

# **Adoption of Housing Strategy Implementation Plan**

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## **Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of this report is to seek adoption of the Housing Strategy Implementation Plan.

## **Recommendation**

The Council is asked to formally adopt the Housing Strategy Implementation Plan.

## **Public Interest**

This report covers the Council's overall strategic approach to housing provision across the district, in partnership with other organisations such as the County Council (with respect to its health and wellbeing responsibilities) and a range of Housing Associations and other landlords operating within the district. The proposed document is the district specific plan which follows on from the county wide framework document adopted by the Council in March 2014.

It will be of interest to members of the public concerned about the provision of:-

- social housing for those in need in their local area
- low cost and other forms of affordable housing below prevailing market rates
- advice and support services to those who find themselves homeless
- housing related support for those who might otherwise find it difficult to maintain their current tenure
- practical assistance for those owning or occupying poor standard housing in the private sector
- temporary stopping points for the gypsy and traveller communities

and to members of the public interested in the wider economic benefits of improving housing provision.

It will be of particular interest to any member of the public who is seeking assistance with any of the above or has a friend or relative in need of assistance from the District Council or one of the other related partner agencies.

## **Background**

Following the introduction of a new statutory requirement, the district council first published a Housing Strategy in October 1992 covering the three year period 1992-1995. The last full Housing & Accommodation Strategy was published in May 2004, covering the period 2004 – 2007. An update document was published in 2008, but since then no further updates have been issued, in anticipation of the development of the county-wide document.

The five housing authorities in Somerset have a long history of working collaboratively resulting in resources being used more effectively and various initiatives being developed consistently. This partnership working pre-dates the current government's emphasis on strategic, cross-border, multi-discipline partnerships and has been delivered through the Somerset Strategic Housing Partnership (SSHP) and the Somerset Strategic Housing Group

(SSHG). The former includes the latter and all the relevant elected member portfolio holders from the five districts and the County.

Work began in earnest on a county wide housing strategy in 2011 with the creation of a vision statement, developed through wide consultation with affected agencies and groups. A project group began work in February 2012 to develop the vision into a full blown strategy framework. After originally holding back in order to allow for a county wide process, this councils scrutiny task and finish group considered the proposed framework document in January 2014. The Council formally adopted the Housing Strategy Framework Document on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2014.

When endorsing the county-wide framework document, the District Executive also endorsed the proposals for developing a district specific strategy document.

### **Development of the Housing Strategy Implementation Plan: Process**

Following the proposals endorsed by the District Executive on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2014, an internal project team was created, led by the Corporate Strategic Housing Manager and included:

- Members of the Strategic Housing Unit
- The Environmental Health Manager
- The Empty Homes Officer
- A member of the Spatial Policy team
- A team leader from the Benefits team and
- The Council's Equalities Officer

The Housing Options team were also invited to send officers to the project team and were kept informed of progress at all stages.

The project team reviewed relevant strategies, action plans and other evidence to look at:

- How current each document is
- How consistent documents are with the county-wide housing strategy framework
- Whether the evidence base required a refresh
- Identifying and reviewing any outstanding actions
- Identifying whether anything needs to change in the light of the framework document and/or emerging issues
- Checking for options appraisals
- Inclusion of Equalities Analysis
- Opportunities for further partnership or cross boundary working.

A consultation draft was produced in July 2014 and widely circulated to a range of relevant stakeholders such as Parish Councils, Housing Associations and other partner organisations. The consultation draft was also made available on our web site. The formal consultation period ran for ten weeks, closing on 17<sup>th</sup> September. Embedded within the consultation draft were eight specific consultation questions at appropriate places within the text and a final catch-all question seeking comments on any other aspect. A web-based 'surveymonkey' questionnaire was also created using the same standard questions.

There was also a report back to Scrutiny and the Task and Finish Group (which commented on the pre-consultation draft). One of the regular Portfolio Holder discussion group mornings, open to all elected members, in early September, was set aside to go through the nine consultation questions. Finally the document was discussed at the Equalities Steering Group meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2014.

### **Development of the Housing Strategy Implementation Plan: Content**

The proposed Housing Strategy Implementation Plan for adoption is attached as Appendix 1.

The Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish group made suggestions with regard to the layout and content of the Housing Strategy Implementation Plan. The District Executive, meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2014, endorsed that the plan be created with the following objectives:

- Ensuring SSDC addresses priorities based on its locality and demographic
- The strategy is supported by the most up-to-date information and evidence
- The strategy details the objectives and priority areas that should be addressed while providing flexibility in how this is achieved
- The document is accessible and uses 'Plain English' throughout

The document has been developed to be consistent with the county wide housing strategy framework and look at how some of the issues identified should be addressed at a local level. However, as suggested by the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish group it identifies four, rather than three, objectives:

- Objective 1 Health & wellbeing for all
- Objective 2 To increase the supply of affordable housing to support economic growth and development.
- Objective 3 Making effective use of South Somerset's housing stock.
- Objective 4 To meet the housing and accommodation related support needs of Somerset's most vulnerable and least resilient residents by working in partnership.

The main part of the document provides commentary on these objectives in turn, recognising that some areas of activity straddle two or more of these objectives. On the whole the evidence behind the commentary is gathered together in a separate section towards the back of the document, or separately referenced, rather than set within the commentary text. Where new actions are proposed these are described in the main commentary but also summarised in an action plan table at the end of the main commentary sequence.

### **Financial Implications**

There are financial implications arising from the some parts of the document, as described in the action plan section. Specific actions within that plan are either already resourced through existing budgets and staffing levels or will be subject to separate formal reports.

### **Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications**

All affordable housing in receipt of public subsidy, whether through the HCA or from the Council, has to achieve the minimum code three rating within the Code for Sustainable Homes.

Other interventions made by the Council or its partners in the private sector produce refurbishment or renovated properties achieving a higher standard than was previously the case, even if not reaching code three; particular emphasis is placed on tackling fuel poverty.

The proposed framework document supports these activities and therefore contributes towards reducing overall emissions.

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

An equalities analysis has been carried out and will be published alongside the document. It is attached as Appendix 2.

### **Implications for Corporate Priorities**

The proposed framework document clearly provides a major plank in addressing “Focus Three – Homes” and in particular meets the stated aims:

This is what we will do:

- Minimise impact to our residents of the major changes to housing and council tax benefits proposed by the Government.
- Make optimum use of resources for home adaptations each year to enable people to live independently.
- Minimise homelessness by providing advice, support and housing options.
- With partners, enable additional new homes to meet the needs of the district, including mixed housing schemes to buy or rent that are affordable.
- Identify a temporary stopping point for gypsies and travellers by 2014.
- Continue to work with partners to bring private sector housing up to Decent Homes Standard
- Continue to work to bring empty houses back into use.
- Work with partners to combat fuel poverty”

and the major statement in the Plan:

*“We want decent housing for our residents that matches their income”*

The proposed framework document also contributes towards “Focus One – Jobs”, in particular through the positive economic impact of construction activity brought about by investment in new housing.

## **Privacy Impact Assessment**

This report does not directly impact on any data held of a personal nature.

## **Background Papers**

- Somerset Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Somerset Homeless Strategy (2013 – 2016)
- Somerset Youth Housing Strategy & Action Plan (2012 -2015)
- Housing, Health, Care and Support Strategy for older People in Somerset
- Avon and Somerset Rough Sleepers Steering Group Action Plan (2012)
- Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) 2011 and update 2013
- Somerset Financial inclusion Strategy (2011-2013)
- Somerset Tenancy Strategy (2012)
- Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy (2008-2026)
- Somerset Dementia Strategy (2010)
- Somerset Extra Care Housing Strategic Review (2008)
- Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Strategy (2006 – 2009)
- Private Sector Housing Strategy (2007 – 2012)
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2009)
- Empty Property Strategy (Jointly with Mendip) (2010)
- Temporary Accommodation Strategy (2011)
- Council Plan (2012-2015)
- Rural Housing Action Plan (2013)
- Asset Management Strategy (2014)

Previous reports:

Adoption of County-wide Housing Strategy Framework, Council, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2014

Adoption of Housing Strategy Implementation Plan, District Executive, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014