

CABINET – 21 APRIL 2008

HOUSING STRATEGY

REPORT OF HEAD OF STRATEGIC HOUSING

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RECENT REFERENCES:

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Government has recently highlighted the importance of local authorities' strategic housing role. The Council's Housing Strategy is in need of review and updating. Following consultation and an examination of the evidence base the Winchester Housing Board have arrived at a vision and set of high level priorities. The objective of achieving these will underpin all other housing activity.

A range of more detailed housing implementation and action plans, including those relating to homelessness and private sector housing, will be developed in order to further develop the Housing Strategy themes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the Housing Strategy vision and priorities are adopted and used as a basis to develop the Housing Strategy.
2. That the Housing Strategy be considered at a future meeting of Cabinet (target date for draft to be presented - July 2008).
3. That the subsequent housing implementation and action plans be considered for approval by the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities under the portfolio holder decision making scheme.

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##### DETAIL:

#### 1 Introduction

The aim of this report is to seek endorsement of the Housing Strategy vision and proposed priorities. This will provide a framework to develop the Housing Strategy (which will be brought back to Cabinet for consideration) and the more detailed implementation and action plans that will support the vision. These will be developed in association with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities under the portfolio holder decision making scheme of delegation.

#### 2 Background

2.1 The Council's current Housing Strategy was adopted in 2004 and is now due to be updated.

2.2 The Local Government White Paper (2006) states that; by working effectively with *partners to deliver new market and affordable housing and make best use of stock this [local authority] strategic role is at the heart of achieving social, economic and environmental objectives that shape a community and create a sense of place*. The Housing Green Paper (2007) and the subsequent Housing and Regeneration Bill (2007) emphasise that, through their strategic housing role, local authorities have a vital contribution to play in addressing the housing needs of residents across all tenures. *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities Statutory Guidance* (2007) indicates an expectation that housing strategies should be regularly refreshed.

2.3 It is, therefore, important that local authorities have a clear housing vision. The Housing Strategy, together with the forthcoming Local Development Framework (LDF), will set out that vision. While the LDF will focus on the land use implications of housing and overall housing numbers the Housing Strategy will have a much more specific focus. This is set out below.

#### 3. Developing the Vision and Priorities

3.1 The proposed Housing Strategy vision and priorities have been arrived at following extensive consultation, for instance through the annual housing forum, homelessness and private sector housing stakeholder events, and through the development of an evidence base, for example the recent Housing Market Assessment and Stock Condition Surveys. They were agreed by the Winchester Housing Board (the stakeholder group that provides the housing support for the Winchester District Strategic Partnership and Community Strategy) in February 2008.

3.2 The Local Government White Paper (2006) advocates a very close link between housing and sustainable community strategies. The vision and priorities are consistent with the Community Strategy and support its five outcomes (*health and wellbeing; freedom from fear, prosperous economy, high quality environment, and inclusive society*). They also reflect priority themes that have emerged from the Inclusive Society Strategic Outcome Group.

#### 4. Housing Strategy Vision

4.1 The following vision is proposed:

4.2 *To ensure that communities are sustainable & inclusive.*

*To do this it is necessary to:*

- *enhance access to housing of the right type in the right location and, in particular, improve the supply of high quality, affordable housing;*
- *ensure housing is of a high quality and meets the needs of households;*
- *promote safe, mixed, inclusive and high quality neighbourhoods, providing support where necessary;*
- *support vulnerable and disadvantaged people meet their housing needs;*
- *involve communities in achieving their aspirations;*
- *limit the environmental impact of housing, and;*
- *effectively communicate housing issues and celebrate successes.*

4.3 The desire to achieve the above will underpin all housing activity

4.4 While it is desirable to pay attention to the well-being of all parts of the community, it is important that the Strategy focuses the limited resources on those communities and households that require particular support and where the Strategy can make an impact. It is proposed, therefore, that the Strategy focuses, firstly, on those members of the community unable to exercise a reasonable degree of free choice about housing circumstances and living in accommodation or areas that do not meet their needs. There will be also be a focus on the housing related needs and aspiration of other sections of the community, however this will be subsidiary to the primary focus.

#### 5. Housing Strategy Priorities

5.1 The following priorities are proposed:

5.2 *Top Priorities for Action*

- 1) *To improve the supply of affordable homes and meet local needs.*
- 2) *To promote high standards in private and affordable housing, including improving the quality of the Council stock, taking action to tackle climate change, improving energy and water efficiency and recycling, and encouraging the use of renewable energy.*
- 3) *To promote independent living and provide support for vulnerable and disadvantaged households, in particular homeless households with complex needs and older persons.*

5.3 *Other Priorities for Action*

- *To prevent homelessness wherever possible.*
- *To ensure an adequate housing supply to support the local economy and meet local needs, and to take opportunities to provide more affordable homes where other development would not normally be allowed, e.g. the edge of towns and villages, provided development is sustainable and sympathetic to local character.*
- *To improve access to affordable housing and housing choice.*

- *Work effectively with local communities to help them achieve their aspirations, including facilitating community/stakeholder involvement in identifying and developing solutions to housing problems.*
- *Promote freedom from fear by, working with local communities and partners to tackle crime and disorder, increase feelings of safety and deal with anti-social behaviour, and “designing out crime” in housing schemes.*
- *To communicate the benefits of new housing and promote a positive image of affordable housing.*

## 6. Conclusions

- 6.1 Developing a Housing Strategy will allow the Council to establish itself as leading the local housing agenda and in doing so will fulfil Government expectations. The vision and priorities have been developed in consultation and partnership with others and take account of a robust evidence base. The proposals are in conformity with the Community Strategy and support the Corporate Strategy priorities. The Strategy will provide a strategic framework for future decisions and the development of more detailed actions.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

### 7. CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 7.1 The vision and priorities support the Corporate Strategy priorities in several ways, for instance:
- 7.2 *Economic Prosperity:* Ensuring an adequate housing supply to support the local economy.
- 7.3 *Safe and Strong Communities:* Promoting health and well-being by improving the quality of Council housing stock and promoting high standards in private sector housing; promoting an inclusive society by enabling, and improving access to, affordable housing; and, promoting freedom from fear by dealing promptly and effectively with anti-social behaviour.
- 7.4 *High Quality Environment:* Using the planning system to promote the building of new homes to meet local needs.
- 7.5 *An Efficient and Effective Council:* Working with local communities in the District to help them achieve their aspirations

### 8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 8.1 The vision and priorities do not commit the Council to any specific expenditure. However, the more detailed implementation and actions plans will, and as part of their development it will be necessary to take account of their resource implications.

### 9. TACT Comment

- 9.1 TACT has not been formally consulted at this stage on the development of the Housing Strategy but understands that it will be fully consulted in the coming months and prior to the Strategy being finalised. Cabinet will be fully aware of TACTs view from previous comments that TACT is seeking a commitment from the Council for stock retention, to fight the injustice of the subsidy system and to investigate the

feasibility of building new Council homes. In the interim period TACT will be in contact with other Councils in the same position as Winchester. Alan Rickman with John Bond has been on a Focus Group Panel in London run by TPAS for the Government to give tenants views on various matters including negative subsidy and tenants left them in no doubt of our views. We are now awaiting update on the results of the meeting.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

- 10.1 Working papers held in the Strategic Housing Division; Research Documents such as the Housing Market Assessment and Stock Condition Surveys; Core Strategy Issues and Options Paper.