

Meeting: Executive

Portfolio Area: Housing

Date: 7 September 2005

HOUSING STRATEGY AND HOUSING BUSINESS PLAN

(Debbie Rabôt – Head of Housing)

KEY DECISION

Author – Debbie Rabôt Ext.No. 2455

Contributors – Jo Barrett, Ext.No. 2590, Pauline Coletta Ext.No. 2933, Adrian Stones

Lead Officer – Celia Twomey Ext.No. 2456

Contact Officer – Debbie Rabôt Ext.No. 2455, Jo Barrett, Ext.No. 2590

1 PURPOSE

To seek approval for the submission of the Housing Strategy and HRA Business Plan to the Government Office for the Eastern Region (Go – East).

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Council be recommended to approve -

- (i) the Housing Strategy and Action Plan
- (ii) The HRA Business Plan and Action Plan

2.2 That Members agree to delegate authorisations and amendments to this document to the Executive Member for Housing and the Strategic Director.

2.3 That Members agree to align the corporate housing priorities under the ambition 'Good Housing for All' to:

- Improve our homes
- Ensure the development of affordable homes

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 We are required to produce both a Housing Strategy and HRA Business Plan that is assessed by Go-East using the national 'fit for purpose' criteria.

3.2 The original drafts considered by the Executive in February, have now been informed by the stock condition survey and the outcome of the Options Appraisal. We can now include in both documents the method by which Stevenage will achieve the Decent Homes Standard by 2010.

Housing Strategy

The Housing Strategy sets out the vision for all housing, across all tenures, for Stevenage. The document clearly states how it has been informed by the national, regional, sub-regional and local agendas. With the Stevenage Partnership, we share an aim of providing “Good housing for all” – which is the title of the Housing Strategy.

The priorities for the Housing Strategy not only embrace national, regional and sub-regional perspective, but the aims of the Stevenage Partnership, the Council’s priorities, the views of the tenants, stakeholders and partners, the HRA Business Plan and our knowledge of housing need in the town and the condition of the town’s houses.

The priorities for Housing, listed in order of importance are:

1. Improve our homes
2. Improve the customer experience of our service
3. Ensure the development of affordable homes
4. Improve support to homeless and vulnerable people
5. Develop communities people are proud of

For each priority our aims for the next five years are clearly set out, with the options we have considered to achieve them. We have also clearly laid out how we will measure our success.

The HRA Business Plan

The HRA Business Plan flows from the Housing Strategy and demonstrates how our stock, and the way we manage it, can contribute to our strategic aims for housing in the Borough. The HRA business plan sets out our priorities for the next 5 years and how we aim to achieve them.

Meeting the Decent Homes Standard is our main priority and the plan sets out how we propose to achieve this target by 2010. The Action plan outlines the timetable to enable the programme to commence in March 2006. Key will be the Asset Management and Procurement strategy, which will set out the methodology for planning, programming and monitoring all repairs, maintenance and improvement works along with how these works should be contracted. A report to the October 2005 Executive will set out these strategies in greater detail.

The Capital and Revenue resources available and the investment required over the next 6 years for the three maintenance standards developed during the Option Appraisal process to deliver Decent Homes are set out in the business plan. Due to the shortfall of funding for all of the options the council propose to pursue the ALMO option to enable the Council to achieve the Decent Homes target by 2010.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 The development of the Housing Strategy gave us the opportunity to re-examine our priorities. The current corporate ambition is 'Good Housing for All' which has two associated priorities:

- work with partners to provide affordable housing
- ensure tenants and those in need of housing received a top quality housing service

We recommend the priorities are amended to give importance to achieving the Decent Homes standard and are changed to:

- Improve our homes
- Ensure the development of affordable homes

4.2 The challenges we face in providing 'Good Housing for All' in Stevenage are:

- attain the Decent Homes Standard for our properties by 2010
- ensure that homes (this includes the private sector and other RSLs) are of a decent standard
- increase the number of affordable homes in the town and reduce the number of people on the housing waiting list
- achieve 2 star status for the Housing Service by the autumn 2007
- prevent homelessness wherever possible and provide a high quality homelessness service

4.3 How we intend to address the priorities and challenges set out in the Housing Strategy and HRA Business Plan are outlined in the Action Plans for both documents.

Progress of both Action Plan's will be monitored by Go-East on an annual basis once we achieve 'Fit for Purpose'.

4.4 The framework for monitoring both documents is:

- Regular 6 weekly monitoring by Head of Housing, Head of Technical Services and the Strategic Director with the Project Managers
- Improving customer satisfaction levels and opportunities to participate in the service is in the work programme for the Housing and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel
- Set up the 'Stevenage Housing Partnership' formed by representatives from the Stevenage Partnership, FOSTA, the Leaseholders Forum and other key stakeholders to meet twice yearly to scrutinise progress made on the Strategy
- Through the annual Service Plan process we will amend the Housing Service Plan to take into account feedback from these groups and on going consultation with our stakeholders

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 refer extensively to significant underlying financial issues for Housing in Stevenage and the Council's own Housing Stock.

Section 5 of the Housing Strategy entitled "Our Resources" discusses the resources required. Section 1.8 "Resources" in the HRA Business Plan details the Revenue and Capital Budgets for the HRA. Significant financial issues referred to in these documents are that:

- In-line with its key objectives the Council has allocated significant resources to Housing within its Capital Strategy. However, as determined by the Options Appraisal process, the Council is proposing to set up an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) in order to secure the level of funding necessary to achieve the Decent Homes target by 2010.
- 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 none

5.3 Policy Implications

The Housing Strategy is a prime policy document and addresses the corporate aim of 'Good Housing for All'

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- Regional Housing Strategy
- London Commuter Belt Strategy
- Housing Needs Survey
- Stock Condition Survey

APPENDICES

- Copies of the Housing Strategy and HRA Business Plan have been sent to all Members under separate cover.