

SUMMARY OF THE SEVENOAKS DISTRICT EMERGING HOUSING STRATEGY 2022-2026

Housing and Health Advisory Committee - 17 January 2022

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

Status: For Decision

Also considered by:

- Cabinet - 10 February 2022

Key Decision: Yes

Significant in terms of its effects on the communities living or working in an area comprising of 2 or more wards in the District.

Executive Summary Local authorities are not required by Government to have a formal housing strategy, but they are expected to adopt a strategic approach to housing in their local areas to deliver a thriving housing market and address local needs. This report presents a summary of the key priorities and themes of Sevenoaks District Council's emerging Housing Strategy for consideration and approval for public consultation. The final Housing Strategy document will require approval by Full Council so that it may be adopted. A draft timetable is therefore provided detailing the possible timeline to Full Council in July 2022.

This report supports the Key Aim of: delivering a sustainable economy where people can live, work and travel more easily and are empowered to shape their communities.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Kevin Maskell

Contact Officer: Sharon Donald, Housing Strategy Manager, Ext. 7131

Recommendation to Housing & Health Advisory Committee:

- a) To consider the summary of the emerging Housing Strategy;
- b) To support the summary of the emerging Housing Strategy being presented to Cabinet in February 2022, where approval will be sought to undertake full public consultation on the draft priorities and summary.

Recommendation to Cabinet:

- a) To consider the draft priorities and summary of the emerging Housing Strategy;
- b) To approve any minor amendments to the summary being incorporated by the Housing Strategy Manager in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health and Chief Officer - People and Places; and,
- c) To approve the draft priorities and summary being made available for public consultation in order to further shape the development of the emerging Housing Strategy.

Reason for recommendation: The Housing Strategy is a key document that details the Council's priorities for enabling and delivering new homes, ensuring good quality homes in the private sector, and enabling vulnerable residents to remain in their homes.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The current Housing Strategy - Wellbeing Starts at Home (2017-2021) is currently being reviewed and refreshed.
- 2 The Council appointed recognised consultants, Arc4 and Campbell Tickell, to work with officers to support the collation of the evidence base, consultation and drafting of the strategy.
- 3 The process for developing the strategy has included:-
A review of around 25 relevant internal documents including:-
 - 2015 Strategic Housing Market Assessment
 - 2017 Local Housing Needs Survey
 - 2021 Targeted Review of Local Housing Needs and stakeholder feedback
 - 2021 Older Persons Housing Needs Survey
 - Emerging Local Plan
 - Approximately 25 interviews with staff and members, including Housing, Planning, Property and Commercial and Cabinet members.

- Evidence and ideas that have emerged from relevant evidence, reviews and assessments.
- Responses to key questions posed by the consultants (attached as Appendix 1).
- Engagement meetings with officers and Members, including a virtual workshop held on 17 November 2021.

Proposed layout of the new Housing Strategy

4 The contents page will contain the following:-

- Foreword
- Executive Summary
- **SECTION 1:** Sevenoaks as a place and its ambitions for housing
- **SECTION 2: PRIORITY 1:** Developing Sevenoaks' housing offer: building new affordable homes
- **SECTION 3:PRIORITY 2:** Promoting quality and optimising the suitability of homes
- **SECTION 4: PRIORITY 3:** Reducing homelessness and improving routes into permanent accommodation
- **SECTION 5: PRIORITY 4:** Healthy people, homes and places
- Action Plan

A summary of the sections

5 **SECTION 1: Sevenoaks District as a place and its ambitions for housing**

This section is a context-setting section and chronicles the main ambitions and priorities for housing within the setting of Sevenoaks District as being a very popular, but expensive place to live.

It references the Council Plan (2018) and the six priorities in the Community Plan 2019-2022 as the Council's main vision documents whilst leaving space for further amendments following the ongoing Character Study being developed by Planning Policy. It also references the opportunities for the Town Centre Plans to achieve some of the Council's ambitions (including for housing), for new affordable homes to support a sustainable economy and for partnerships with health to enable people to live well in suitable homes for longer.

It positions Sevenoaks District Council as a key performer in shaping the District's housing market with a range of partners, helping to fill gaps in the

market so that more households can live in a suitable home at a price they can afford.

It also provides a summary of some of the key successes the Council has had relating to housing in recent years, alongside the main challenges it faces, whilst also identifying some of the opportunities.

6 SECTION 2: PRIORITY 1: Developing Sevenoaks District's housing offer: building new affordable homes

This section is in two parts. The first part summarises what needs to be delivered in the District based on the evidence provided. This includes:

- Population and household trends and the implications for housing;
- Affordable housing requirements and the challenge of 'genuine affordability';
- The need for homes at varied price-points;
- Delivery targets on new housing developments;
- Targets for specialist homes and filling gaps in resident housing journeys - particularly young people moving into independence, essential workers and older people looking to move to a more suitable home.

The second part sets out how Sevenoaks District Council intends to influence and support delivery of new homes. It proposes a range of options including:

- The Council considering becoming a Registered Provider allowing it to apply for Affordable Housing Programme Funding from Homes England;
- Prudential borrowing, using Public Works Loans Board or other lending mechanisms;
- Strategic development partnerships with key partners, such as housing associations;
- Direct acquisition and building through Quercus Housing and Quercus 7;
- Review of smaller sites, including Council owned land, for development and disposal for housing;
- Optimising affordable housing delivery through the planning system;
- Optimising how land is used;
- Sources of funding for new homes;
- Supporting others to building new homes;

- Community housing and self-build models.

Whilst the focus is on filling gaps that are not well-served by the market it contains options that cross-subsidise from 'for profit' activity.

7 SECTION 3: PRIORITY 2: Promoting quality and optimising suitability of homes

This section is in three parts. The first sets out an approach to standards in new homes for the Council to consider. This largely focuses on whether Sevenoaks District Council intends to require building, design or low carbon standards that are above the legal requirements.

The second focuses on improving both supply and quality in the private rented sector. It proposes a suite of measures to enhance the experience for both landlords and tenants and persuade more property owners to let their homes to people who are on the housing register. This includes persuading and supporting owners of empty homes to turn them into good quality homes. The section proposes upgrades to the Council's enforcement approach to address the poorest housing and management conditions.

The third section focuses on suitability of the homes for occupiers, across all tenures. It includes:-

- Support for older people either to stay living in their existing home or to find and move to a more suitable home or co-housing experience;
- Refurbishing, extending or repurposing of dwellings to make better use of them;
- Providing better opportunities for disabled people to access a home that suits them as their needs change;
- Recommendations for the review of the allocations policy to support better matching of homes, including right-sizing, to particular needs to improve residents' lives also sits in this section.

8 SECTION 4: PRIORITY 3: Reducing homelessness and improving routes into permanent accommodation

Recognising that homelessness is a growing problem in the Sevenoaks District, this section sets out a 'whole journey' approach to addressing the issue.

It starts with the housing market challenges that lie behind the rising homeless figures and moves quickly into how the Council will strengthen its approach to 'prevention'. There are sections on 'relief' of homelessness and rough sleeping. The recent decision the Council has taken to invest directly in new Temporary Accommodation is included.

There is a very important section on improving routes into permanent accommodation that includes several actions to create better pathways for people to access appropriate accommodation in a timely way, so that no one spends longer than a defined period in Temporary Accommodation. There is an appeal to partners to work constructively with the Council to improve outcomes for people who do find themselves without a home.

9 **SECTION 5: PRIORITY 4: Healthy people, homes and places**

This section sets out two or three areas of focus for Sevenoaks District Council, in partnership with NHS and public health colleagues, to improve residents’ health and wellbeing. Building on the success of Sevenoaks District Council’s Hospital Discharge and Safe and Secure schemes, it offers some approaches to addressing health issues that are caused or exacerbated by someone’s housing situation before they present in an acute (hospital) setting. This includes the matter of affordable warmth to address fuel poverty which clinicians are now being expected to support in guidance on *Excess winter deaths and the health risks associated with cold homes* published by NICE (National Institute for Clinical Excellence).

The section includes a checklist for healthy place-shaping, the Council’s town centre plans and the opportunities to develop more ‘15-minute neighbourhoods’. It also includes a summary of the Council’s efforts to address energy efficiency and drive towards low carbon homes existing housing.

Next Steps

- 10 The draft timeline for reporting, public consultation and final approval for the implementation of the Housing Strategy is as follows:-

Deadline for any comments and/or revisions to summary document 31 December 2021		
Housing & Health Advisory Committee	17 January 2022	Comments to Cabinet prior to public consultation on the emerging priorities of the Housing Strategy
Cabinet	10 February 2022	Request for approval of the emerging priorities of the Housing Strategy for public consultation
PUBLIC CONSULTATION - 14 February 2022 to 11 March 2022		
SMT	22 March 2022	Feedback from consultation and

		presentation of Housing Strategy
Cabinet Briefing	5 April 2022	Feedback from consultation and presentation of Housing Strategy
Housing & Health Advisory Committee	7 June 2022	Feedback from consultation and presentation of final draft Housing Strategy
Cabinet	7 July 2022	Recommendation for approval of the Housing Strategy and action plan for implementation
Full Council	19 July 2022	Approval of the Housing Strategy and action plan for implementation.

Other Options Considered and/or Rejected

- 11 Whilst section 87 of the Local Government Act 2003 conferred the power on the Secretary of State to require local housing authorities to have a housing strategy, this was repealed by section 29 of the Deregulation Act 2015. This means there is no statutory requirement for the Council to have a Housing Strategy. Nevertheless, the Council's constitution includes a Policy Framework that references a Housing Strategy as a key strategy or plan.

The Council has a range of statutory duties relating to housing, homelessness, and reviewing housing conditions. This strategy will assist the Council in meeting those duties. The strategy will be carefully developed through an inclusive process to ensure it has, as far as possible, taken into account a range of views and the results of considerable evidence and analysis.

The strategy is a key document that details the Council's priorities for delivering new homes, ensuring good quality homes in the private sector, and enabling vulnerable residents to remain in their homes.

Key Implications

Resource (Non-Financial)

There are no additional resource requirements arising from the approval of the strategy.

Financial)

Immediate activity summarised in the strategy is accounted for within existing budgets. Any additional activity identified as part of the strategy' Action Plan will be considered for feasibility within the normal yearly budgeting activity.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

The Council has a range of statutory duties relating to housing, homelessness, and reviewing housing conditions. This strategy will assist the Council in meeting those duties.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

However, a full equality impact assessment will accompany the final strategy to consider any implications.

Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district, or supporting the resilience of the natural environment]

Conclusions

Whilst there is no statutory requirement for the Council to have a Housing Strategy, the Council's constitution includes a Policy Framework that references a Housing Strategy as a key strategy or plan that should set out the Council's priorities for housing.

Following the appointment of Arc4/Campbell Tickell in late September 2021, work commenced on the process for developing the strategy as detailed in point 3 of this report. The resulting summary represents the emerging objectives and key priorities for Sevenoaks District.

Further consultation will help shape the new Housing Strategy which will identify how we will manage and deliver our strategic housing role and provide an overarching framework that will feed into the Local Plan and help to formulate other policies on housing issues.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Responses to Key Questions for Members

Background Papers

None

Sarah Robson

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