



CABINET: 10 March 2020

Report of: Corporate Director of Place & Community

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor J. Wilkie

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SUBJECT: HOUSING STRATEGY

Wards Affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To review progress of the Council Housing Strategy 2014-2019, consider extending the existing Strategy operating period and approve the action plan for the extended period.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the progress of the Housing Strategy for the period 2014-2019 as shown in Appendix B be noted.

2.2 That the operating term of the existing Housing Strategy be extended to June 2021.

2.3 That the Housing Strategy Action Plan 2020-2021 as shown in Appendix C be approved.

2.4 That the Director of Place and Community be authorised, after consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, to make any further minor amendments to the Housing Strategy Action Plan 2020-2021.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 In March 2014 Cabinet approved a Housing Strategy for 2014–2019 and Action Plan.

- 3.2 There is no longer a statutory requirement for the Council to produce a Housing Strategy; however it is acknowledged that such documents can be key to providing strategic direction on housing related matters and help to support broader economic objectives. They can also be considered as a contextual document to support wider investment planning.
- 3.3 Government no longer provides guidance for local authorities about producing housing strategies. This was also clarified by the publication of the statutory guidance 'Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities' in 2008 which gives local authorities the discretion about how, when, and in what format they document their housing strategy.
- 3.4 A Housing Strategy brings together and builds on a number of local strategies which deal with aspects of housing and any other related activity that leads to the creation of an appropriate sustainable local housing offer. In doing so a Housing Strategy is intended to provide strategic direction on housing related matters and help to support broader economic objectives.
- 3.5 Housing strategies are intended to:
- Provide an overview of housing related issues in the area;
 - Identify any mismatch between housing supply and demand and identify issues such as matters related to housing conditions, affordability, needs of vulnerable groups etc;
 - Set out the key housing objectives for the authority and its partners;
 - Establish priorities for action and spending priorities;
 - Provide an action plan and policy direction to address the housing challenges and problems in the borough.
- 3.6 The Housing Strategy is intended to work in harmony with the Local Plan and other key local strategies.
- 3.7 The 2014 – 2019 Housing Strategy has six delivery objectives.
- Achieve the right supply of new homes including maximising affordable housing;
 - Regenerate and remodel areas of Skelmersdale;
 - Make the best use of all existing homes;
 - Encourage well managed and maintained homes across all tenures;
 - Encourage investment to meet specialist housing requirements;
 - Deliver the Council's Sustainable Energy Strategy 2012- 2020 Residential and Domestic Sector objectives.
- 3.8 Appendix A provides further information about the key delivery actions linked to the above objectives.
- 3.9 The Strategy can influence the creation of attractive places and good quality housing across all tenures. Importantly, having the right "housing offer", a choice of homes in the right location, over a varied price or rent range can help attract investment and workers to the Borough. That in turn can

contribute to supporting the local economy along with helping to retain local people who would have perhaps relocated to more affordable homes in neighbouring boroughs.

- 3.10 Having a varied housing offer can lead to people having opportunities and choices over where they live. Creating high quality well-connected homes contributes to enhancing people's life chances, making positive impacts on health and wellbeing, connections to skills and employment and an improved environment.
- 3.11 In essence an appropriate balance of good quality housing which provides variety, choice and is accessible are fundamental to the well-being of the citizens of any local authority area. This can involve making the best use of the housing that is already there, as well as working effectively with the market to supply new homes.

4.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The Housing Strategy 2014-2019 and action plan is coming to the end of its operating period, however the key aims and strategic housing delivery objectives of the current Housing Strategy remain relevant and supported by the Affordable and Specialist Housing Need Study published in 2018.
- 4.2 Undertaking the development of a new long term Housing Strategy of a five years or more duration is therefore considered not necessary at this time, however an interim approach is proposed in section 5 below.
- 4.3 In terms of delivery achievements, the Council has worked directly and with partners to deliver a number of positive Housing Strategy related outcomes all of which aim to improve the lives of our residents.
- 4.4 Appendix B provides detail of Housing strategy progress / achievements from the Housing Strategy 2014-19 period. Some achievements are:
 - Secured £5.8 million of Homes England Grant investment in to the Borough as part of the development of affordable housing;
 - Enabled the development of 297 affordable homes with pipeline planning approvals expected to deliver 300 affordable homes in the future;
 - Delivered the Land Auction Pilot, one of three nationally, which delivered a capital receipt to the Council and will see the Whalleys site in Skelmersdale provide up to 630 new homes with 146 being affordable based upon the existing planning permissions;
 - Improved Council Housing in line with the Capital Investment Programme;
 - Achieved improvements to the Council housing stock by redeveloping two sites at Firbeck and Beechtrees in Skelmersdale which included the development of 78 affordable homes;

- Have assisted households to improve the energy efficiency of their homes through a range of schemes;
- Administered the Winter Warm Scheme;
- Assisted the Liberty Centre, as part of a Lancashire wide bid, to secure £200k one off funding from the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government which enhanced Domestic Abuse service provision in the Borough;
- Land identified and planning approval obtained, as part of the steps to achieve the development of a Foyer;
- Redeveloped the former Westec Council Offices site in Ormskirk, developing 27 residential dwellings, including 9 affordable;
- Established Tawd Valley Development Company;
- Developed a Financial Inclusion Strategy 2015-2018;
- Developed, using the Councils Affordable Housing Capital budget, in partnership with Regenda Housing Group 61 affordable homes.

5.0 HOUSING STRATEGY PROPOSAL

5.1 It is proposed that the operating term of the existing Housing Strategy is extended slightly to June 2021 and that a new action plan is prepared for the period covering 2020-2021. A new action plan for the extended period is attached in Appendix C for consideration

5.2 A Housing Strategy extension would mean that the six Housing Strategy delivery objectives as highlighted in paragraph 3.7 would remain in operation.

5.3 The recommended approach in paragraph 5.1 is made on the basis that:

- a) The current Housing Strategy aims and objectives remain relevant at this time;
- b) The Council will be commissioning research work, including a new Affordable and Specialist Housing Need Study to be published in autumn 2020, to help inform and act as the evidence base for the development of a new Local Plan;
- c) This same evidence base can then be used for the development of a new long term Housing Strategy for 2022 onwards.

5.4 In summary, the proposal seeks to:

- Extend the existing Housing Strategy to June 2021 with a new action plan covering the extended term;
- Develop a new Housing Strategy for June 2021 onwards once the Council is in receipt of the evidence base that will be commissioned as part of the development of the new local plan, referred to in para 5.3 (b) above. The indicative timetable for the development of a new Housing Strategy for June 2021 onwards is shown in Appendix D

6.0 BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSAL

6.1 An Affordable and Specialist Housing Need Study is necessary in the development of a long term Housing Strategy and so it seems prudent to extend the existing Housing Strategy operating term slightly to enable both the Local Plan and Housing Strategy to align and share the same evidence base. Previously, the development of the Housing Strategy and Local Plan has not been aligned. The benefit of extending the existing Housing Strategy operating term is that:

- It enables the alignment to the commissioning of research which can be used to help inform the development of a new Local Plan but will also feed into the evidence base for a new long term Housing Strategy and Action Plan for June 2021 onwards.
- provides an opportunity to align the respective research requirements for each document when it comes to produce a long term Housing Strategy;
- means that a new Local Plan and new Housing Strategy, will then share the same evidence base;
- it provides an opportunity for the development of the Housing Strategy and new Local Plan policies that are in harmony with each document, as opposed to being slightly out of kilter due to relying upon evidence commissioned at different times;
- enables the development of policies and objectives which are consistent across both documents and by doing so, will avoid misinterpretation / policy conflicts being perceived when the new Local Plan goes through the statutory Local Plan examination stages;
- means policy approaches will be aligned between the new long term Housing Strategy June 2021 onwards and new Local Plan, the consistency of approach of which will mean that no policy conflicts will exist and so there are no policy conflicts which could weaken the Council position at planning appeals.

6.2 If a new housing strategy were to be developed at this time, it would be based upon the existing evidence base which will soon become superseded, within the next 18 months, by the new evidence and research that will be undertaken as part of Local Plan formulation. That would create a situation where the Housing Strategy and Local Plan would each be based upon different evidence strands which could undermine Local Plan formulation.

7.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The Housing Strategy 2014 – 2019 existing Vision is, *"The provision of good quality housing, in the right locations which also supports our economic and regeneration priorities, meets people's changing needs and is situated within pleasant, safe and sustainable communities"*

7.2 The Housing Strategy Vision and Delivery Objectives are in harmony with the Councils overall Corporate Priorities which aim to:

- Deliver tangible and visible improvements in the Borough;
- Engage and empower our local communities;

- Actively promote the Borough as a great place to live, work, visit and invest

8.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 At this stage though no specific resource implications have been identified, key actions will need to be considered through future Service Action Plans.

9.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

9.1 Failure to develop a housing strategy which has clear evidenced based housing delivery objectives will mean that the Council will not be able to target resources effectively to address the housing requirements of the Borough.

10.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

10.1 It is recognised that living in a safe environment in good quality housing can have positive benefits on good physical and mental health. Good health depends on having homes that are safe and free from physical hazards. In contrast, poor quality and inadequate housing contributes to health problems such as chronic diseases and injuries, and can have harmful effects on childhood development.

10.2 The Housing Strategy vision referred to in paragraph 7.1 sets out the Council's aspirations for the housing offer in West Lancashire. It is considered that by working to achieve that vision there will be positive benefits across all the health and wellbeing themes as shown below:

- Promote good health and wellbeing and enable people to flourish
- Prevent and tackle the causes of ill health;
- Empower people in vulnerable, deprived and disadvantaged communities to realise their full health potential;
- Develop and support effective and high quality health and wellbeing services;
- Encourage and enable all people to take a role in identifying and addressing barriers to improve health and wellbeing;
- Increase people's independence throughout their life course and ability to lead full active lives.)

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is a direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Therefore an Equality Impact Assessment is required. A formal Equality Impact Assessment is attached as an Appendix E to this report.

Appendices

Appendix A – Existing Housing Strategy Objectives/ Key Delivery Actions

Appendix B – Housing Strategy 2014-19 Progress

Appendix C – Housing Strategy Action Plan 2020-2021

Appendix D – New Housing Strategy Development Timetable (indicative dates)

Appendix E – EIA – Initial Assessment