

Report to	-	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date	-	10 September 2018
Report of	-	Executive Directors
Subject	-	Housing and Homelessness Strategy – Consultation

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That Cabinet be asked to approve the draft Consultation Plan and Consultation Document in respect of a Housing and Homelessness Strategy to allow a six week consultation on the priorities for the development of a final Housing and Homelessness Strategy.

Heads of Service: Ben Hook/Joe Powell

Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to present to Members the draft Consultation Plan and Consultation Document for a Rother Housing and Homelessness Strategy.
2. The aim of the consultation plan is to provide statutory and voluntary partners, resident groups and interested parties an opportunity to certify that we have identified the key housing issues that affect Rother, and to give their views on what the housing priorities for the Rother district should be.

Background

3. Local authorities are required under the Homelessness Act 2002 to have a published Homelessness Strategy. However, it is common practice to bring together the Housing and Homelessness Strategies into one document to ensure we consider Housing supply as part of the solution to the issues of housing demand.
4. The purpose of a Housing Strategy is to:
 - a. Provide an overview of housing issues in the area;
 - b. Identify any gaps in housing supply and demand;
 - c. Identify harmful housing conditions;
 - d. Set out agreed priorities for action; and
 - e. Set out the key housing actions for the authority and its partners in delivering the agreed priorities through the provision of an action plan and policy direction.
5. The purpose of a Homelessness Strategy is to set out the local authority approach to preventing homelessness in the district, by providing advice and support for people in the district who are, or may, become homeless.

Work Completed to Date

6. Recommendations from the recent Housing Task & Finish Group were agreed by Cabinet (Minute CB18/14 refers); these included two recommendations regarding inclusion of actions within a Housing & Homelessness Strategy. The first recommendation related to preventing and reducing homelessness; the second to increasing the provision of affordable housing. The relevant recommendations and actions are set out in the Consultation Document at Appendix 1.
7. To aid the consultation process, a review of homelessness has been undertaken. The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on all local housing authorities to carry out a review of homelessness and homelessness service provision for their area every five years. The review helps us to understand the levels of homelessness, reasons for homelessness and the type of services we need to provide to enable us to support and assist households in the district. A copy of the Review is available in the Members' Room <http://www.rother.gov.uk/housing-consultation>.
8. Key points from the homelessness review are set out below:
 - **Increasing homelessness:** Levels of homelessness applications have increased from 112 in 2014/15 to 216 in 2017/18.
 - **High need for 1 bed accommodation:** There is a need for a range of affordable housing across the district with the highest need being for one bedroom accommodation particularly, but not exclusively, for older people.
 - **High need for affordable rented accommodation:** The predominant housing need is for affordable rented accommodation, although there is also some need identified for intermediate housing schemes such as shared ownership properties.
 - **High levels of disability and long term health problems:** Rother has significantly higher levels of people with long term health problems or a disability (23.4%) than England and Wales (17.9%) or the South East (15.7%).
 - **High levels of benefit take up:** Benefit take up is higher (11.3%) than nationally (10.7%), although a breakdown shows this is due to poor health and disability related benefits.
9. The last review was undertaken in 2013 with the Housing and Homelessness Strategy published in 2014.
10. A significant research project into the housing needs and housing stock condition across the district was undertaken during 2017. A social research company, Opinion Research Services (ORS) was commissioned to undertake housing assessments and household questionnaires. ORS have analysed the findings from these surveys which form the basis of a strategic approach to affordable housing delivery and tackling private rented sector conditions over the coming years. Some of the findings from the report are set out below; the full report can be found at <http://www.rother.gov.uk/housing-research>:

Category 1 Hazards¹

- The overall proportion of private sector dwellings with a Category 1 hazard in the study area is 18.5%, which equates to around 7,210 dwellings.
- 891 dwellings (2.6%) have two Category 1 hazards and around 208 dwellings (1%) have three or more Category 1 hazards identified.
- The most prominent Category 1 hazards are excess cold and falls on level surfaces (8.1% and 6.7% respectively).

Decent Homes - Thermal Comfort

- 6,420 dwellings in the study area have a thermal comfort failure equating to around 16.5% of the dwelling stock.
- Privately rented dwellings have a higher rate of failure (25.7%) compared with owner occupied dwellings (14.3%).

Households with Specific Needs

- 17.5% of households have at least one member with limited or restricted mobility. A further 3.7% have a member with another health issue that affects their housing needs.
- 96.5% of those who indicated a health limitation feel that their home is suitable or could be adapted for their needs.
- Of those indicating a preference for supported accommodation, Extra Care for the Elderly was the most popular choice by a wide margin.

The Consultation

11. The Plan, as attached at Appendix 2, sets out the groups we intend to consult and the methods we intend to use. The majority of the consultation will take place via an online questionnaire, however, telephone and written consultation responses will be accepted.
12. The consultation questionnaire, as attached at the end of Appendix 1, sets out a number of proposed priorities based on the outcomes of the Homelessness Review and Strategic Housing Research report, as well as recommendations from the Housing Task & Finish Group. The intention is to keep the questionnaire concise with the main objective of collating views on the importance of each of the proposed priorities.

Next Steps

13. The strategy is now due for revision with initial review and consultation undertaken through the Housing Task & Finish Group. The wider consultation exercise will now follow and will take 6 weeks.

¹ A category 1 hazard is a hazard that poses a serious threat to the health or safety of people living in or visiting your home. Examples of category 1 hazards can include: exposed wiring or overloaded electrical sockets or dangerous or broken boiler.

14. The outcomes of the consultation exercise will formulate a final Housing and Homelessness Strategy which will be used to steer the direction of Housing Services, including the homelessness and housing options services, over the next five years (2019-24).

Dr Anthony Leonard/Malcolm Johnston
Executive Directors

Risk Assessment Statement

The Council has a legal obligation to have in place a strategy to tackle and reduce homelessness. If we do not have an up to date strategy it may expose the Council to future challenges and we may not be able to access government funding.

Draft Consultation Document: Housing & Homelessness Strategy

The Council is reviewing its Housing & Homelessness Strategy. The Strategy will set out how we will deliver our housing and homelessness services in the future. More information on work completed to date can be found at www.rother.gov.uk/housingconsultation

We would appreciate it if you would take a little time to give us your opinion on the priorities identified.

You can complete this survey on-line at www.rother.gov.uk/housingconsultation
Surveys must be returned by 26 November 2018.

Priority 1 - REDUCING DEMAND: Prevent and reduce homelessness

Rother currently provides a housing options service, the objective is to assist households at risk of homelessness to prevent their homelessness. This priority puts in place an action plan to provide a proactive service in order to reduce an anticipated increase in homelessness. Actions could include:

- a. Establishing a regular local multi agency homelessness forum to design, deliver and monitor homelessness prevention measures.
- b. Engage with partners to reduce costs by preventing duplication of services.
- c. Establish protocols and procedures with social landlords and letting agents operating in Rother to help identify and reduce homelessness at an earlier stage.
- d. Put in place additional homeless prevention measures; these include setting up and managing a social lettings agency and securing access to more private rented properties through closer partnership with local landlords.
- e. Work with the voluntary sector and relevant statutory partners to explore options for creating a street homelessness centre/hub in Bexhill, with outreach available to rural areas of Rother.
- f. Update the criteria for Discretionary Housing Payment by April 2019 to better reflect the needs of households affected by welfare reforms.
- g. Develop a communications plan to include training, to ensure front line officers, partners and Members are aware of the support available to people at risk of homelessness.
- h. Put in place actions to encourage raising aspirations, particularly those of young people, to access training and employment as a route into better quality housing.

Q1. Do you think reducing demand should be a key priority for the strategy?

Yes/No (if no, please explain why)

Q2. Do you think the actions set out for this priority are correct?

Yes/No (if no, please explain why)

Q3. Which of the actions should we prioritise? Why? (Choose as many or as few as you like)

Q4. What other actions could we include?

Priority 2 - INCREASING SUPPLY: Maximise the supply of high quality affordable housing in urban and rural areas

This priority recognises the lack of affordable housing in rural as well as urban areas, and would put in place an action plan which would support the development of affordable housing to help meet local housing needs across the district and include partnership working with Registered Providers and Developers in order to maximise opportunities for increasing development. Actions could include:

- a. Create a delivery vehicle or vehicles such as a local Housing Company or public/private partnership with the following objectives:
 - To acquire emergency and temporary accommodation through the purchase of accommodation for conversion, or delivering new build temporary accommodation; and
 - Purchasing accommodation for those in housing need, for market, private rent or to meet temporary accommodation needs.
- b. Purchasing and developing 'stalled' sites which are vital to the delivery of affordable housing through negotiation or Compulsory Purchase Orders where other options have failed.
- c. Strengthen partnership working with Registered Providers (social Landlords) by expanding the number of preferred partners and developing a joint framework/protocol agreement incorporating streamlined planning processes with realistic timeframes and clear guidance notes.
- d. Continue working with Action in Rural Sussex, Parish and Town Councils and community groups in identifying suitable sites and delivering community led housing.

- e. Consideration be given to allowing exception site planning policy² to allow for an element of market housing to cross subsidise where viability is an issue, taking account of revised National Planning Policy Framework.
- f. *Helping people to buy a home* – Increase the delivery of low cost home ownership options.

Q5. Do you think increasing supply should be a key priority for the strategy?

Yes/No (if no, please explain why)

Q6. Do you think the actions set out for this priority are correct?

Yes/No (if no, please explain why)

Q7. Which of the actions could we prioritise? Why?

Q8. What other actions should we include?

Priority 3 - IMPROVING QUALITY: Ensure warm, healthy, well maintained homes

This priority focuses on delivering measures available to reduce carbon emissions and fuel poverty and improving the rented housing sector. Action could include:

- a. Working with Registered Providers (Social Landlords) to explore the opportunity of introducing affordable warmth methods and modern and innovative methods of construction, for example timber framed kits, for all affordable housing developments.
- b. Improving the rented housing sector – putting in place an action plan which would target rented sector property which is in poor condition.
- c. Put in place an action plan which would set out a number of methods for bringing into use empty homes, from contacting owners and offering incentives through to the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders.

² Exception site policy: Rural exception sites are sites for affordable housing development in rural locations where market housing would not normally be acceptable because of planning policy constraints and are therefore an exception to policy. Homes can be brought forward on these sites only if there is a proven unmet local need for affordable housing and a legal planning agreement (s106 agreement) is put in place to ensure that the homes will always remain affordable

Q9. Do you think increasing supply should be a key priority for the strategy?

Yes/No (if no, please explain why)

Q10. Do you think the actions set out for this priority are correct?

Yes/No (if no, please explain why)

Q11. Which of the actions could we prioritise? Why?

Q12. What other actions should we include?

General questions:

Q13. Are there any other housing issues we have not mentioned which you think should be included?

Q14. Please include any other comments below.

RDC HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY CONSULTATION PLAN 2018

The Housing and Homelessness Strategy is due for renewal. The Strategy aims to set out the priorities for affordable housing development and homelessness & housing services in the district and will include a plan of how we will meet these priorities.

Aims of the consultation:

- To ensure we have identified the key housing issues that affect Rother
- To ensure our information is accurate and up to date
- To give a wide audience of partners, residents and interested parties the opportunity to provide their views on what the housing priorities for the District should be.

Who we will consult:

Resident target groups:	Statutory Partners:	Voluntary sector partners:	Internal/other:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Association tenants • Housing Register applicants • Housing Benefit claimants • Homelessness Options clients • Other interested residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DWP • Registered Providers (Housing Associations) • ESCC Adult Social Care • ESCC Children's services • ESCC Gypsy & Traveller liaison • Neighbouring Local Authorities • Homes England • CCG/NHS (Clinical Commissioning Group) • Mental Health Services • Sussex Police • East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service • Student Support Services – local colleges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen's Advice • Rother Voluntary Action • Homelessness Unity Group • Hastings Furniture Service • Homeworks • The Mediation Service • Southdown • Benefit & Debt Advice • HARC (Hastings Advice and Representation Centre) • Brighton Housing Trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning Policy • Regeneration/property investment • Finance • Housing Benefit & Council Tax • Parish / Town Councils • Customer Services • Keep Warm & Well – East Sussex Fuel Poverty Co-Ordinator

How we will consult:

GROUP	METHOD	COMMUNICATION
Benefit & Debt Advice Service	On-line questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Brighton Housing Trust	On-Line questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Citizen's Advice Bureau	On-line Questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)	On-line Questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Customer Services	Request for comments	Via e-mail, meeting if required
Depart Work & Pensions (DWP)	On-Line questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service	On-line Questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
ESCC Adult Social Care	On-line Questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
ESCC Children's services	On-line Questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire

GROUP	METHOD	COMMUNICATION
ESCC Gypsy & Traveller liaison	On-line Questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Finance	Request for comments	Via e-mail, meeting if required
Hastings Advice & Representations Centre (HARC)	On-line questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Hastings Furniture Service	On-line questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Homelessness Unity Group	On-line questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Homelessness/ Housing Options clients	On-Line questionnaire	Leaflet with details given to applicants during interview
Homes England	On-line Questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Homeworks	On-line questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Housing Association Tenants	On-line questionnaire	Via Optivo newsletter
Housing Associations – development teams	On-line questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Housing associations – management teams	On-line questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Housing Benefit & Council Tax	Request for comments	Via e-mail, meeting if required
Housing Benefit claimants	On-line questionnaire	Additional paragraph on all letters going out to HB claimants
Housing Register applicants	On-line questionnaire	Additional paragraph on all letters/emails going to new applicants
Keep Warm & Well – East Sussex Fuel Poverty Co-Ordinator	On-line Questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Mental Health Services	On-line Questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Neighbouring Local Authorities	On-line Questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Other interested residents	On-line questionnaire	Via MyAlerts with link to questionnaire
Parish/Town Councils	On-line Questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Planning Policy	Request for comments	Via e-mail, meeting if required
Regeneration/property investment	Request for comments	Via e-mail, meeting if required
Rother Voluntary Action	On-Line questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Southdown.org	On-line questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Student Support Services – Local colleges	On-line Questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
Sussex Police	On-line Questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire
The Mediation Service	On-line questionnaire	Via e-mail with link to questionnaire

In addition to the above plan, a local press release will be communicated, in order to raise awareness of the ongoing consultation and allow all residents to have their say.

As well as through the on-line questionnaire, all consultees will be given the opportunity to provide comments on the strategies via e-mail or letter. The RDC social media accounts will provide regular reminders regarding the ongoing consultation.

Paper copies of the questionnaire will be available at our 3 help points for those unable to take part on-line. Residents will also have access to the Help Point online computers.

Consultation will commence 15 October 2018. The deadline for consultation responses to be received is 26 November 2018.

Following the Consultation: The outcomes of the consultation will be used to formulate a draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy to present to Cabinet and full Council for adoption to inform the direction of Housing services, including the homelessness and housing options services over the next five years (2019-24).