

**DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY 2004/07
(Report by the Head of Housing Services)**

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to consult members on and seek approval of the draft Housing Strategy 2004/07.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1** Each year Government via *GO-East* invites local authorities to submit a Housing Strategy and also seeks other prescribed documents and statistical information. This information will be used by *GO-East* and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) for several purposes: to inform about local, regional and national housing issues/statistics; to assess individual authority's performance against benchmarks, government initiatives and policy; and to invite authorities to bid for capital resources for the following financial year.
- 2.2** The Housing Strategy document is the Council's assessment of the housing needs of the District. It details the issues locally and the proposals for the future.
- 2.3** In the current round authorities are asked to submit four documents: a Housing Strategy; a statistical appendix (this is to be transmitted electronically on their internet based data collection system 'InterForm'); the seventh progress report for the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995; and a HRA Business Plan (this is not applicable to HDC as the Council has transferred its housing stock).
- 2.4** The documents form part of the information used when Government Offices and the Housing Corporation make their assessment of each authority's efficiency and effectiveness in meeting housing need.
- 2.5** A new capital expenditure control system, based on a prudential code, is expected to be introduced from April 2004. This will allow authorities to borrow as long as they can demonstrate that they can meet the repayments. The importance of the HIP submission will, therefore, logically change to allocating capital grants and the **revenue** support that the Government will provide in relation to the Council's proposed capital spending. No proposals on how this revenue support will be allocated have yet been published.
- 2.6** The Government ended Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LASHG) support from the 1 April 2003. Transitional funding arrangements have been made for 2003/04. The result of bids for transitional funding for specific housing schemes has not yet been announced.

- 2.7** From April 2004 there will be a 'single regional (financial) housing pot' for the East of England. The newly formed Regional Housing Board (East of England) is to submit its recommendations on strategic priorities for funding, informed by the Regional Housing Strategy for the East of England, to the Minister by the end of July 2003. The allocations to the region for 2004/5 and 2005/6 will be announced towards the end of the calendar year.
- 2.8** Much of the detail on the prioritising of bids for transitional funding, the size of the regional pot and how allocations will be made from the regional pot have yet to be decided. We are, therefore, unable to give guidance on the implications for future local affordable housing schemes at this time.
- 2.9** The allocation of funding for disabled facilities grants remains with *Go-East*, as normal.
- 2.10** The documentation submitted to *GO-East* will also be used by the specialist Housing Inspectorate, as part of any Best Value Review process. In addition, the strategy and *Go-East's* assessment of the quality of the strategy together with our performance will form part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of this Council.
- 2.11** Our Strategy document has been restricted, by the ODPM, to a 30 page submission. It has been difficult to contain the document to that length whilst satisfying the level of detail sought in their Guidance Notes. It should be borne in mind that any additional comments may need to be matched by a reduction in content elsewhere.
- 2.12** The Housing Strategy, with covering letter, has been sent to all elected members of the District Council. It has been sent out in advance of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Cabinet and Council to allow members to digest the content and to raise any comments with members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Cabinet or for clarification direct to the Head of Housing Services prior to consideration at Council.
- 2.13** Last year the Government also introduced a new rating of 'Fit for Purpose'. This is a pass or fail test for housing strategies which will supersede the previous rating system. Once fit for purpose status has been achieved there is no requirement to submit a new strategy for 3 years.
- 2.14** We are one of only three Councils in the East of England (48 authorities) to achieve the 'Fit for Purpose' status. However, because of new information from the housing needs survey, and census data, it has been agreed with *GO-East* that we will revise our strategy in the current year. *GO-East* has advised us that they will not assess the revised strategy.
- 2.15** This year a new freedom, to agree a submission date for the strategy, was given by the ODPM. However, other documents still have to be submitted by their deadline of 31 July 2003. This freedom was not known at the time when dates for consultation and Council approvals were agreed. Therefore, it seems prudent to continue with the original proposal of submission by 31 July 2003.

2.16 Because of the timescale, consultation is ongoing with a range of other partners as listed in the Strategy. Any material comments made by consultees, that may alter the drafting of the Strategy, will be input into the process of member consultation as and when known.

3. CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATION

3.1 Under the Council's new constitutional arrangements, the Housing Strategy and associated supporting strategies forms part of the policy framework, and requires approval by the Council.

3.2 The timescale for submission of the Strategy is short and requires prompt consideration in order that the deadline may be achieved. Members are, therefore, invited to consider the consultation draft (which has been circulated by the Head of Housing Services) at Scrutiny Panel on 1 July 2003 and Cabinet on 10 July 2003, prior to its consideration at Council on 23 July 2003.

3.3 Council is asked to **approve** the Housing Strategy, and to **authorise** that the Director of Operational Services, following consultation with the Executive Member for housing strategy, approve any necessary presentational changes, or textual changes to the Housing Strategy document resulting from ongoing consultation, and to submit the Strategy to *GO-East* by 31 July 2003.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Housing Strategy Statement 2004/2007 and associated documentation

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