

Report To: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 5th November 2015

Lead Member: Cllr Barbara Smith

Report Author: Angela Loftus, Strategic Housing and Planning Manager

Title: Denbighshire's Draft Housing Strategy

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update of progress on Denbighshire's Housing Strategy and an outline of the next steps proposed. Input from Communities Scrutiny will help to inform the development of the final Strategy and the Action Plan. An outline proposal for the suggested approach to the Housing Strategy was discussed at Council Briefing in April 2015. The draft Housing Strategy: Summary is attached as Appendix 1 and the draft Action Plan is attached as Appendix 2. The full draft Housing Strategy can be accessed via the following link [Denbighshire's Draft Housing Strategy](#)
- 1.2 Ensuring access to good quality housing is a key priority in the Corporate Plan. Denbighshire's Housing Strategy will set out the Council's approach to addressing that priority, identifying and prioritising the key actions required.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1 This report has been prepared as a result of a request from Communities Scrutiny to review the emerging Housing Strategy and provide input to inform the Strategy, prior to it being reported to Council in December. Communities Scrutiny Committee previously reviewed the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task & Finish Group. These recommendations have been reflected in the emerging Housing Strategy, where appropriate.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That Committee considers and comments on Denbighshire's Draft Housing Strategy (summary attached as Appendix 1) with accompanying draft Action Plan (attached as Appendix 2) and provides guidance on future governance.

4. Report details.

- 4.1 Ensuring access to good quality housing is a key corporate priority and the development of a clear and robust Housing Strategy will provide the framework for all relevant Council functions to successfully address this priority. The intention of the Housing Strategy is to provide a clear statement of the Council's vision and aims for housing in the County for the next 5 years.

- 4.2 It sets out the key challenges and issues affecting the County and what various Council functions intend to do to help overcome these challenges. The Housing Strategy aims to express the multi-disciplinary corporate approach to housing issues and delivery in the County, providing the framework for other more detailed strategies, policies, procedures etc and relevant Business Plans. The emerging Strategy reflects the full range of housing issues and provision: council, registered social landlords, private rented and owner-occupied and the need to address the concerns of the Wales Audit Office with regard to the delivery of affordable housing in Denbighshire. Affordable housing has been highlighted as a key theme within the Strategy.
- 4.3 The Strategy identifies 5 “Themes” which are priority areas for action to be addressed and these form the core of the Strategy. These themes are:
1. More homes to meet local need and demand
 2. Creating a supply of affordable homes
 3. Safe and healthy homes
 4. Homes and support for vulnerable people
 5. Housing’s role in delivering sustainable communities
- 4.4 For each theme issues, challenges, actions, desired outcomes are clearly identified, along with indicators of success. Examples of current projects and good practice are highlighted under each theme. The draft Housing Strategy: Summary is attached as Appendix 1.
- 4.5 Detailed statistics and background information will be attached as an accompanying document but a summary of the appropriate contextual information relevant to each theme is included in the main text of the Strategy document. The aim is for a clear, succinct, usable and sustainable Strategy.
- 4.6 The Strategy will be accompanied by an Action Plan and the draft Action Plan is attached as Appendix 2. Work on the Action Plan is on-going and it is anticipated that this will be a living document, subject to regular monitoring and review. The Action Plan sets out in more detail the actions the relevant teams within the Council will focus on and how it will work with partners over the next 5 years to help to realise the Council’s vision. It is important to prioritise actions which will have the greatest impact whilst also being realistic about what can be delivered with limited resources.
- 4.7 Work on the emerging Housing Strategy has been steered by a group of Lead Members with responsibility for an area of housing within their portfolios. The group comprises Councillors David Smith (planning, empty homes, housing enforcement, private sector housing & grants), Julian Thompson-Hill (council housing, finance & Housing Revenue Account), Bobby Feeley (extra care, older people, social care and well-being) Hugh Irving (homelessness & gypsies & travellers) and is chaired by Councillor Barbara Smith, who has overall responsibility for delivering the Housing Strategy.

- 4.8 The Housing Strategy will be a key corporate document and the Strategic Planning and Housing Team have been working with officers across the Council to develop the Strategy and accompanying Action Plan, including those with responsibilities for community development, neighbourhood development, empty homes, private rented sector, enforcement, energy efficiency, disabilities and extra care, supporting people, public protection and planning, homelessness and housing stock. Officers have attended a Community Support Services team meeting and a workshop was held for staff from housing, maintenance, homelessness and youth services on 17th August, to ensure that they had an input to the Strategy. Output from this workshop has formed a key input into the draft Strategy. The Team has also met with Registered Social Landlords who are active in the County. The Strategic Partnership Board reviewed and discussed the proposed Strategy outline and has provided helpful input.
- 4.9 An Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group was set up in response to concerns amongst Members about affordable housing policy and delivery. The Task and Finish Group started meeting in September 2014 and held 7 meetings in total. It considered a range of affordable housing issues in depth, and final recommendations were discussed at Communities Scrutiny Committee on 28th May 2015 and agreed by Cabinet on 30th June 2015. These recommendations have been reflected in the emerging Housing Strategy, where appropriate.
- 4.10 Work on the Housing Strategy is on-going and input to the Action Plan from partners is crucial to ensure buy-in from everyone who will have a role to play in the successful delivery of the Strategy. Input from Senior Leadership Team has helped to frame both the Strategy and its accompanying Action Plan.
- 4.11 Arrangements for future governance will need to be considered by senior officers and Lead Members but there is clearly a desire from the broader membership to be represented. Views from Scrutiny Committee would be welcomed.

What happens next?

- 4.12 The intention is to report the Housing Strategy to Council in December and comments from Communities Scrutiny Committee will inform that report.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

- 5.1 Denbighshire's emerging Housing Strategy will contribute to the following corporate priorities:
- Developing the local economy – development within the County will contribute towards securing local employment opportunities in the construction sector

- Ensuring access to good quality housing – successful delivery of the proposed actions will enable improved provision of additional affordable and market housing across Denbighshire to meet the County’s needs.
- Vulnerable people are protected and are able to live as independently as possible

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1 Successful delivery of the actions identified in the Housing Strategy will be dependent on a partnership approach within the Council, including input from Finance, Legal, Property, Planning & Public Protection services.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.

7.1 An EqIA will be undertaken for the further development of Denbighshire’s Housing Strategy prior to its formal adoption.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

8.1 Communities Scrutiny Committee previously reviewed the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task & Finish Group. These recommendations have been reflected in the emerging Housing Strategy, where appropriate.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 The detailed cost implications will have to be considered further as the strategy develops.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1 The delivery of the Housing Strategy is a key priority for the Council & improving the delivery of affordable housing within the County will be a fundamental aim of the Strategy. Failure to progress the Strategy would miss the opportunity to provide a clear approach to housing issues in the County and demonstrate action to Wales Audit office.

11. Power to make the Decision

11.1 Article 6.3.3 of the Council’s Constitution outlines Scrutiny’s policy development functions.

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