annual need for 1,065 affordable housing units

4.3 Throughout the strategy, reference is made to the Options Appraisal. The main purpose of the Options Appraisal is to decide the future arrangements for managing and maintaining the Council's stock of housing. The appraisal will also consider wider housing issues and the future priorities and direction of the housing strategic framework. The Council wants to consider all the available options and in the meantime, it will continue to make progress on delivering its key objectives.

4.4 The Housing Strategy Action Plan is fundamental to the delivery of the housing strategy. Progress against this Action Plan will be monitored in a variety of ways:

- Individual targets overseen by responsible officers
- Housing strategy group
- FOSTA and other stakeholders will be kept abreast of progress
- Updates in tenants and housing applicants' newsletters

- 4.5 The Council's stakeholders have had the opportunity to contribute to the strategy. The annual housing conference – 'Have a Say Day' offered an important opportunity to influence the development of the housing strategy. A diverse group of stakeholders are invited to contribute to the debate on local housing issues. FOSTA and GO East have been consulted and their comments incorporated into the document.
- 4.6 The strategy is interlinked with the business plan that must also be submitted to GO East. Both are dependent on the outcomes of the stock condition survey, which currently requires additional work to supplement it. Once this is completed both the strategy and business plan will be updated to produce strategic documents for the longer term.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from the production of the Housing Strategy and the HRA Business Plan. However, both of these documents refers extensively to significant underlying financial issues for Housing in Stevenage and the Council's own Housing Stock.

Section Four of the Housing Strategy entitled 'Delivering the Strategy' discusses the resources required. Section Four 'Resources' in the HRA Business Plan details the current Revenue and Capital Budgets for the HRA. Significant financial issues referred to in these documents and to be addressed in the coming year are that:

- In-line with its key objectives the Council has currently allocated significant resources to Housing within its Capital Strategy. The current level of allocation will be reviewed subject to the outcome of the HRA Stock Condition Survey.
- The outcome of the Options Appraisal process has the potential to have a major impact on the Council and the resources available for Housing.
- Funding in support of the Housing Strategy for Stevenage is expected from various sources external to the Council including the Housing Corporation, Housing Partnership, Local Authority Social Housing Grant: transitional programme, and Growth Area Delivery Grant.

5.2 Legal Implications

There are no legal implications.

APPENDICES

- Housing Strategy 2005-2008 (Draft Copy available in Members Library)
- Action Plan (Draft Copy available in Members Library)