

Executive Summary

Housing Strategy 2003/08 Update

Marcus C. Connor

Purpose

Bury is currently required to produce and submit to Government, an updated Housing Strategy on an annual basis.

This Strategy recognises the many changes that have taken place in the last twelve months, nationally, regionally and locally and addresses these in the way that future plans are developed.

Background

The Housing Strategy 2003/08 Update, builds on last year's favourably received strategy, rated as 'above average' (the first time ever in Bury), and aims to meet the Government's 'Fit for Purpose' criteria.

The Strategy takes into account Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (RPG13) and also reflects the priorities and cross-cutting themes detailed in the North West Regional Housing Strategy 2003.

The Strategy is informed by recently commissioned research, the 2001 General Housing Needs Survey, and analysis. This data, and efforts to maintain an up-to-date picture of house conditions and housing markets across all tenures, allows us to address current and future issues relating to housing demand and supply by developing appropriate and realistic solutions.

To take us forward, we have identified, in partnership with tenants, residents and other stakeholders, five Corporate Housing Priorities and an Action Plan to take us to 2008.

Contents and Issues

Chapter 2.0 explains the context in which Bury's housing services are delivered in partnership with our stakeholders, providing details of population, employment, and the housing market and how these have changed over time and likely future trends. Links are made to the Local Strategic Partnership; the Borough's Community Strategy and the Council's Corporate Plan.

Details of the resources likely to be available to Bury in the future are also provided. These are likely to be significantly reduced due to the development of the Regional Housing Strategy and the Regional Housing Board as the mechanism with which to allocate resources in the future and their concentration on the Market Renewal Pathfinders as a means of achieving housing regeneration.

The allocation of resources to these areas, is also likely to have a knock on effect for Bury in that inward migration and retention of the current population base could be affected by the regeneration of neighbouring areas, making them appear more attractive to Bury's current and future residents.

Chapter 3.0 describes how the work of Housing Services will help to achieve each of Bury's seven Corporate Objectives, for example:

- The development of the Pimhole Implementation Plan will help to develop housing in the area, promote sustainability and so help in 'Developing a Stronger Community Spirit'.
- Work carried out in both the public and private sector to improve energy efficiency will assist in 'Improving Transport and the Environment'.
- The development of a Learning Disability, Housing and Support Strategy and work to provide secure supported accommodation for teenage parents and young people will help in 'Creating a Better Future for All Future Generations'.
- The successful implementation of projects such as the Neighbourhood Wardens Scheme and Junior Wardens Scheme and the piloting of a landlord accreditation scheme in partnership with a registered social landlord will contribute to 'Making Our Communities Safer and Healthier'.
- The implementation of a Choice Based Letting System from January 2004 and work to achieve a 2-star service will be significant contributors to 'Improving the Quality and Availability of Council Services'.
- The BME Housing Strategy, Supporting People and work in the private sector will be significant factors in Bury 'Achieving Social Inclusion'.
- Projects such as the development of an Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) to carry out repairs, decorating and improvements to public sector housing will contribute to 'Developing a Competitive and Diverse Local Economy'.

Chapter 4.0 looks in more detail at how Bury is implementing its Corporate Housing Objectives. The projects referred to in that section are highlighted in more detail in Chapters 4.1 to 4.4.

Chapter 4.1 identifies how we will provide choice for residents, discussing what is currently available and how gaps in services will be addressed to meet future needs. In the private sector, the work recently commenced in the Pimhole Renewal Area should provide and help to promote further regeneration of one of the more deprived areas of the Borough. Most significantly for the regeneration of public sector housing, the section details the reasons for Bury's decision to pursue the Arms' Length Management Option in order to access additional financing for improving council housing and estates. This option has been selected after a rigorous assessment process involving all stakeholders, officers, external consultants and Government representatives and is firmly believed to provide the best solution to Bury's future public sector housing needs. This option is fully supported by those taking part in public consultation events.

Chapter 4.2 looks at the quality of services provided by Housing Services. It provides more details of the benefits of the Choice Based Lettings System in improving accessibility to council housing and touches on the work outlined in the BME Housing Strategy that will

ensure that services are equally accessible to all customers. Access to services is also aided by the introduction of service standards leaflets in both Environmental Development Services and Housing in order to better inform current and potential customers of the range of services available to them. Methods of customer involvement, which is an essential and integral component of the services we provide, are also outlined.

Chapter 4.3 concentrates on reducing inequality in service provision, making strong links to the BME Housing Strategy and specific initiatives, such as Anchor Agency's Handy Person Scheme, which assists the vulnerable, elderly and disabled across tenures in carrying out minor repairs in their homes. The award of a £225,725 grant in Spring 2002 to support activities for homeless people is also outlined; linking to the excellent work carried out by this service in conjunction with partner organisations. Similarly, the chapter includes comments on the development of the Housing Advice Service. Finally, the significant progress made in the development of Supporting People is highlighted, particularly the acquisition of significant funding for Bury's projects in this area, culminating in our request for an early inspection of the service in September / October 2003.

Chapter 4.4, looks at the role housing has in contributing to overall social, economic and environmental improvement in Bury. This details the work of the Economic Renewal Action Plan (ERAP) in Bury's most deprived wards, the Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment in East Bury, the Pimhole Renewal Area, work linked to the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB 5) and significant proposals outlined in the document 'Reinventing Radcliffe'. Attention is also focussed on community safety, linked to the work of the Neighbourhood Wardens, and on energy efficiency, dealing with the work of projects such as the Energy Showhouse.

Finally, Chapter 5.0 contains a comprehensive Action Plan detailing the individual projects that will be carried out in order to ensure that the schemes detailed in the main body of the document are achieved.

Conclusions

The Housing Strategy has responded to advice received following last year's positively received submission and should achieve the criteria required by the Government's 'Fit for Purpose'.

The initiatives outlined in this strategy, will ensure that the services delivered by Housing Services and its partners will support and enhance national, regional, local and corporate objectives and so help to promote a service which meets the needs of current and future residents of the Borough, allowing them to live in safe, secure and sustainable communities.