

ANALYSIS OF

DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY

CONSULTATION

INTRODUCTION

Following Cabinet approval on the 18th September 2013, extensive consultation on the draft Housing Strategy 2014-2024 was commenced using a variety of methods to maximise opportunities for response.

Questions were asked in relation to:

- whether respondents supported our five key housing priorities (delivering a sufficient and suitable supply of housing in the Borough, affordability, fewer empty properties, good quality accommodation and partnership development);
- what respondents felt we needed to do to deliver these priorities;
- what respondents felt was the most important priority;
- whether the strategy was easy to read;
- whether respondents understood what the strategy was trying to achieve; and
- whether there was anything else the strategy needed to consider.

The results from an on-line survey, interactive voting sessions and discussions from the four workshop events based on these key questions are combined and summarised below.

In total **88** responses were received on the draft Housing Strategy, with people from a range of backgrounds and representing different sectors of the housing market expressing their views.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONSES

People responding to the consultation were asked to state which of the five priorities identified in the draft strategy they felt were the most important. Both methods of consultation produced similar results with the top three priorities stated as:

1. Delivering a sufficient and suitable supply of housing
2. Affordability
3. Good Quality Accommodation

Respondents were also asked what was required to deliver against each of the priorities and these are listed below:

1. Delivering a sufficient and suitable supply of housing in the Borough:

- The importance creating mixed tenure developments.
- A need for the Council to help to identify land for development.
- Choice of housing for older people.
- Potential issue with availability of finance preventing the delivery of enough homes in the Borough.
- Need a range of housing to meet the needs of all customers.
- Need for 1-bedroom properties.
- Need for larger, 3- and 4-bedroom properties.
- Need should be met through refurbishment of existing properties, not all new development.
- Importance of protecting the Green Belt and developing on Brownfield sites, particularly those with existing planning permissions.
- Occupants should be held more accountable for their homes.

2. Affordability:

- Concerns about the costs of private renting.
- Costs of renting all types of accommodation felt to be high / difficult to meet, especially with benefit changes.
- The problems people are facing with increasing fuel poverty and living costs, and the impact this can have on ability to pay rent.
- Importance of affordable housing in the Borough.
- The importance of making people aware of the different affordable housing options, such as discounted outright sale and shared ownership.
- The need to avoid excluding some people by having too restrictive local lettings policies.
- Need to ensure a range of tenures are available, including home ownership, rent to buy, and renting.
- Need to balance affordable housing requirements with development costs if housing schemes are to be delivered.

3. Empty Properties:

- Need to increase Council Tax on empty properties.
- Explore incentives or support to help owners bring empties back into use.
- Need to take action where properties are left empty.
- Need to protect communities from anti social behaviour caused by empties.
- Action needs to be taken against rogue landlords. Need action to regulate against subletting.
- Need to promote positive initiatives, such as the Landlord Accreditation Scheme.
- Work with landlords / owners of empty properties.
- Focus on bringing empties back into use rather than building new housing.

4. Good Quality Accommodation:

- Concerns about standards of accommodation in the private rented sector.
- Concerns that standards in parts of the private rented sector are tolerated in the Borough because people really want to live here.
- Council needs to work collaboratively with private landlords to raise standards; otherwise there is a need to take enforcement action.
- More rigorous inspection of the private rented sector proposed.
- Negative impact on estates from poorly maintained former 'Right to Buy' properties.
- Need incentives, such as Green Deal, to address fuel poverty and its associated negative effects.
- Need to use quality to positively affect health of residents.
- Promote quality accommodation provided by Registered Providers.

5. Partnership Development:

- Partnership working is important to improve standards and the environment.
- Build on existing successful partnerships.
- Develop partnerships with developers.
- More involvement for tenants.
- More partnership working to support cross border moves.

Additional Priorities

While the majority of respondents stated that they supported the five priorities, workshops attendees were asked to identify any other issues or priorities which had not been covered in earlier discussions. Observations made included:

- Excellent strategy, but needs resources to deliver.
- Need to consider a range of options to maximise resources available to the Borough.
- Need effective communication with tenants.
- Support needed to prevent homelessness.

Further Comments

Analysis showed that there was a good representation from a range of stakeholder groups, therefore demonstrating that the intended audience for the consultation had been reached.

Encouragingly the majority of respondents stated that the draft strategy was easy to read and that they understood what the strategy was trying to do.

PRESENTATION TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The draft Housing Strategy and Action Plan, together with the analysis of the consultation responses received to date, were presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14 January 2014 as the concluding part of the consultation process. The Committee was supportive of the priorities of the Strategy and the Action Plan.

The key issues discussed by the Committee were:

- The importance of bring empty properties back into use as this can enhance the quality of the local environment and reduce any negative impact on the local area.
- To work with developers to ensure that new housing closely matches the needs of the Borough.
- To work with private landlords to increase the quality of rented accommodation and take action against poor quality properties.
- The importance of affordable housing in the Borough.
- The importance of the housing market in supporting the development of a strong local economy.
- To be mindful of the needs of different customer groups in the Borough, to avoid people feeling excluded.

The Committee has asked for an update on progress against the Action Plan to be presented to them in twelve months time.

CONCLUSIONS

The majority of respondents to the consultation were supportive of the priorities contained in the draft Housing Strategy, giving encouragement to further progress our draft proposals.

While the number of people taking the opportunity to comment on the draft Housing Strategy was quite low, good discussions took place at all the events, with a wide range of different people from developers, councillors, staff and residents providing useful input into the discussions.