

DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY 2022-2027

Council - 19 July 2022

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

Status: For Comment

Also considered by:

- Housing & Health Advisory Committee - 6 June 2022
- Cabinet - 7 July 2022

Key Decision: No

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 the outcome of a public consultation and the resultant draft Housing Strategy for consideration. The final Housing Strategy document will require approval by Full Council so that it may be adopted.

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(s): Sharon Donald, Ext. 7131

Liz Crockford, Ext. 7482

Recommendation to Housing & Health Advisory Committee:

- (a) To note the feedback received from the public consultation;
- (b) To consider and recommend to Cabinet that it be recommended to Council that the draft Housing Strategy 2022-2027 be adopted;

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- (c) To recommend to Council that the Housing Strategy 2022-27 be adopted

Recommendation to Council:

- (a) To note the feedback received from the public consultation;
- (b) That, subject to any amendments by Cabinet, the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 be adopted.

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 themes contained in the draft Housing Strategy 2022 - 2027 were subject to public consultation between 14 February and 18 April 2022. Over 140 responses were received and the results, by theme, are summarised below. NB. "In agreement" refers to those respondents who either strongly agreed, or agreed.

2. Theme 1 - Developing Sevenoaks District's housing offer: building new affordable homes

What we asked - How strongly do you agree or disagree that new housing developments should include a proportion of affordable housing for local people?

The response was - **In agreement 85.8%**

What we asked - How strongly do you agree or disagree that Sevenoaks District Council should consider building and owning social housing?

The response was - **In agreement 75.9%**

3. Theme 2 - Promoting quality and optimising suitability of homes

What we asked - How strongly do you agree or disagree that we should work with housing associations and developers to deliver a range of homes that meet our residents' needs for example, family homes and homes for older and disabled people?

The response was - **In agreement 92%**

What we asked - *How strongly do you agree or disagree that we should make it easier for residents in socially rented homes with spare rooms to downsize so their property could be made available for families or bigger households?*

The response was - **In agreement 81.1%**

What we asked - *How strongly do you agree or disagree that we should fund home adaptations for older or disabled residents so they can live independently in their own home for as long as possible?*

The response was - **In agreement 86.2%**

4 Theme 3 - Reducing homelessness and improving routes into permanent accommodation

What we asked - *How strongly do you agree or disagree that we should increase the support we provide to people at risk of becoming homeless and in some circumstances helping with rent?*

The response was - **In agreement 75.7%**

What we asked - *How strongly do you agree or disagree that we should offer support, help and incentives to landlords to make their property available to homeless people on our waiting lists?*

The response was - **In agreement 77.2%**

5 Theme 4 - Healthy people, homes and places

What we asked - *How strongly do you agree or disagree that, wherever possible housing delivery meets the needs of current and future residents in Sevenoaks District?*

The response was - **In agreement 80.4%**

What we asked - *How strongly do you agree or disagree that new developments should include a mix of housing tenures including homes for market sale or rent, affordable homes available for rent for those on the Housing Register and affordable Home Ownership options such as shared-ownership?*

The response was - **In agreement 79.6%**

What we asked - *How strongly do you agree or disagree that new developments should include a mix of housing for people from different age groups, backgrounds and incomes?*

The response was - **In agreement 70.6%**

What we asked - *How strongly do you agree or disagree that the effects of climate change are considered at every stage of housing delivery; from the design of new homes, how they are constructed and how energy efficient and easy to use they are for occupants?*

The response was - **In agreement 85.7%**

What we asked - *How strongly do you agree or disagree that we should look to secure external funding to pay for home energy efficiency improvements in residents' homes to tackle climate change?*

The response was - **In agreement 80.4%**

What we asked - *How strongly do you agree or disagree that new developments should have access to existing or new communal services such as schools, health and leisure provision, public transport, community halls and play facilities?*

The response was - **In agreement 90.2%**

6 Respondents were invited to provide further comments on the themes and suggest how SDC might achieve its housing ambitions. Comments fall into a number of broad categories as shown below:

- New build - There were competing issues here, i.e. protect the Green Belt versus build on some areas of Green Belt due to level of unmet need; small developments not large; infrastructure and parking are key; houses/bungalows, not more flats; engage with existing residents; green energy - solar panels heat pumps, water recycling, electric vehicle charging points; build below (above?) surface car parks
- Affordable housing - more homes needed; need more affordable homes for rent to serve wider than the Housing Register; SDC to build homes; help needed by young people, those with disabilities and older people; hand holding for those looking to move/downsize; retain designated older persons' housing
- Existing stock - improve existing homes to tackle poor conditions; provide assistance to older and vulnerable residents to insulate homes and generally make them more energy efficient, including providing practical advice; return empty homes to use; combat anti-social behaviour.

Some of the points raised under “New Build”, provide useful commentary but go beyond the remit of the Housing Strategy. They pick up themes that have greater relevance to the emerging Local Plan, which will go out to consultation later this year, asking residents what it ought to contain. One area where the Housing Strategy could precede the emerging Local Plan is by encouraging the showcasing of exemplar design standards. This may be appropriate where the District Council uses its own land to develop new

housing, particularly 100% affordable housing schemes where these are developed by Quercus Housing (or the District Council itself, if it gains Registered Provider status).

Many of the points raised under “Affordable Housing”, will be addressed through the Sevenoaks District Housing Register Allocations Scheme (subject to approval and adoption) and a proposed under-occupation initiative in partnership with our Registered Providers (subject to approval). The Build to Rent tenure may assist those who require affordable homes to rent, but are not eligible to join the Housing Register.

Our ability to influence and improve the existing stock is extremely limited due to funding constraints. However, as detailed within the Council’s Housing Assistance Policy, funding is available to eligible households through the Better Care Fund to deliver both mandatory disabled facility grants (DFGs) and other discretionary grants which are principally aimed at enabling residents to continue to reside safely in their own homes. The Council has also sought external funding to help deliver energy efficiency improvements to eligible households. This has included external wall insulation to park homes across the District, grants for solar installations and replacement windows. We also work with owners of empty homes to find ways to bring them back into use such as arranging interest free loans for essential works through the KCC initiative, Kent No Use Empty. Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) can be reported to the Police or the District Council and the Community Safety Unit meets daily to address ASB that has been reported.

7 The consultation demonstrates there is strong support for the proposed themes of the new Strategy. Based on this, our consultants, arc4, have developed a draft Housing Strategy 2022-2027, attached at Appendix 1.

8 It is considered that a broad range of participants responded to the consultation. Access to the consultation did not discriminate against any group or section of society. However, it is noted that over 65% of respondents were female, which is not representative of the local population.

Subsequent to the consultation, it remains the case that officers believe the themes of the Housing Strategy address the housing needs and aspirations of local people, whatever their background. An equality impact assessment is attached at Appendix 2.

9 A review mechanism is proposed, so that minor adjustments may be made to the Strategy and its accompanying Action Plan (through delegated authority to the Chief Officer People & Places in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Health), to ensure it retains its relevance and robustness.

Other options Considered and/or rejected

None.

Key Implications

Financial

Activity identified under the action plan will be considered for feasibility within the normal yearly budgeting activity.

Resource (non financial)

There are no additional resource requirements arising from the approval of the Strategy. Activity identified under the action plan will be considered for feasibility within the annual Housing Service Plan.

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. An equality impact assessment is attached at Appendix 2.

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. The Housing Strategy 2022-2027 will fulfil this role.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Draft Housing Strategy 2022-2027

Appendix 2 - Equality Impact Assessment

Background Papers

None.

Sarah Robson

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer - People & Places