

Public
Key Decision - Yes

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Housing Strategy 2020-2025
Date: Cabinet – 22nd October 2020
Executive Portfolio: Executive Leader
Report by: Interim Corporate Director, David Edwards
Wards affected: All

Executive Summary:

At the end of July 2020, a revised set of core strategies and plans were discussed and agreed for the Council. Work is progressing on these documents to an agreed timetable.

The attached Housing Strategy has been developed following internal and external consultation - including a member workshop with Overview and Scrutiny in early August. External consultation has been undertaken informally and formally with a variety of housing providers and interested parties.

A separate one-year action plan has also been produced; this contains details on how the outcomes set out in the strategy will be accomplished. Given the current challenges in responding to COVID-19 and the ongoing uncertainty it was felt that providing a plan for the next twelve months was appropriate. This plan will change further depending on local and national circumstances.

Recommendation:

- (a) To agree the Housing Strategy for 2020-25 and accompanying one-year action plan.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To set out the strategic direction for housing in Huntingdonshire in the medium term.
- 1.2 To highlight the housing priorities and how these will be achieved by the Council and through working in partnership.
- 1.3 To set out a short-term action plan for the next twelve months, noting that further work will need to be undertaken to refine these details, particularly in response to COVID-19 and the likelihood of further housing related legislative change. Whilst the action plan will be updated during the next 5 years it is not anticipated that the Strategy will change significantly.
- 1.4 To request that the Cabinet agrees the attached documents which will then form a key part of the new Strategies and Plans bookcase for the Council.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/ BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Members agreed a revised set of Plans and in July 2020. The table below contains the high-level documents that the Council will be using to set out future objectives, priorities and service delivery. This suite of documents will be brought together over the next 15 months.

Overarching Plans	Outcome Plans	Strategic Plans	Activity Plans
Place Strategy to 2050 (Vision for Huntingdonshire)	Local Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Asset Management Strategy• <i>Waste Strategy</i>• Housing Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Corporate Plan Asset Management Plan</i>• Waste Minimisation Plan
	Community Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Housing Strategy• <i>Consultation and Engagement Strategy</i>• <i>Leisure and Health Strategy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Corporate Plan</i>
	Economic Growth Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transport Strategy• Climate Change Strategy• <i>Commercial Investment Strategy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Regeneration Plan</i>
Vision for HDC	Core Service Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Workforce Strategy</i>• Digital Strategy• <i>Leisure and Health Strategy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Information Management Plan</i>• <i>Medium Term Financial Strategy</i>• <i>Service Plan(s) (SMs)</i>

- 2.2 The documents printed in italics will span more than one of the outcome areas, those highlighted in bold have been identified by Overview and Scrutiny for further involvement as part of their work programme for 2020/21.

3. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 3.1 The preferred option of bringing forward the Strategy at this stage is reflected in the report. It is recognised that housing policy, need and provision is changing all the time and the document represents an evidence led approach in determining the housing priorities and objectives for the Council. Housing is a high priority and it is important that the objectives and outcomes are clearly

defined, many of which involve working with other public sector organisations, registered providers, and the private sector.

- 3.2 **Delay** - There was an option to delay in updating the Housing Strategy until a later date. However, given the importance of having a clear policy around Housing and the broad range of Council services that the elements of the strategy touch it was important to update the document now. There are also several pieces of current work including the A141 and Wyton where it would be beneficial to have an updated strategy in place. In addition, the Council currently has a vacant Housing Manager post and reviewing the strategy and identifying the immediate priority actions at this stage has helped to shape the job requirements.
- 3.3 **To present the housing outcomes in another document** – the housing objectives could be captured in one of the other documents. Whilst some high-level objectives are set out in the Local Plan this is a longer-term document and does not contain a high level of housing detail. By incorporating housing into another document would also devalue this key priority for the Council which was recognised when the planning bookcase was assembled and also by the member interest that has been shown throughout the development of this document.
- 3.4 **Do nothing** - there is always a do-nothing option, this would result in the Council not having a current strategy in place which would limit some of the wider aspirations and prioritisation of housing activity.

4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

- 4.1 The Performance and Growth Panel discussed the Housing Strategy 2020-2025 at its meeting on 7th October 2020. Members have stated that the ambition of the Strategy should be recognised. Moreover, the aims and objectives contained in the Action Plan should be endorsed. While there is concern at the proposed reduction in Disabled Facility Grant spending, the Panel has accepted that better use should be made of the funding to achieve improved value for money.
- 4.2 The Panel has discussed how residents who are not eligible for a Housing Association property and who do not meet the eligibility criteria for private rented accommodation might obtain accommodation under the Strategy. Importantly, if the Council were to become a landlord of private properties then it could act in a more socially responsible way and provide accommodation for such residents.
- 4.3 After further deliberation the Panel established that the Strategy does not contain rules that would prevent the Council from working with local authority partners. It allows and even encourages the Council to take a pragmatic approach to whom it will work with according to circumstances.

5. KEY IMPACTS/ RISKS

5.1 **Clarity of purpose** – if the Council does not have an up to date strategy in place it makes it difficult to engage with potential partners and plan service delivery.

5.2 **The focus of the housing work becomes quickly out of date or has limited relevance** – mitigation is through setting a single year action plan any emerging issues will be captured. In the current climate there are challenges around meeting housing need and affordable housing, this is expected to become more acute in the short term. There are also various regional and local pieces of work underway that the strategy will inform, and which will inform future housing action plans. It is anticipated that the headline outcomes set out in the strategy will remain for the medium term

5.3 **The strategy does not reflect the local position and requirements** – the Council has brought in an independent expert to undertake the development of the strategy and action plan. Informal and formal engagement has taken place on the development of the documents and once an initial draft had been produced. Feedback has been positive in terms of the aspirations of the Council and the range of housing issues that have been covered.

6. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

6.1 The Corporate Plan was agreed by Cabinet in September 2020. This includes housing objectives and targets for the coming year. As with this action plan these objectives will be regularly reviewed particularly in response to the COVID-19 situation.

7. CONSULTATION

7.1 There has been formal consultation on these proposals with a range of housing organisations.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There is a statutory duty to provide a range of housing support.

9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 In delivering the work outlined in the action plan there are implications for several council departments. The Council is also currently recruiting to the vacant Housing Manager post, the successful candidate will have a key role in progressing this work.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

10.1 The Council needs to have a Housing Strategy that is current and fit for purpose. The attached document reflects the latest housing context in Huntingdon and sets out a broad range of desired housing outcomes for the future. It identifies 3 overarching priorities:

1. New Homes to meet the needs of Huntingdonshire now and in the future
2. Homes to enable people to live independent and healthy lives
3. Working in partnership to achieve shared objectives

10.2 Providing a one-year action plan also provides some further information on how these priorities will be achieved, and where achievement of priority actions are dependent on the variety of ongoing and not yet completed local and regional studies that need to be considered in the district. An annual action plan was strongly supported by those who responded to the external consultation.

11. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

- 11.1 Appendix 1 – Huntingdonshire District Council Housing Strategy 2020 – 2025
Appendix 2 – Housing Strategy Annual Action Plan

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1 Formal feedback responses on the final draft document have been received from:-

Councillor Wilson
Cross Keys Housing
Longhurst Group
Urban and Civic

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