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## **Housing Strategy 2012-2016**

To: **Cabinet – 22 January 2013**

By: **Lauren Hemsley – Senior Strategic Housing Officer**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Ward: **All wards**

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**Summary:** **To approve the Housing Strategy for 2012-2016 following the close of the consultation.**

### **For Decision**

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#### **1.0 Introduction and Background**

1.1 The Local Government Act 2003, requires local authorities to have a Housing Strategy. The current Housing Strategy was adopted in 2005 and expired in 2010. A number of changes were anticipated in 2011 during the refresh of the strategy such as the Localism Act, 2011, the National Housing Strategy, Comprehensive Spending Review and the Welfare and Benefit Reform. These have now been incorporated into the new strategy. The lifespan of the strategy will be the same as the Corporate Plan.

#### **2.0 The Current Situation**

2.1 The key housing issues for Thanet over the next four years have been identified as part of the initial consultation, which was undertaken in December 2011. A review document was sent out to 150 stakeholders, which included Housing Associations, developers, landlords and others. (The initial review document is in Appendix 3, p.42 of the strategy and the stakeholder list is on p.53). The comments received have helped inform the strategy as well as officer workshops and utilising existing strategies and resources. A Members Briefing was held on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> June to introduce members to the housing issues to be included in the strategy. A further SMT/Cabinet briefing was held on 4<sup>th</sup> September and the Housing Strategy was also an agenda item at the Parish Forum on 25<sup>th</sup> October. The Housing Strategy was also presented to the SMT Managers Forum on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2012.

2.2 The main focus of the strategy is in relation to: maximising affordable housing delivery; tackling empty homes and making better use of existing housing stock and managing the impacts of the Welfare and Benefit Reform. These issues are incorporated into five key priorities as below:

1. Deliver a range of homes to meet the local housing need which residents can afford.
2. Make better use of the existing housing stock across all tenures and improve housing conditions.
3. Enable vulnerable people access to good quality housing and to live independently.
4. Provide an accessible housing options service for Thanet residents.
5. Deliver housing in support of our regeneration and economic development objectives.

- 2.3 The Housing Strategy is also accompanied by an Action Plan which sets out how the key priorities will be delivered. It features a range of housing projects and work streams including cross departmental projects such as the empty properties project to bring 30 empty homes back into use as affordable housing utilising funding from the Homes and Communities Agency and the Live Margate housing intervention to bring back into use 160 homes. The Action Plan will be updated annually so members and stakeholders can see how projects are progressing and any new projects that start during the lifespan of the strategy. It will allow for any policy changes to be incorporated ensuring the strategy is kept current and relevant for the four year lifespan.
- 2.4 The 6 week public consultation closed on 3 December 2012. We emailed out a link to the draft Housing Strategy to over 150 stakeholders to include housing associations, developers and other Kent local authorities amongst others. (A full list of stakeholders is available on p.58 of the strategy). A dedicated page was uploaded onto the TDC website for the duration of the consultation and there were also links from the communications consultation pages. An online form was created for comments to be submitted. Hard copies were made available for collection at the Gateway and were posted out to residents on request who were unable to access a computer or call into the gateway.
- 2.5 In total we received 7 responses from stakeholders and 2 responses via the online comments survey form from residents. We had a number of requests for copies of strategies which were posted out to residents and copies were also available at the Gateway for residents and stakeholders to collect.
- 2.6 In summary the stakeholder responses were positive and the following stakeholders made comments on the draft strategy.
- Kent Probation
  - KCC Strategic Housing
  - Orbit South Housing Association
  - East Kent Housing
  - Kent Police
  - Minster Parish Council
  - KCC Families and Social Care
- 2.7 The 2 responses from residents suggested actions we are all ready undertaking which are included in the Action Plan, such as improving standards of private rented sector properties.
- 2.8 Some of the comments made related more to the Local Plan and other more detailed policies, such as the Allocations Policy. These will all be subject to their own consultation and scrutiny. The following issues relating to the content of the strategy were raised from the responses and have been incorporated into the final revised strategy:
- The strategy should address accommodation needs of offenders.
  - The importance of safety and the reduction of crime should be emphasised.
  - We should include more detail about the re-invigorated Right to Buy receipts.
  - More reference should be made to the welfare and benefit reform and under occupation.
  - More reference to Building for Life and Wheelchair Accessible Housing should be made.
  - We need to refer to people with a learning disability in the strategy.

- We should refer to the Care and Support Fund (HCA funding opportunity)
- We should refer to the Local Authority Mortgage Scheme.
- More detail of the new powers under the Localism Act should be included relating to the new powers to discharge our homelessness duty into the private rented sector.
- We need to address the impact of the Welfare and Benefit Reform on the potential migration of benefit dependent households into Thanet in search of cheaper housing costs.
- Need to include more about Affordable Rent.

These comments have now been addressed in the final version of the strategy. None of the feedback requested changing any of the key priorities or disagreed with any actions in the action plan. They referred to drawing out certain issues in more detail and have not substantially altered any of the principles of the housing strategy.

Comments were also received after a presentation on the Housing Strategy was given to the SMT Managers Forum. The presentation of the Action Plan has since been reorganised to make it clearer how the key priorities will be delivered.

### **3.0 Options**

- 3.1 For Cabinet to agree the final version of the Housing Strategy, which can then progress to Council for final approval.

### **4.0 Next Steps**

- 4.1 To take the strategy to Council for approval. The Action Plan is a working document and progress will be reported to SMT and members on an annual basis to ensure the document is kept up to date and that we are tackling housing issues which emerge before the next refresh is due in 2015/16.

### **5.0 Corporate Implications**

#### **5.1 Financial and VAT**

- 5.1.1 The Housing Strategy has very limited financial implications. The consultation has been carried out using the TDC web pages and links to these web pages were emailed out to stakeholders. We produced some hardcopy documents and in addition to officer time, this is the only cost incurred in producing the strategy. The action plan contains details of specific projects where there will be financial implications, but these projects would be subject to a separate scrutiny and Cabinet decision.

#### **5.2 Legal**

- 5.2.1 The author considers there are no legal implications.

#### **5.3 Corporate**

- 5.3.1 The Housing Strategy has strong links with the ethos and priorities of the Corporate Plan. In particular Priority 7: "We will plan for the right type and number of homes in the right place to create sustainable communities in the future." Other priorities such as Priority 2: "We will tackle disadvantage across the district" feature housing issues such as tackling empty homes and also Priority 4: "We will make our district a safer place to live" in terms of good housing design and creating sustainable communities.

## 5.4 Equity and Equalities

- 5.4.1 Equity and equality are addressed within the strategy, but an Equalities Impact Assessment has also produced (please see attached at Annex 2). The strategy does not negatively impact on any residents of the district and aims to improve housing opportunities. The Housing Strategy does not set any new policy, but how we will approach the housing issues over the next four years. Individual policies and strategies which are referred to in the action plan may require an Equality Impact Assessment, but these would be dealt with separately.

## 6.0 Recommendation

- 6.1 For Cabinet to approve the strategy and proceed with the timetable for the document to go to Council in February 2013 for approval.

## 7.0 Decision Making Process

- 7.1 This is a key decision to go to Cabinet and Full Council. It is a key decision because the strategy is for the whole district and therefore affects all wards.
- 7.2 The strategy has been to Overview and Scrutiny for consideration (recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny will be presented at the Cabinet meeting).

Future Meeting if applicable: Overview & Scrutiny Cabinet Council	Date: 15 January 2013 22 January 2013 28 February 2013
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Contact Officer:	Lauren Hemsley, Senior Strategic Housing Officer
Reporting to:	Madeline Homer, Director of Community Services

## Annex List

Annex 1	Housing Strategy 2012-2016
Annex 2	Equality Impact Assessment

## Background Papers

Title	Details of where to access copy
None	N/A

## Corporate Consultation Undertaken

Finance	Sarah Martin – Financial Services Manager
Legal	Gary Cordes – Legal Services Manager
Communications	Hannah Thorpe – Corporate Communications Officer