

REPORT FOR DECISION



DECISION OF:	The Cabinet
DATE:	18 September 2013
SUBJECT:	Consultation on the Draft Housing Strategy 2013-23
REPORT FROM:	Cllr Rishi Shori, Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Health and Housing
CONTACT OFFICER:	Marcus Connor – Head of Performance & Housing Strategy
TYPE OF DECISION:	CABINET (NON-KEY DECISION)
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION/STATUS:	This report is within the public domain
SUMMARY:	<p>Whilst it is no longer a Government requirement to submit a Housing Strategy for regulatory purposes, it remains good practice for local authorities to develop a Strategy which sets out local priorities and provides a guide to registered providers and developers on housing requirements within the Borough.</p> <p>Bury's current Housing Strategy was written 10 years ago and is outdated. The new draft strategy (attached) uses refreshed data from Bury's Housing Need & Demand Assessment (2011/12) and other sources to identify 5 key themes for action over the next 10 years. This Assessment was developed through extensive consultation with stakeholders and seeks to respond to their identified housing needs and demands.</p> <p>Some initial consultation has already been carried out to provide a reality check on the draft proposals. Approval is now sought to undertake wider consultation with Elected Members, the public, housing providers and stakeholders to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highlight the issues• Seek consensus on the priorities• Produce a robust action plan to strengthen housing improvement in the Borough

	The consultation would take place during October / November 2013, with a revised and final Housing Strategy being presented to Cabinet early in 2014.
OPTIONS & RECOMMENDED OPTION	<p>Option 1 – Agree to consult on the draft Housing Strategy. As reported above, it is good practice to have an up to date Housing Strategy for the Borough. It is better practice if stakeholders are able to contribute to the process.</p> <p>Option 2 - Do nothing. This would leave the Borough without an overarching strategy. Although not an essential requirement, a clear strategy assists decision making and enhances the prospects of external funding bids</p> <p>Option 1 is the preferred option and only commits the Council to consulting on the draft Housing Strategy.</p>
IMPLICATIONS:	The Housing Strategy will provide a guide to where housing should be provided in the Borough, helping to obtain a joined up approach and maximising the use of limited resources.
Corporate Aims/Policy Framework:	Do the proposals accord with the Policy Framework? Yes
Statement by the S151 Officer: Financial Implications and Risk Considerations:	<p>The Strategy is a critical document outlining the future direction of Housing in the Borough.</p> <p>The financial issues / options are outlined at section 6.0 of the Housing Strategy, along with considerations to be taken into account when developing new initiatives.</p> <p>The Strategy mitigates the risks of having an unstable supply of housing, and seeks to ensure best use of available resources.</p>
Statement by Executive Director of Resources:	
Equality/Diversity implications:	The Equality Analysis for the Draft Strategy shows that there will be a positive impact on people with the following Equality Characteristics: Race, Disability, Age, Religion or Belief, and Caring Responsibilities. It will enhance opportunity by seeking to meet the needs of those with specific characteristics and so avoid them being excluded from the housing options generally available in the Borough. It will also help to foster good relations between those with a protected characteristic and those who do not, such as the integration of schemes for older people into the wider community.

Considered by Monitoring Officer:	Yes. Although not a statutory or regulatory requirement, a Housing Strategy is seen as best practice and is in line with the requirement for local authorities to be open and transparent in policy and decision making. The proposal to review will enable consideration of the Homes and Communities Agency's Regulatory Framework and consultation with local stakeholders is also in line with the government's localism agenda. When considering the Strategy, Members must have due regard to the Council's equality duties (under the Equality Act 2010), must ensure that the consultation process is fair and thorough and that they have an opportunity to consider responses.
Wards Affected:	All Wards
Scrutiny Interest:	Overview and scrutiny

TRACKING/PROCESS

DIRECTOR: Executive Director of Adult Care Services

Chief Executive/ Strategic Leadership Team	Executive Member/Chair	Ward Members	Partners
2 September 2013			
Scrutiny Committee	Committee	Council	
	18 September 2013		

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Government Office used to require all local authorities to produce a Housing Strategy for their area that met set criteria. Bury's Strategy was last assessed in 2004 and successfully obtained a 'Fit for Purpose' rating. The burden of external assessment has since been lifted enabling strategies to be reflective of local needs and circumstances.
- 1.2 With changes in the housing, planning and economic climate over recent years, Bury's housing strategy has become outdated and needs to be refreshed. A Housing Need & Demand Assessment was commissioned in 2011/12 and the outcome of this report together with other data on the local housing market has been used to determine future housing trends, needs and demands. Responding to these issues is essential for effective decision making, guiding the actions of housing providers and ensuring that the Council and its partners maximise their use of resources.
- 1.3 As part of the strategy development process, it is important that the Council obtains the views of all stakeholders. Subject to any comments by Cabinet, it is proposed to undertake formal consultation on the draft Housing Strategy during October/November 2013 with a view to submitting a final version (together with the results of consultation) to Cabinet early in 2014.

2.0 DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY

- 2.1 The primary aim of the strategy is to achieve sufficiency and suitability of housing within the Borough. This means influencing the market and looking to create conditions which encourage the right mix, of the right type, size and tenure of housing, in the right locations, to meet the needs of the Borough. Part of this is about increasing the number of dwellings available to meet a rising population. But it is not just about numbers. The Council also needs to take actions which promote quality housing that is both accessible and affordable to residents.
- 2.2 In the current economic climate this will be challenging. However it is expected that over the life of this strategy, conditions will change and the Borough needs to be in a position to respond and take advantage of any upturn. Bury is a popular place to live and the strategy looks to develop that unique selling point through:
 - Encouraging responsible house building
 - Maintaining the balance between bought and rented properties – with owner occupation expected to remain the principle tenure type
 - Tackling the number of empty homes
 - Partnership working with partners to build decent and sustainable neighbourhoods
- 2.3 There is also recognition of the social aspects of housing in terms of:
 - Supporting the 'Green Agenda' to maximise energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty
 - Assessing affordability across the townships
 - Identifying the needs of specific groups such as older people, people with disabilities, homeless households

- 2.4 Through the data analysis and discussions around the findings with a sample group of stakeholders, certain themes emerge which can be categorised under five main headings:
- Objective 1: Delivering a sufficient and suitable supply of housing in the Borough
 - Objective 2: Affordability
 - Objective 3: Fewer empty properties
 - Objective 4: Good quality accommodation
 - Objective 5: Partnership development
- 2.5 The Council has some ideas on how these issues can be taken forward but, rather than dictate the outcome, it is proposed to test the strategy's findings through the consultation process and engage stakeholders in developing the action plan.

3.0 CONSULTATION

- 3.1 Subject to Cabinet approval, the views of a wide range of stakeholders will be sought using a variety of techniques:
- All Elected Members via email
 - Open consultation with the public via the Council's website
 - Consultation with housing providers operating in the Borough, landlords, interest groups and voluntary sector organisations
 - Focus Groups – this could include a session specifically for Elected Members
 - Feedback from the Joint Commissioning Partnership, Housing Association Liaison Group and Six Town Housing Board.
 - Homes and Communities Agency
 - Housing Strategy Programme Board
- 3.2 The methods of consultation will vary according to demand and to maximise participation. Full details will be sent out to providers, members and interested groups to allow them to comment. More generally, press releases and other media outlets including the Council website will be utilised to raise awareness and generate responses from the public and potential customers. Copies of the draft strategy will be available on the website and in the main Council offices and alternative arrangements will be made for people who have difficulty accessing the document.
- 3.3 The period of consultation will be from 1 October 2013 for 8 weeks. All responses will be collated and analysed in a report to be circulated alongside the revised final Housing Strategy to Cabinet in early 2014.

4.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- 4.1 The strategy aims to provide a framework for housing provision which meets the needs of all residents in the Borough, being mindful of the need to maximise the acquisition and use of limited resources.
- 4.2 The equality analysis will be amended during and following consultation. The initial version is attached for information.

5.0 RISK

- 5.1 The main risk at this stage is that we will be raising expectations that cannot be fulfilled. It is accepted that much will depend on the prevailing economic situation but the strategy provides direction to housing providers, identifies the local needs and priorities and provides support to future funding bids. In these times, focus and cohesiveness take on greater significance in order to achieve better outcomes and an effective use of resources.
- 5.2 A subsequent risk is that the strategy will be ineffective and not shape the market as intended. To mitigate this risk, the Housing Strategy has been written to complement planning and other policies to ensure a consistent and coherent approach to housing in the Borough. Engaging stakeholders through consultation in the development of the strategy and action plan should also mitigate the risk of the strategy being ignored.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 Bury's Housing Strategy is old and needs refreshing. Consequently, work has been undertaken to update our knowledge of the local housing market, needs and demand to produce a new draft Housing Strategy which is intended to take the Borough forward into the next decade.
- 6.2 The strategy has identified a number of key issues which have been grouped under 5 key objectives. To obtain consensus on the issues and engage housing providers and other stakeholders in designing the solutions, it is proposed to undertake a comprehensive consultation programme. This programme will not only record people's views on the strategy but also make a major contribution to developing the action plan.
- 6.3 It is recommended that:
- (a) Cabinet considers and comments on the draft Housing Strategy;
 - (b) Cabinet agrees to a formal process of consultation with stakeholders during October/November 2013; and
 - (c) A report summarising the consultation responses together with the final version of the Housing Strategy 2013-23 is submitted to Cabinet in early 2014.

List of Background Papers:-

Housing Need & Demand Assessment 2011/12

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