

PROPOSALS FOR A NEW HOUSING STRATEGY

Housing and Health Advisory Committee - 9 February 2021

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer People & Places

Status: For Comment

Key Decision: No

This report supports the Key Aim of the District Council's Community Plan (2019-22).

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Kevin Maskell

Contact Officer: Gavin Missons, Ext. 7332

Recommendation to Housing and Health Advisory Committee: That Members agree to

- (a) the proposed timetable for the development of a new housing strategy; as set out in Appendix A
- (b) develop a new homelessness strategy in-house and concurrently with the main housing strategy;
- (c) make use of existing and other secondary housing intelligence to avoid the commissioning of external consultants; and
- (d) introduce a new affordable housing target to be monitored and reviewed by Housing & Health Advisory Committee as a standing item.

Reason for recommendation: To put in place a plan of action for Officers to work to.

Introduction and Background

- 1 Although no longer a legal requirement, the District Council has typically produced an overarching District-level housing strategy every 5-years as a matter of good practice.
- 2 Under 'The Homelessness Act 2002', local authorities are still legally required to produce homelessness strategies every 5-years, however, and in the past this has been undertaken in partnership with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council (TMBC) and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) as part of a defined sub-regional housing market approach.

- 3 With separate housing strategies in place and each covering different geographical areas whilst also varying in remits, confusion has often arisen as to the purpose of each document.

Proposed approach

- 4 Members will be provided with a presentation (copy at Appendix A) during this agenda item and setting out several proposals for discussion, including:
 - A timetable for the development of a new Housing Strategy;
 - The use of existing and secondary intelligence to avoid the commissioning of costly studies;
 - The introduction of a new affordable housing delivery target to be monitored and reviewed by HHAC as a standing item; and
 - A plan of action for the development of a new in-house homelessness strategy as opposed to the previous sub-regional approach and re-commissioning of external consultants.

Other options Considered and/or rejected

- 5 By developing a new homelessness strategy in partnership with TMBC and TWBC, the District Council would once again incur costs of around £10,000. If the District Council were to develop a new edition in-house and with existing officer resources, however, it would be able to avoid these costs.
- 6 An option would be to update the District Council's housing intelligence base (as was the case with the development of the 2017 edition of the Housing Strategy), but this would incur costs of around £60,000 - and so it is proposed to make best use of existing and other secondary intelligence to, once again, achieve significant financial savings.

Next steps

- 7 If approved, a more detailed project plan would be drawn up and officer/member meetings set up as and when required. Periodic updates would also be provided to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health (PHHH) and at HHAC as a standing item through 2021.

Key Implications

Financial

Any financial implications would be covered through project development stages and brought back to HHAC for consideration. Developing a homelessness strategy in-house would achieve savings for the District Council. Making best use of existing intelligence would also create savings for the District Council.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

It is a legal requirement for local authorities to produce homelessness strategies every 5-years, though general overarching housing strategies are optional. By developing both strategies in-house and concurrently, the District Council would be better able to prepare for future housing requirements and plan accordingly.

Equality Assessment

As part of the development of these new strategies, full equality impact assessments and other key checklists/assessments would be carried out, including sustainability; value for money; asset maintenance; and community impacts/outcomes.

Conclusions

By adopting the proposed approach, the District Council would have in place a much more accessible and user-friendly plan of action for the future, which would also assist with subsequent monitoring/evaluation whilst achieving significant financial savings in the process.

Appendices

Appendix A - Presentation: 'Updating our new Housing Strategy'

Background Papers

[Housing Strategy \(2017\)](#)

[Community Plan \(2019-22\)](#)

Sarah Robson

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer - People & Places