

Executive

Cherwell Housing Strategy and Tenancy Strategy 2012-17

July 2013

Report of Head of Regeneration and Housing

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Executive with an update on the Housing Strategy 2012-17 and Tenancy Strategy 2012-17

This report is public

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended:

- (1) To note the contents of the report and progress to date in delivering the Council's Housing strategy and the Council's Tenancy Strategy
- (2) To receive a further update in 12 months' time.

Executive Summary

In 2012 Cherwell District Council approved the publication of two key strategic documents:

- Cherwell Housing Strategy (2012 – 17) "*Enterprise – Innovation – Empowerment*" 2012-17
- Cherwell Tenancy Strategy(2012 – 17) "Transparent solutions serving individual and local needs"

These are both statutory documents (Local Government Act 2003 and Localism Act 2011).

Much has happened in the year since these strategies were produced at a national level (welfare reform, reduced HCA Grant etc.) which has impacted at a local level.

This highlight report will give a brief overview of the work that has been undertaken over the past year. It also provides a summary of any key changes to the local and national context in which homes are built and housing related services delivered.

Proposals

- (1) That the report and progress to date is noted by the Executive
- (2) A further update report is brought back to Executive in 12 months

Background Information

The Council's Housing Strategy contains six main priorities that the Council identified it would deliver over the strategy period. These are:

- Increase the supply and access to housing
- Develop financially inclusive, sustainable communities
- House our most vulnerable residents
- Ensure homes are safe, warm and well managed
- Prevent Homelessness
- Maximise resources and be an investment ready district

The Council's Tenancy Strategy provides guidance for RPs (Registered Providers) operating in the Cherwell area. It sets out the Council's position on the provision of affordable housing including the use of flexible tenancies, affordable rents and the use of private sector tenancies for homeless households.

Both strategies have been produced at a time of great change at a national level. Most notably:

- welfare reform
- reduced HCA Grant
- tenancy reform

This report touches on the local impact of these changes in terms of demand, supply and reconfiguration of service provision.

Key Issues for Consideration

The key issues to consider are progress and context.

The Housing Strategy is delivered by the whole of the Housing Service including:

- **The Housing and Regeneration Delivery Team**, which has an enabling role (supporting RPs and developers) and a direct development role ~ such as the empty homes programme and the Build! @ programme.
- **The Housing Needs Team** are responsible for delivering the housing options service. This also includes nominating applicants from the Council's housing register and delivering the Council's statutory duties to the homeless including homeless prevention and provision of temporary accommodation.
- **The Private Sector Housing Team** which manage the Disabled Facilities Grants, Houses in Multiple Occupation and housing enforcement actions.

Below are some of the highlights from the last year from the six Strategic Priorities set out in the Housing Strategy:

Priority 1: Increasing the supply and access to housing

- Officers continue to promote the successful Landlords' grants to part fund improvements in return for nomination rights from the Council. 15 were approved in 2012-13 worth £253,000, 7 of which were completed within the year.
- Housing Services has enabled the delivery of 113 new affordable homes in 2012/13 by supporting RP's and working with planners and developers.
- The Council's 'Build' Programme has delivered 7 refurbished properties for single people. A further two refurbishment schemes are on site which will deliver 21 affordable flats to rent and the 21 shared ownership properties at Kingsmere are due to start on site in July 2013.
- The council has joined the Local Authority Mortgage Scheme to help first time buyers onto the property ladder.
- Officers continue to provide a wide range of advice and support services to enable those in housing need to be able to access suitable accommodation. The team has prevented over 240 households becoming homeless through its prevention activity

Priority 2: Developing financially and socially sustainable communities

- The 'Build' programme is creating opportunities for apprenticeships on its new build and refurbishment schemes.
- Work is underway to set up a Credit Union to enable greater access for those who may be financially excluded to be able to access cheaper loans and bank accounts and manage their money.

Priority 3: Providing housing for our most vulnerable residents

- A business case is being developed to assess the possibility of joint funding a Housing OT post to enhance deliverability.
- Officers are working closely with RP's specifically Sanctuary regarding their sheltered housing review to ensure that the most vulnerable clients continue to be suitably housed.
- Officers continue to attend key strategic meetings in relation to (former) Supporting People activities including the Housing Support Advisory Group to maintain an active role in forming strategic decisions which will directly affect services in Cherwell District

Priority 4: Ensuring homes are safe, warm and well managed

- The annual Houses in Multiple Occupation inspection programme has been established and will now be carried out over the next year
- Officers have carried out 126 enforcement actions in the last year to address unsatisfactory conditions to ensure that residents can be confident that they are able to live in a warm, safe home.
- A Stock Modelling exercise is now completed and is currently being analysed to inform on future service delivery.
- The Council has become a founder, shareholder member of the Community Interest Company called Green Deal Together which will shortly become active as a Green Deal Provider.
- CDC have successfully bid for DECC funding led by the Eco Bicester Team, to freely assess and install Green Deal measures in Bicester in order to test out Green Deal across the District.

Priority 5: Preventing Homelessness

- Officers continue to participate to deliver on the No Second Night Out initiative by working to ensure that anyone coming to the Council presenting as street homeless will not need to face another night on the streets.
- In 2012/13 Officers gave housing advice to 1,131 households who presented as 'at risk of homelessness'. Of these:
 - 328 cases involved detailed casework to prevent homelessness successfully
 - 127 statutory homeless decisions were made
 - 84 cases required Temporary accommodation for a short or medium period.

Though these figures reflected a similar level of performance as in 2011/12 it should be noted that there has been an increase in requests for assistance from 2011 onwards. This reflects the national picture with cases continuing to become more complex and challenging.

- A Homelessness Action Plan is being drafted to drive forward the homeless prevention agenda which CDC has been so successful in achieving to date. This will have a focus on personal resilience, responsibility, resilience, health & wellbeing. This will be launched for consultation on 17th July
- Places of Change accommodation is being developed as part of the CDC's Build Programme. 7 units have been completed with a further 13 units to come through in 2013, to enable a housing solution for single people in housing need, including a number of people who are homeless.
- 42 new households were accommodated in the Private sector in 2011/12 through use of the Council's cashless deposit bond scheme. To date over 250 households remain successfully accommodated in the private rented sector through the support of the Councils Scheme.
- Cherwell have been a very successful Council in participating in the Government 's Mortgage Rescue Scheme with 7 households facing repossession successfully in staying in their existing homes and a further 11 cases are awaiting completion . This is the best performance in Oxfordshire and for the South East of England.

Priority 6: Maximising resources – Investment –Ready District

- Officers continually explore opportunities to attract public and private sector inward investment. This includes HCA Grant, trust funding and private sector investment through private developers.
- The Cherwell Community Land Trust has been established and is on its way to commencing its first scheme and start building up an asset base to safeguard investment into affordable housing in the district in perpetuity.
- Officers have been successful in working collaboratively with OCC on the transfer of land for the use of affordable housing.

Local and National Context

Over the period of the Housing and Tenancy Strategy there have been and will be a number of issues which will present many challenges as well as new opportunities for Cherwell District Council and its partners.

Welfare Reform

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 introduced major changes to the social welfare system. As a result of welfare reform and the introduction of universal credit, there will be a fundamental change for housing organisations and for those receiving benefit. There are a number of areas in which changes will be made and are summarised below.

Universal Credit

- Benefit claimants will receive a single payment of all the benefit to which they are entitled, monthly in arrears.
- Direct payment of rent to social landlords will cease except in a few exceptional cases, meaning that some claimants may struggle to manage their budgets and social landlords will need to spend much more time pursuing their rent collection.

Benefit Cap

Welfare Reforms include the introduction of a benefit cap maximum of £500 per week for households with children and £350 for singles with an exception for :

- Single people working 16 hours per week
- Couples working 24 hours between them per week.
- People in receipt of the certain benefits including disability living allowance.

Social Sector Size Criteria

Working age tenants who are under occupy their homes will have their benefit reduced by 14% for one extra bedroom and 25% for two or more. This affects over 900 social tenancies in Cherwell. The Council has worked with Registered Providers to minimise the effects by changing the priority for downsizers in the Allocations Policy, by the use of Discretionary Housing Payments and through the development programme providing a greater number of one and two bedroom homes.

Personal Independence Payments (PIP)

Personal Independence payments are being introduced to replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA). There is no automatic transfer from DLA to PIP and it is anticipated that there will be at least 10% fewer claims allowed. This will mean a reduced income for those households.

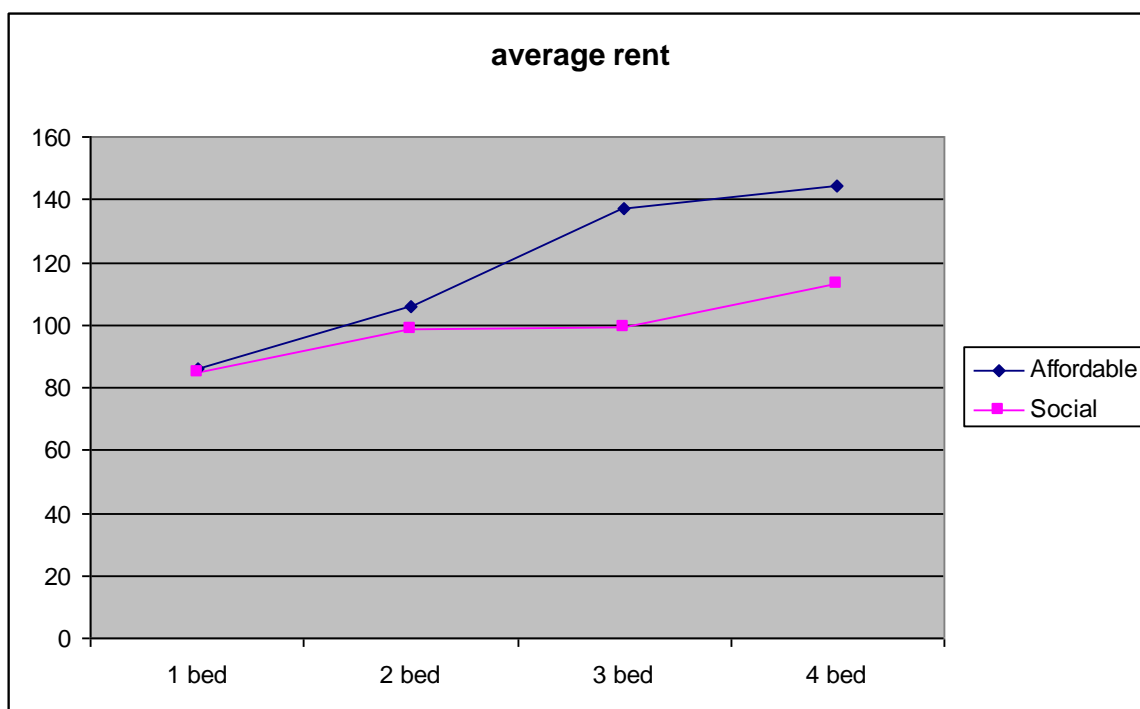
Crisis Payments

The existing scheme has been replaced by local schemes for which upper tier Local Authorities take responsibility. In Oxfordshire, the emphasis is on benefits in kind, such as vouchers for the Food Bank, though cash grants can be made in some circumstances. There are components of the new scheme both of which are cash limited and can only be granted once a year

Affordable Rents

The proportion of conversion of exiting social rented homes to affordable rents since the introduction of this new product has been significantly higher than the one third of homes requested set out in Cherwell's Tenancy Strategy. As part of RP's contract with the HCA, RPs must convert a set amount of Social Rented properties to Affordable Rent in order meet their financial returns and fund additional affordable housing. CDC officers continue to negotiate with RPs to take a strategic view, assess the impact of conversions on affordability for tenants and explore solutions to mitigate risk wherever possible.

The rent differentials between Social and Affordable Rent are shown in the table below, identifying that the differential increases are more significant for larger homes. Negotiations between CDC Officers and RPs have led to some RP's starting to exclude their larger properties from conversion to affordable rents.



New Allocation Policy Implementation

A new Allocation policy was agreed by Executive in October 2012. Implementation has necessitated a new IT system and the withdrawal from the Sub-Regional system. This complex process is expected to be completed by mid-October with the new policy fully implemented and operational by the end of 2013.

Health & Wellbeing Board

With substantial changes taking place in the social care and health arenas, it is key that Cherwell maintain strong strategic links with the new Health and Wellbeing Board and the key delivery groups and work strands which come from this decision making body.

Funding for supported housing projects for young people and floating support services will all be affected by re-commissioning. Very careful review and planning will be needed to sustain and continue this type of provision

Conclusion

This report illustrates just a small part of the overall work being done in the District by the council and partners to deliver affordable housing, housing related support and to prevent homelessness and improve housing standards.

In order to ensure that the Housing Strategy and the Tenancy Strategy delivers on its promises a multi-disciplinary Housing Strategy Steering Panel will be established to optimise opportunity, work collaboratively and build on the success to date. .

Each year of the Strategy a report will come to Executive in order to give an update on the past year's activities on the Housing Strategy, and what the future year will bring. It is intended to provide a brief position statement on how the Council is achieving its strategic housing objectives and allow Executive to feed back on the on-going work.

Implications

Financial:

It is the intention that the majority of actions will be undertaken within the existing resources available to the Council and through the inward investment already secured by CDC and its partners. CDC will continue to seek further investment opportunities to respond to on-going housing need and find creative solutions to maintain high levels of performance.

Comments checked by Karen Curtin, Head of Finance and Procurement 01295 221551

Legal:

The Housing Strategy and Tenancy Strategy are statutory documents which a local authority is required to develop.

Comments checked by Richard Hawtin, Team Leader (Property and Contracts) 01295 221695

Risk Management:

There are many changes taking place in the housing environment which could impact on the delivery of a number of actions and delivering on the vision of the

Tenancy Strategy. It is therefore important that a Housing Strategy Steering Panel is formed in order to monitor and control the delivery of both strategies and to manage the possible impacts of changes taking place at a national and local level and provide regular reporting

Comment checked by Chris Stratford, Head of Regeneration and Housing

Equalities

The Housing Strategy and Tenancy Strategy will contribute to the Corporate Equality Action Plan 2012-15. Where it is deemed appropriate and proportional individual Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out on any policies, procedures or initiatives that derive from a specific action point from either the Housing Strategy or Tenancy Strategy.

Comments checked by Claire Taylor, Corporate Performance Manager 0300 0030113

Wards Affected

All

Corporate Plan Themes

Cherwell, a district of opportunity
A safe and healthy Cherwell

Lead Member

Councillor Miss Debbie Pickford
Lead Member for Housing

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
None	
Background Papers	
None	
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