

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

**Agenda
Item No.**

Report of Deputy Chief Executive (People)

to

Cabinet

on

9th January 2017

Prepared by: Glyn Halksworth, Group Manager Housing &
Social Inclusion, on behalf of Sharon Houlden, Director of
Adult Services & Housing

Development of a Vision for Housing in Southend

Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee

Executive Councillor: Councillor Mark Flewitt

A Part 1 Public Agenda Item

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of work underway to develop a 'vision for housing in Southend', incorporating the preparation of a progressive Housing Strategy and clear work plans and strategies relating to the key areas of homelessness prevention, rough sleeping, South Essex Homes, sheltered housing, allocations, and work with the private rented sector.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet endorses:
- a) The proposed approach and timescales for the development of the Housing Vision and the Housing Strategy;
 - b) The approaches and timescales for the development and delivery of other workstreams.
- 2.2 That the Director of Adult Services and Housing and the Director for Planning and Transport, in consultation with Executive Members and Council staff as appropriate, are authorised to:
- a) Approve and make decisions relating to the development of the actions contained herein through the proposed meetings structure; and,
 - b) Return to Cabinet with draft vision and strategy documents for final agreement following their development and consultation.

3. Background

- 3.1 Changes in the financial and policy landscape over the last year have highlighted the need for a refreshed, progressive Housing Strategy for Southend. It was further agreed that this work needs to be corporately owned and to cement in place a vision for housing that is required as part of the longer-term strategic thinking underway around the town's future growth, economic

development, infrastructure and the 'place shaping' the local authority is leading.

- 3.2 The identified need is supported by the findings of a senior management review of how housing and planning services are structured within the Council. This review identified that the current Housing Strategy, which was developed and published in 2011, is largely out of date. It was identified that the Council's vision, aspirations and objectives for housing in the Borough require clarity and it is felt to be essential that re-development of a housing vision and strategy should subscribe to a 'housing is everyone's responsibility' principle. At the national level there are increasing pressures around homelessness and challenges relating to a shortage of suitable affordable housing in many communities, especially in London, South East and Eastern England. In Southend these pressures are evidenced by the growing visible homeless problems in the borough, such as those seen to be impacting in and around the town centre, as well as increasing numbers of households requiring temporary accommodation and who are threatened with homelessness. Responses to these challenges require action on several fronts and thus the development and delivery of the housing vision and the strategic workstreams it informs must actively involve different functions of the Council and our many partners.
- 3.3 The work required to deliver a robust, effective housing offer for Southend is broad. This breadth is illustrated by the proposed Southend Strategy Framework, which is appended to this report (Appendix 1). It is proposed that this framework is adopted in order to guide the work required. As will be seen from this framework, it is felt that the Housing Strategy should encompass the areas of: supply and demand for housing; financial strategy; homelessness prevention; housing allocations; regeneration and development; private sector housing; older people's housing (including sheltered housing); our work with partners, including registered providers; and, housing management.
- 3.4 This work programme would be lead through a specially convened Housing Strategy Development Group. This group would be time-limited and focussed on the delivery of the above work, including coordination across the many workstreams identified. The group would be chaired at Director level, with day to day management of the programme being led by the Group Manager Housing and Social Inclusion. Membership of the group would include different disciplines of the Council and of partners as required by the different workstreams. It is proposed that the group would be authorised, under Director leadership, to approve and make decisions relating to the work. The work will actively involve the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Sustainability, and will link closely with Executive DMTs for direction on development phases. Members would be regularly consulted on progress prior to final draft vision and strategy documents being returned to Cabinet for final agreement via the Housing and Homelessness Working Party, subject to Council approving the change of name and jurisdiction of this group.

The group will lead two key areas of work, these being:

1. **Establishing a shared vision** around which to shape the approach to housing strategy in the broadest sense;

2. **Delivering a range of workstreams** which are consistent with that vision and strategic approach.

3.5 **Establishing a shared vision**

Housing, given its associations with community, neighbourhood, health, life chances and opportunity is something people are passionate about and they therefore need to be able to connect with a vision emotionally as well as practically. The work to establish a shared vision would seek to secure real ownership of an agreed 'view of the world' which will both contribute to the renewed drive and energy at Southend as well as provide a sound platform for future decision making. This vision should be underpinned by some very clear ambitions, aspirations and objectives. It is proposed that the vision would be developed through the following steps:

1. Internal research to clarify how 'Housing' should be described and the interaction of housing with other associated areas. It is important that the vision is consistent with other policy areas and is broad enough to ensure the concept of 'place' is embraced while at the same time is sufficiently focussed to be meaningful.
2. The development of focussed questions that need to be considered to ensure that the vision reflects Southend ambitions as well as the scale of the challenge that needs to be addressed.
3. One to one discussions (either face to face or by telephone) with key stakeholders around the questions identified above to determine their view of the issues, what the priorities should be and the ambitions and aspirations the vision should capture. For this phase of the work key stakeholders will be drawn from senior council and South Essex Homes leaders, including the Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning & Sustainability. Subsequent phases will include broader stakeholders, including Essex Police, local voluntary sector providers, health organisations and local businesses and representative groups.
4. A facilitated workshop bringing stakeholders together to:
 - a) Review the themes emerging from the work carried out and the one to one discussions;
 - b) Question, challenge, debate and strengthen the common understanding of the opportunities and challenges;
 - c) Agree the substance of the vision and headlines for challenges, aspirations and objectives.
5. Testing of the emerging draft vision in order to ensure it is coherent with the Local Plan and South Essex 2050.
6. The production and circulation of formal vision document to be shared with stakeholders and to provide a platform for strategy and policy development. It is proposed that this work should be completed March 2018.

3.6 Further workstreams

As identified above and within the appendix, the production of a Housing Strategy necessarily encompasses consideration of a number of other key workstreams which require taking forwards. At this stage of the development of a Housing Strategy these are understood to be:

1. Facilitating and supporting the development of the new Housing Strategy;
2. Developing and progressing other specific housing strategies and policy work, including homelessness prevention, older peoples housing strategy, allocations policy, sheltered housing, and work around Private Sector Housing relating to both quality and affordability ;
3. Developing the role of South Essex Homes in the context of the Council's wider housing strategy and the agreement of a new Management Agreement between the Council and South Essex Homes.
4. Development of the Housing Investment Company, including its role in the development and provision of temporary and affordable housing.

With some of these workstreams there are time pressures (for example, the current housing allocations policy and homelessness strategies are due for renewal from April 2018) and consideration will need to be given to relative priorities of these workstreams, and the need to deploy some 'parallel running', whereby, as long as strategic parameters and intent are understood work can progress before the overarching Housing Strategy is finalised.

Further detail of the above is provided below:

3.6.1 Facilitating and supporting the development of the new Housing Strategy

A significant part of the work will be achieved through the development of the housing vision and ensuring this is meaningful and something which acts as a coordinating, connective tissue between different aspects of these areas of work. Once this vision is established work will be delivered to create an overarching Housing Strategy, involving a broader stakeholder group, and ensuring this is appropriately consulted upon.

It is recommended that this work is completed (drafted and consulted upon) by June 2018.

3.6.2 Support with other specific housing strategies identified within proposed strategy framework

As outlined within the appendix and above, there are several key workstreams which require progression, including the completion of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy, a review of the Housing Allocations Policy (including local connection), development of Private Sector Housing, and more. Some of this work is already partially developed and can be progressed quickly once an understanding of priorities has been agreed and once strategic parameters and intent of the overarching Strategy are understood in order that approaches are consistent.

Timeframes for completion of these workstreams will differ dependent on agreed priorities. It is recommended that aspects such as the Homelessness Prevention Strategy and the Housing Allocations Policy review are quickly progressed in order to be ready by April 2018.

Specific examples of work to be pursued include:

3.6.2.1

Facilitating and supporting the development of a review plan for sheltered housing with appropriate business cases

The previous sheltered housing review should be revisited in order to ensure its findings are consistent with the housing vision and Strategy being developed. Once we are assured of the requisite coherence work will include:

1. The development of an implementation plan to ensure the review recommendations get delivered;
2. Work to model the viability of options for specific assets;
3. Development of an Older Peoples Housing Strategy.

It is recommended that this work is completed (drafted and consulted upon) by June 2018.

3.6.2.2

Develop the role of South Essex Homes in the context of the council's wider housing strategy and the agreement of a new Management Agreement between the Council and South Essex Homes

The work of South Essex Homes is critical to that of the Council and adds value to the Council's vision of housing. In this context it is imperative that South Essex Homes' contribution to the Council's work is central to the context of the wider strategy. The role of the ALMO should be integral to the newly developed strategic vision and the revised Management Agreement developed, in partnership, to ensure it reflects the contribution required.

This work would take place throughout 2018, with agreement on the future Management Agreement required well in advance of its required start date of April 2019.

4. Other Options

No alternative options are recommended.

5. Reasons for recommendations

A collective vision for housing is critical to providing context and coherence for strategy and policy decisions. The need for housing to be considered as an integral component of the Council's work on behalf of local citizens and their changing demographics and needs is clear: housing is central to our ambitions for economic development and the creation of jobs and enabling of a workforce, and to our aspirations as an emerging city with a broad and compelling offer.

Housing is currently a key policy area at the national level, with many aspects frequently being debated and aligned opportunities emerging, along with legislative and structural changes such as the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 and the Housing and Planning Act 2016. With both a need to refresh local approaches in light of these and to be ready to take advantage of emerging opportunities these may bring, along with an overarching requirement to ensure housing is joined up and operates in service both of the Council's broader vision and direction, and of its citizens, the timing of this proposed work is apposite.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities

Ensuring the housing needs of the Borough are met now and in the future is consistent with the Council's Vision and Corporate Priorities of Safe, Prosperous and Healthy.

6.2 Financial Implications

Costs for coordinating and leading this work can be met from existing budgets. Officer time aligned with contributing workstreams will continue to be made available to support the work and to lead on work as necessary in order that we grow our capacity to lead this work in the future.

6.3 Legal Implications

Some of the workstreams to be included are required by statute, for example, the need for a homelessness prevention strategy. These will all be updated and verified through this work.

6.4 People Implications

This work will be supported by existing officer resource. Day-to-day leadership will be from the Group Manager Housing and Social Inclusion.

6.5 Property Implications

Consideration of assets management will be included within several workstreams, particularly those relating to South Essex Homes.

6.6 Consultation

Aspects of the work will require detailed consultation and lead officers will draw upon the expertise of Corporate Consultation officers to ensure best practice. Findings from consultations will be published and will inform final strategies and policies to be endorsed by subsequent Cabinets.

6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

Aspects of this work programme will require equality analyses to be undertaken in line with national and local requirements. Related activity will report via the

Corporate Equality Steering Group and findings will be incorporated into the final drafting of policy and strategy papers.

6.8 Risk Assessment

The proposal is intended to support improved positioning of housing within broader corporate work and thus to be better aligned to other areas of work. As such it is expected the work will have a positive impact.

6.9 Value for Money

The proposal is deemed to be efficient insofar as it will lead to more coherent working across the corporate landscape and with partners. Lead officer costs will be met from within existing resource, along with additional officer support as identified above. As such it is expected the work will offer good value for money.

6.10 Community Safety Implications

Several areas of work which will be included under the aegis of a vision for housing and the corresponding strategies would positively impact on community safety.

6.11 Environmental Impact

Some areas of work which will be included under the aegis of a vision for housing and corresponding strategy would potentially have a positive impact on the environment. Where required environmental impact assessments would be undertaken.

7. Background Papers

None

8. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Proposed Southend Strategy Framework

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