

Item 4 – Matters referred by Council, Audit Committee, Scrutiny Committee, CIL Spending Board, or Cabinet Advisory Committees

The Housing Strategy Action Plan – 2 Years On was considered by the Housing & Health Advisory Committee on 5 November 2024, and a reference to Cabinet was resolved. The relevant Minute extract is below.

Housing & Health Advisory Committee (5 November 2024, Minute 30)

The Chief Officer for People & Places presented the report, which set out the annual review of the Housing Strategy 2022 – 2027, which was adopted at Full Council in July 2022. The report sets out the strategy's four themes, alongside some of the challenges facing the service, together with successes. The officer noted that the Council is in its last year of funding of MHCLG's Homelessness Prevention Grant, Rough Sleeper Initiative and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme. These funding streams have significantly contributed to staffing costs, temporary and supported accommodation, landlord incentives, homelessness prevention and community support. The officer explained that many of the staffing posts were fixed-term due to short-term Government funding settlements.

Members discussed the report. They queried whether the risk assessment within the strategy was sufficient, covering risk, mitigation, likelihood, severity, and priority. It was further suggested the Local Plan could be more fully integrated into the plan. Members expressed concern around the high turnover rate within the Housing service, and questioned whether stress from difficult customer interactions was managed sufficiently. Members requested further information on the number of Rural Housing Needs Surveys completed against delivery.

Members also queried the Community Wi-Fi project and options to deliver and fund, as Kent County Council were no longer able to do so. The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Health requested Cllr Streatfeild put his questions in writing to him and he would provide a written response to the points raised.

Action: for the Chief Officer for People and Places to provide members with information on Rural Housing Needs Surveys completed against delivery.

Action 2: for the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Health to provide a written response to the Committee on receipt of the questions raised by Cllr Streatfeild.

Members further discussed the national affordable housing, notably social housing shortage. The Chief Officer for People & Places explained that the viability of providing social housing in developments was financially challenging for Registered Providers. The officer referred members to the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning's affordable housing policy

percentage on new developments, together with the work undertaken by Housing Policy and Enabling team to work with Registered Providers. Members discussed the mechanisms by which housing providers monitored their social housing stock. Members were advised that there was no legal mechanism to compel people to not under-occupy housing. The officer discussed the Changing Spaces project, which provides incentives to social housing tenants to voluntarily downsize to smaller properties.

Action 3: for the Chief Officer for People & Places to provide members with additional information regarding any under-occupancy reviews carried out by housing providers within the district.

Members discussed the possibility of creating a separate strategy and action plan specifically for social housing. They noted the importance of planning within this proposed strategy. It was proposed and duly seconded that it be recommended to Cabinet that a cross-party working group be created to develop a Social Housing Strategy and Action Plan. The motion was put to the vote and it was:

Resolved: That

- a) The report be noted; and
- b) That it be recommended to Cabinet that a cross-party working group to develop a Social Housing Strategy and Action Plan, be established.

Background Documents

Housing Strategy Action Plan – 2 Years On Report:

<https://cds.sevenoaks.gov.uk/documents/s59661/08%20HHAC%20Report%20-%20Housing%20Strategy%202%20Year%20on%20-%20September%202024.pdf?J=1>

Housing Strategy 2022 – 2027 Action Plan:

<https://cds.sevenoaks.gov.uk/documents/s59662/08%20Appendix%20A%20-%20Housing%20Strategy%20Action%20Plan%202022-2027%20Year%202.pdf?J=1>