

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting	Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods
2.	Date	29th October 2012
3.	Title	Housing Strategy
4.	Directorate	Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

5. Summary

Rotherham's Housing Strategy needs to be rewritten in order to take account of public spending cuts and national policy changes. A new draft Housing Strategy was produced in May, and shared with Directorate Leadership Team and Cabinet Member prior to the comprehensive programme of consultation which took place between June and August. The draft has been updated to take account of feedback from Members, staff, partner agencies, the voluntary and community sector and Rotherham residents, and is now undergoing the required process for final sign off and endorsement.

The draft Strategy was presented to Improving Places Select Commission on 17th October, who endorsed the draft and made a number of comments which are reflected in this covering report. Cabinet Member is now asked to review feedback from Improving Places, make any final amendments to the draft, and agree that it should be presented to Cabinet on 21st November for formal approval.

6. Recommendations

- Agree that the final draft Housing Strategy should be presented to Cabinet for approval.

7. Proposals and details

7.1 Background information about the draft Housing Strategy

It was agreed by Neighbourhoods and Adult Services Directorate Leadership Team that the Housing Strategy should be a 30 year strategy linked to the 30 year HRA business plan, but with a focus on the key deliverables for the next three years. Each new instalment of the strategy will be produced every three years, each with its own 'brand', e.g. part 1, 2013-16, focuses on *continuing to improve the quality and choice of Rotherham's housing offer*. The draft Housing Strategy is deliberately concise and accessible to everybody, including tenants and residents, and we have used a simple format of 'ten commitments':

- 1) We will deliver Council housing that meets people's needs
- 2) We will increase and improve the supply of affordable rented housing in Rotherham
- 3) We will deliver against our Local Investment Plan
- 4) We will make communities safer
- 5) We will work with partners to help to ensure everyone can afford to heat their home
- 6) We will help people to access the support they need
- 7) We will help people in Rotherham's most disadvantaged communities
- 8) We will engage with communities and individuals so that we have a better understanding of how to meet their needs and aspirations
- 9) We will help to improve Rotherham's private rented sector
- 10) We will help people who wish to own their home

We will also produce a separate, new document – Rotherham's *annual housing intelligence report* – to sit next to the Strategy, that will contain all relevant statistics, analysis, survey results ('where do you want to live' survey) housing market information etc. This will be an extremely useful resource, and it will be easy to keep this up to date rather than having to wait for the next Housing Strategy instalment. Once the Housing Strategy document has been approved a separate robust action plan will be produced to contain the finer detail of each commitment and enable us to publish six monthly updates on the Council's website.

7.2 Joined up approach to consultation

We identified opportunities to consult on other key issues concurrently with the Housing Strategy, which enabled us to use resources more effectively and ensure a holistic approach to strategic housing issues. These were as follows:

- Changes to the Allocations Policy (the Localism Act 2011 allows us to apply locally determined criteria and changes to how the housing register is managed)
- Development of a new Strategic Tenancy Policy (we asked people for their views on fixed term tenancies, as introduced by the Localism Act 2011, as RMBC must publish a Strategic Tenancy Policy by January 2013)
- Amendment to the new Homelessness Strategy (we advised people of the new power to discharge the Council's homelessness duty into the private rented sector)
- Supporting People Strategy
- Warmer Homes Strategy

7.3 Consultation programme

In line with best practice, consultation was carried out over a three month period and advice and support was provided by Corporate Community Engagement Officers. Each of the following activities primarily focused on the Housing Strategy but also generated feedback that was useful to the simultaneous consultations listed above.

General publicity: Webpage, dedicated email address, online questionnaire (275 responses), press release, publicised via all RMBC communication channels, emails to Members, all NAS staff, all partners, groups, communities of interest

Elected Members: Seminar, Area Assemblies

Staff and partner agencies: Emails, participation in public events, participation in 'fine-tuning' sub-groups, Strategic Housing Partnership, Forums, Supporting People providers' forum

Public consultation: Two public events at Springwell Gardens, RotherFed meeting, Learning from Customers forum, Area Assemblies, Tenant Quality and Standards Monitoring group, private landlords forum

The above consultation generated a vast amount of feedback, some of the most common themes being:

- Working with deprived communities important – but don't forget other areas deserve support
- Work in a more joined up way between services
- Lots on views how we allocate housing
- We should enforce tenancy conditions
- Improve how we communicate with people particularly young people, deaf people, people with learning disabilities

Once all of the material had been reviewed the draft Housing Strategy was updated, and eight small sub-groups were organised to fine-tune each of the commitments. These were led by NAS officers and included staff from other directorates and external organisations to provide an element of challenge and benchmarking. Once these sessions had all concluded, the Strategy was again updated and sent out to all staff and partners that had been involved, for any final comments.

7.4 Improving Places Select Commission

Members acknowledged that they had had various opportunities to comment on and influence the draft Housing Strategy, and overall they endorsed the document and agreed that it should be reported to Cabinet Member. Other positive comments on the draft included ease of reading due to its accessible format, and the fact that it is realistic and focuses on needs rather than solely on aspirations.

A number of questions were raised and discussion ensued regarding particular elements of the Housing Strategy:

- The concurrent consultation on the possibility of long, fixed term tenancies for large Council properties was discussed, due to recent media coverage. This will be reported on separately to Improving Places Select Commission in November.
- The importance of ensuring Housing Champions and other front-line staff are available to work in the areas to tackle antisocial behaviour and other housing management issues was noted.
- It was acknowledged that it is equally important to ensure high standards of customer service provision via the Contact Centre, and an update on recruitment to vacancies within customer services was provided.
- Members noted the challenges of ensuring the problems that sometimes occur when younger and older tenants live together in blocks of flats are dealt with effectively.
- There was a general discussion regards ASB and how RMBC compares to other local authorities, and the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services provided detailed facts and figures regarding the enforcement action that has been taken against perpetrators of ASB over the past year.
- Members noted that officers must enable them to enact the commitment to take a zero tolerance approach to drug and alcohol related ASB and criminality, by providing high quality evidence.
- It was noted that in delivering one and two bedroom properties it is essential that we consider the size of rooms and ensure adequate provision of storage space.

All of the above comments, while not necessarily requiring amendment to the draft Housing Strategy, were taken on board and where appropriate will be reflected in the action plan. Updates on specific issues can be provided to the Select Commission as and when required.

As a final point, Improving Places Select Commission noted that they should be involved in monitoring progress against the Housing Strategy action plan and this should be reflected in the work programme.

8. Finance

The consultation programme has largely been delivered within existing resources and costs have been kept to a minimum. We will need to develop a Housing Strategy action plan with a clear indication of costs and funding sources.

9. Risks and uncertainties

There is always a risk that the Housing Strategy will become out of date due to the rapidly changing national legislative and policy environment. However, the housing intelligence report can be amended if necessary and we will have a webpage with an overview of the Housing Strategy that can be updated to reflect any major changes. The next instalment of the 30 year Housing Strategy, 2016-2019, will be started in late 2015.

10. Policy and performance agenda implications

The Housing Strategy aligns with national policy and strategy and will support local priorities, including the vision of the Local Investment Plan (“our vision is that all communities are empowered and able to engage in and benefit from, the transformation of Rotherham, with no one place or person left behind”), and the Community Strategy draft priorities for 2012-15:

- 1) Help local people and businesses benefit from a growing economy
- 2) Ensure the best start in life for children and families
- 3) Support those that are vulnerable within our communities

Production of the Housing Strategy is also an objective within this year’s NAS Service Plan.

11. Background papers and consultation

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – final draft Housing Strategy

Background papers

- (Existing) Rotherham Housing Strategy updated June 2010 and April 2011
- National housing strategy – Laying the Foundations (CLG November 2011)
- Localism Act 2011

Consultation

A comprehensive programme of consultation has been completed, as summarised in 7.3.

12. Contact name

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