

Report to	-	Cabinet
Date	-	11 February 2019
Report of the	-	Executive Director
Subject	-	Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy

Recommendation to COUNCIL: That:

- 1) the joint Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy be approved and adopted; and
 - 2) in accordance with the rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018, the Council introduces from 1 April 2020 the higher empty property premiums for Council Tax as detailed in this report; and
 - 3) the Executive Director is granted delegated authority to develop an exemption criteria to the new charges in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance.
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Head of Service: Ben Hook

Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor Mrs Hughes

Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to present to Members a Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy for recommendation to full Council.
2. A set of proposed priorities have been consulted on that have informed the Strategy, as agreed by Members at Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Minute OSC18/22 refers) and Cabinet (Minutes CB18/28 refers).
3. Furthermore, national policy, recent reviews of housing, homelessness and rough sleeping in Rother, extensive research and consultation outcomes have been used to further develop the Strategy.

Background

4. The purpose of a Housing Strategy is to set out the key actions for the authority and its partners in delivering the agreed priorities, through the provision of an action plan and policy direction. Local authorities are also required by Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 to have in place a published Homelessness Strategy.
5. The purpose of a Homelessness Strategy is to set out the local authority approach to preventing homelessness in the district and providing advice and support for people in the district who are or may become homeless.

6. Added to this, Government is directing local authorities to ensure a Rough Sleeper Strategy is in place from 2019. It is therefore proposed that a single Strategy is presented covering housing, homelessness and rough sleeping, given the crossover between delivery plan actions. The Strategy is attached as Appendix 1.

Consultation feedback

7. A six week consultation exercise was completed in November 2018. A resident and partner consultation was undertaken via an on-line survey, and a consultation event took place for key stakeholder partners during November 2018. A total of 151 individual responses were received. A total of 31 organisations were represented at the consultation event.
8. The consultation feedback placed the top three priorities as increasing supply of housing (58%); reducing demand (homelessness and rough sleeping) (29%); and improving the quality of housing (13%).
9. A detailed summary of the feedback is available in the Members' Room.

The Strategy

10. The Strategy (Appendix 1) sets out a number of actions within each of the three priority areas with an overall ambition to contribute to a wider vision for the district: delivering economic and regeneration goals; tackling homelessness and meeting housing need; helping more people access home ownership; and improving the health and wellbeing of communities.
11. Rother's role in delivering these actions may be varied from enabling and supporting, through to direct delivery. For example the Council's role may be ensuring the necessary plans and policies are in place to enable an action to be achieved (e.g. affordable housing policy); a supporting role to a delivery partner (e.g. supported housing schemes); or as a lead partner (e.g. provision of temporary accommodation or outright build with a joint venture partner).

Empty Homes

12. Bringing empty homes back into use is seen by many as part of the solution required to increase housing supply. The Government recently passed legislation to allow Councils to apply a higher long term empty premium to council tax charges for empty properties. The rationale for the change is to encourage empty homes back into use. The current premium of 50% did have some success nationally of reducing the long term empty properties and the Government now wish to take this further. The Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018 allows the following increases in the premium to be charged:

Financial year 2019/20

- Maximum of 100% premium for properties that have been empty for at least 2 years (was 50%)

Financial year 2020/21

- Maximum of 100% premium if property empty for at least 2 years but less than 5 years
- Maximum of 200% premium if property empty for at least 5 years

Financial year 2021 onwards

- Maximum of 100% premium if property empty for at least 2 years but less than 5 years
 - Maximum of 200% premium if property empty for at least 5 years but less than 10 years
 - Maximum 300% premium if property empty for at least 10 years
13. Currently there are approximately 100 properties in Rother paying the current long term empty premium for Council Tax. It is proposed that the Council introduces these increases from April 2020. This would allow time for consultation with those potentially affected and also enable criteria to be developed to allow for any exemptions from the premium that Members may wish to see, for example where a property is being actively marketed.

Future Monitoring and Updates

14. Key to the success of this Strategy is partnership working; partner organisations have been involved in the process of developing and agreeing the priorities and actions proposed within this Strategy, from the early work of the Task and Finish Group through to the joint consultation event. Partnership working is a theme which runs throughout the Strategy and its delivery plan. Further to this, a multi-agency approach to monitoring the delivery of the Strategy is in the early stages of development. It is likely this will take the form of a quarterly meeting or forum.
15. It is intended that an update will be presented on an annual basis; this will provide information on delivery plan progress and any service changes that may be required as a result of resource and/or national policy changes.

Conclusion

16. The Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy provides a clear direction in terms of how the Council and its partners will tackle the issues relating to lack of affordable housing, meeting housing needs, tackling homelessness and rough sleeping and improving the quality and suitability of housing in the district. The Strategy is based on sound evidence provided through the Homelessness Review and Strategic Housing Report as well as other sources of data and consultation. The document's delivery plan sets out how we intend to tackle these issues and provides clear targets as a measure of success, which will be reported on an annual basis.

Dr Anthony Leonard
Executive Director

Risk Assessment Statement

The Council has a legal obligation to have Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategies in place. If it does not comply then the Council may lose funding. Not having a Strategy may mean resources are incorrectly allocated and priorities misunderstood.