

Cherwell District Council

Executive

4 March 2019

Housing Strategy 2019 - 2024 : 'Cherwell - A Place to Prosper'

Report of Assistant Director: Social Care Commissioning and Housing

This report is public

Purpose of report

To consider and agree adoption of the Housing Strategy 2019-2024 and Action Plan 2019-20, taking in to account the results of the public consultation phase.

1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To agree the Housing Strategy 2019-2024 and Action Plan 2019-2020 for adoption and implementation.
- 1.2 To note the results of the public consultation on the Strategy and how these have been taken in to account.
- 1.3 To note the equalities impact assessment that supports the Strategy.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 The previous Housing Strategy for Cherwell District Council was published in 2011 covering the period 2012-2017. It incorporated the Homelessness Strategy which is now a standalone and refreshed Strategy adopted in July 2018 and covering the period 2018-20. Homelessness is therefore not included in the Housing Strategy in any level of detail although clearly delivering new housing and improving existing housing contributes to the prevention and resolution of homelessness.
- 2.2 The Housing Strategy (appendix 1) sets out our priorities for responding to the wider housing needs of the district but with a focus on affordable housing which is the council's key role. It takes particular account of the current and future needs of groups such as older people, disabled people, young people, vulnerable families and people on low income. The housing needs of these groups are a priority in terms of their vulnerability, access to housing, affordability and achieving positive health outcomes.
- 2.3 It is not a statutory requirement to have a Housing Strategy but is seen as good practice in setting out the Council's priorities and plans for meeting housing need

based on local assessments of need. This includes intelligence from key internal and external partners such as Build!, the Bicester Team, Development Management, Oxfordshire County Council and Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. It is also important that we are clear and open with our partners (particularly Registered Providers (RPs)) and communities about what we expect to deliver. We aim to set out clearly how we will create the right environment and support them in their work to deliver housing in response to identified need.

- 2.4 Cherwell District Council has a strong track record of enabling and delivering affordable housing and finding innovative solutions to meet housing need. This commitment is unwavering and our partnership with Oxfordshire County Council gives further opportunities to develop the diversity of housing our communities need.
- 2.5 We expect the Housing Strategy to guide and influence partners, particularly developers and RPs, in helping to deliver quality housing that meets our community's needs and enables them to live healthy, positive lives. We are very clear that we are not just in the business of delivering affordable housing. We also have a key role and responsibility in building sustainable and cohesive communities. Working with partners to achieve this is essential.
- 2.6 We expect the Strategy to be a material consideration in Development Management decisions and the evolution of Planning policy and it is clearly important that Housing and Planning work closely to deliver our ambitions.

3.0 Report Details

- 3.1 Since our previous strategy was produced there have been some major changes in legislation and national policy. In summary:
 - 3.1.1 Welfare Reforms – The Welfare Reform Act 2012 introduced significant changes to the benefits system including new caps on local housing allowance (LHA) and housing benefit, the creation of Universal Credit (UC) and the reform of Council Tax Benefit and Disability Living Allowance (DLA). The Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 contained further changes including the ending of automatic entitlement for 18-21 year olds and the restriction of benefits for families with more than two children.
 - 3.1.2 The Care Act 2014 – The Care Act 2014 extends the role of local authorities with adult social care responsibilities who provide assistance to people who have care needs. The Act defines housing as a 'health-related service', highlighting the need for integrating care and support provision. To meet these needs Adult Care will and local housing authorities need to work closely to provide a range of housing and support services, such as supported housing and extra care housing.
 - 3.1.3 Housing and Planning Act 2016 – The Housing and Planning Act 2016 introduced a number of policy changes including:
 - the potential for extension of the Right to Buy (RTB) to RPs
 - starter homes (a home available to first time buyers between 23 and 39 at a discount of 20%) were defined as affordable housing for the purposes of the National Planning Policy Framework

- local planning authorities have a duty to keep a register of demand for self-build properties and grant planning permission for adequate serviced plots to meet the measured demand for self-build housing in the district.
 - new and changed enforcement powers for local housing authorities aimed at tackling rogue landlords
- 3.1.4 The Housing White Paper 2017 - 'Fixing our broken housing market', released in February 2017 set out the Government's proposals to:
- make changes to the planning system to facilitate development and build homes faster
 - ensure the required infrastructure is delivered at the right time
 - support smaller builders, local authorities and housing associations to build
 - support building for rent and custom and self-build initiatives
 - provide more support for first time buyers alongside other affordable provision
 - introduce a revised methodology for calculating housing need.
- 3.1.5 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRAct) - implemented in April 2018 and has substantially increased the duties owed by local authorities to homeless people and people threatened with homelessness. These include a greater emphasis on homelessness prevention with councils being required to help people at risk of losing accommodation as soon as they are threatened with homelessness within 56 days and increased duties to households not in priority need.
- 3.1.6 National Planning Policy Framework – the government published the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and amended Planning Policy Guidance in 2018. Changes include:
- introduction of a new Affordable Housing definition. Social rented homes are reintroduced into the government's definition and it is broadened to include Build to Rent units (marketed at an affordable rent), Starter Homes and Discounted Market Sale housing.
 - At least 10% of homes on 10+ dwelling schemes should be for affordable home ownership, with exemption rural exception sites, Build to Rent schemes and specialist housing proposals (such as for the elderly or students).
 - Introduction of 'entry level exception sites' suitable for first-time buyers or those looking to rent their first home. These sites must comprise a high proportion of entry-level homes and adjacent to existing settlements.
 - Shifting viability assessment from the decision-making stage to the plan making stage and 'where up to date policies have been set out the contributions expected from development, planning applications that comply with them should be assumed to be viable'.
 - Introduction of a new standardised housing needs assessment
- 3.1.7 The Social Housing Green Paper – The government published the green paper 'A new deal for social housing' on 14 August 2018, setting out a proposed strategy for reforming social housing. It aims to rebalance the relationship between landlords and residents, tackle stigma and ensure social housing can act as a stable base and support social mobility. It is based around five themes:
- ensuring homes are safe and decent
 - effective resolution of complaints about social landlords

- empowering residents and strengthening the regulator
- tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities
- expanding supply and supporting home ownership

3.1.8 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing reforms - From 1 October 2018 the Government extended the number of properties subject to mandatory licensing so it is now a requirement that HMOs that are occupied by 5 or more people from two or more separate households regardless of how many floors are subject to mandatory licensing.

These developments demonstrate the dynamic nature of housing and related policy in recent years and have been taken in to account and reflected in the Strategy.

Key Facts – State of the District’s Housing

3.2 This is the evidence base that has been collated and used to identify what our priorities should be and where the challenges and gaps are. Just as the Homelessness Review informed the Homelessness Strategy the State of the District has informed the draft Housing Strategy and is a public document published as a resource that partners and interested parties can refer to. The document can be found as Appendix D at <https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/downloads/download/1329/housing-strategy-2018-2023-consultation-documents>

3.3 A summary of key achievements under the previous strategy and a document setting out the strategic context for the new strategy can also be found on this webpage.

Housing Strategy 2019 – 2024: The Priorities

3.4 We identified the following 3 high level priorities in consultation with the Lead Member, Housing and key internal and external partners. We also drew on the points raised by the 20 Councillors who attended a Member workshop about the Strategy on 9 October 2018.

PRIORITY 1: Increase the supply and diversity of affordable housing to ensure the right types of housing are available in the right places.

PRIORITY 2 : Improve the quality and sustainability of our homes and build thriving, healthy communities

PRIORITY 3 : Enhance opportunities for residents to access suitable homes and have housing choices

3.5 These priorities have been supported and accepted by the majority of consultees and we believe these are the right overarching priorities for the Strategy.

3.6 The Strategy expands on these priorities to describe what we are aiming to achieve and deliver. The action plan details the ‘how’ in 2019/20 and will be refreshed and monitored annually in recognition of the changing policy landscape, local authority structures and resources and key partnerships.

3.7 We have made a number of changes to the detail of how we will deliver against these priorities, taking in to account what consultees have told us.

Consultation

- 3.8 Following the draft Strategy being approved by the Executive on 3rd December 2018 we consulted on the Strategy between 7th December 2018 and 25th January 2019. This took the form of stakeholder meetings and a web based questionnaire. 64 people commented through the website, 47 of whom were local residents (73% of responders). We held stakeholder events in January which were attended by 51 people and received many comments from the voluntary and community sector, RPs and county council colleagues in particular at these events. 48 people commented on the strategy via social media. This amounts to a total of 162 respondents.
- 3.9 Consultation responses are set out at appendix 3 with comments on how we have responded to these submissions.
- 3.10 In summary some of the key issues that we have taken in to account in the final Strategy are:
- Strengthening reference to the need for developments of affordable housing to include a proportion that is for social rent. This is a challenge in terms of funding and getting developers/RPs to deliver homes for social rent but this is an issue we need to pursue. (We are expecting a positive outturn of 585 affordable units in 2018/19, significantly above the target of 400. But in future we would like a proportion to be for social rent).
 - The need to make people aware of their housing options more widely, beyond households that are facing homelessness. We are reviewing Cherwell Bond Scheme to see how we can help other groups in housing need e.g. keyworkers and other low income households, in addition to the homeless households we already assist in to the private rented sector.
 - Meeting the housing needs of older people, young people and disabled people – our joint working with Oxfordshire County Council gives greater opportunity to meet these needs in our District and beyond and in working with providers to achieve this (e.g. Sanctuary have now commented on their oversupply of Housing for Older People/age defined general needs properties but accept that the condition and type of this stock may not be considered desirable and have said they would welcome the opportunity to contribute to an Older Persons Housing Strategy. We are also working with Oxfordshire County Council to deliver new accommodation options for vulnerable young people e.g. care leavers. We are clear that delivery cannot be a ‘one size fits all’ and we need to deliver customised solutions for different groups of young people and older people.
 - Concerns about the condition of some properties in the private rented sector and in registered provider accommodation were raised by a number of respondents. We are pursuing enforcement activity and are monitoring this closely although complaints about RPs have been falling year on year. Targets have been set for this activity in the action plan. We agree that we need to do more to help tenants who have problems with their landlord or the quality of their housing and are redesigning the website to make this help easier to find. We will promote the help on offer via web and publicity/social media.
 - Closer joint working needed between Housing and Planning to ensure quality standards are met and planning processes facilitate the acceleration of housing delivery, particularly in view of the Growth Deal. Some respondents also questioned whether the planning requirements for 30% of housing development in Banbury and Bicester to be affordable housing and 35% elsewhere in the

district are high enough e.g. compared to Oxford city which has a requirement for 50% affordable housing. This is an issue that warrants debate and would need to be picked up in the next review of the Local Plan.

- Many points were raised by the voluntary and community sector about helping homeless households and these will be fed in to delivery of the Homelessness Strategy.
- We plan to set up a Housing Coordination Group to coordinate officer activity in delivering the action plan.

3.11 The number and the quality of responses to the Strategy is very encouraging and demonstrates that local people and partners are interested and engaged in housing issues and in meeting the housing needs of local communities.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

3.12 The Committee considered the Strategy at its meeting on 19 February 2019.

3.13 Points of clarification were raised and there was discussion about the need for social rented housing and whether our local plan requirements for affordable housing are set at high enough levels.

3.14 The Committee noted that we are on track to deliver around 700 lets to households on the housing register in 2018/19 and the majority of these are at social rent.

3.15 The Committee supported the proposed review and enhancement of Cherwell Bond Scheme and the need to reach out to people in housing need who may be able to join the housing register but perceive there is no hope of gaining a property.

3.16 It was agreed that the Committee would receive a report on delivery of the action plan, 12 months from now.

Action Plan

3.17 Attached at appendix 2 is the Action Plan 2019-20 for implementation of the Strategy. This will be refreshed annually. Although 92% of consultees support our priorities 44% did not agree that the actions would deliver the priorities. This might be a reflection of the ambitions within the Strategy and the fact that the action plan is focussed on year 1 of a 5 year strategy. In response to this we have tightened the action plan to ensure it is clearly linked to the priorities and deliverable within our resources. We recognise that the housing market is dynamic and affected by national policy, changes in the economy and Brexit. Therefore it is essential that we keep the action plan under review and adapt our plans when environmental factors affect the local housing situation.

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 The Housing Strategy is an important document in setting out the council's ambitions and priorities against Housing which is a key Business Plan priority (relates directly to BP priorities: Deliver Affordable Housing, Prevent Homelessness and Deliver Innovative and Effective Housing Schemes but also to wider priorities such as Promote Health and Wellbeing, Enhance Community Resilience and Support and Safeguard Vulnerable People).

- 4.2 Consultation responses have given us important information about the role many of our partners are keen to play in helping us deliver the Strategy. Many respondents confirmed the challenges of delivering the volume of housing that our communities need at rents that are truly affordable and of a quality and accessibility that people have a right to expect. Many responses were about tackling homelessness and meeting the needs of vulnerable people. The challenge of providing the diversity of housing and support required within constrained budgets and in a housing market where house prices are out of reach for the majority of people was raised by a number of respondents. Public sector partners raised the importance of responding to changing demographics and the diversity of housing we will need to deliver for older people and disabled adults in particular. Our partnership with Oxfordshire County Council is a crucial mechanism for this delivery and in addressing gaps in housing provision that affect particular groups e.g. care leavers.
- 4.3 The Strategy is supported by an equalities impact assessment, attached at appendix 4.

5.0 Financial and Resource Implications

- 5.1 Delivery of the Housing Strategy requires significant investment of time and resource by the council.

Decisions about specific projects and developments will need to be made, depending on the business case, throughout the lifetime of the Strategy.

Comments checked by:

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6.0 Legal Implications

- 6.1 The Housing Strategy is not a statutory requirement but takes account of the relevant legislation regarding housing.

Comments checked by:

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7.0 Decision Information

Key Decision

Financial Threshold Met: no

Community Impact Threshold Met: yes

Wards Affected

All

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

Deliver Affordable Housing, Prevent Homelessness and Deliver Innovative and Effective Housing Schemes but also to wider priorities such as Promote Health and Wellbeing, Enhance Community Resilience and Support and Safeguard Vulnerable People

Lead Councillor

Councillor John Donaldson, Lead member for Housing

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
1	Draft Housing Strategy 2019-24
2	Action Plan 2019-20
3	Consultation Responses
4	Equalities Impact Assessment
Background Papers	
None	
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