

HOUSING STRATEGY/HOUSING INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2002

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 To provide Members with an update on the development of the Council's housing strategy and outline proposed new arrangements for funding and joint partnership working.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Council is required to produce a Housing Strategy Statement, which is an over arching document that reviews housing related issues in its District, sets out its housing objectives, establishes priorities for action both by the Council and by other service providers and stakeholder's, and sets out a clear Action Plan in agreement with the Council's local partners.
- 2.2 The strategy must be consistent with national policy and designed to deliver regional and sub-regional strategies (including those for economic development and land use) as well as meeting the Authority's wider objectives set out in its Community Plan.
- 2.3 The Council's Housing Strategy Statement was completely reviewed last year and a new strategy produced covering a lifetime of four years (2001–2004).
- 2.4 Historically, the Council's Housing Strategy has been marked "below average" by the Department of Transport Local Government and the Regions (DTLR).

3 BEST VALUE REVIEW

- 3.1 A Best Value Review of the Council's Housing strategic and enabling role was completed early this year and an Action Plan produced which Members agreed at Community Services Committee on 5 February 2002.
- 3.2 An update of the Action Plan outlining comments and progress made will be presented to Members at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 July and will form part of the Council's Housing Investment Programme submission for this year.
- 3.3 Evaluation of the Council's performance, and the completed review, by the Best Value Housing Inspectorate is awaited, but no date has been offered yet.

4 DTLR – NEW GUIDANCE

- 4.1 Although the basic framework for the Housing Investment Programme process is unchanged from last year, the DTLR has issued new guidance to all local authorities outlining requirements on achieving “fit for purpose” housing strategies.
- 4.2 Given this Council’s current “below average” rating it is unlikely that the current housing strategy will be judged “fit for purpose” and further advice is awaited from the DTLR on this issue.
- 4.3 However, as the Best Value inspection is still to be carried out, it seems premature to undertake a further major revision of the housing strategy, which may well then need further changes to take account of issues raised by the inspection.

5 FUNDING AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING

- 5.1 The Council supported a number of bids made by Registered Social Landlords (RSL’s) to the Housing Corporation for the development of affordable general needs and supported housing in the District in 2002/2003. Details are appended below:

Scheme Details	Registered Social Landlord
• Hardwick House – New Elderly Scheme and refurbishment of existing accommodation for general needs.	Swan Housing Association
• St Marks Field, Rochford – Six 1 bedroom flats for general needs	Springboard Housing Association
• Bardfield Way, Rayleigh – Four 1 bedroom flats for people with learning disabilities	Swan Housing Association
• Purchase and repair of four 1 bedroom flats for general needs	Swan Housing Association
• Warwick Drive, Rochford – Two 1 bedroom flats for general needs	Swan Housing Association
• Tendring Avenue, Rayleigh – Six 1 bedroom flats for women and children escaping Domestic Violence	Cygnnet (Part of Swan Housing Association)

Scheme Details	Registered Social Landlord
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hambro Close, Rayleigh – Four 1 bedroom flats for young people at risk 	Cygnet
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homebuy – Six units in District 	Estuary Housing Association
<p>5.2 So far, apart from the Homebuy bid (three units approved) no funding has been received for any of the other bids including the Hardwick House development. Discussions are continuing with the RSL's and the Housing Corporation with a view to modifying the bids made in order to attract funding.</p>	
<p>5.3 The Council can give financial support in the form of Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LASHG) from its Capital Programme to assist RSLs in developing affordable housing in its District.</p>	
<p>5.4 However, the Capital Programme for the current year contains £167,000, which has to be split between Private Sector Renewal Grant and any LASHG programme. In the absence of Housing Corporation funding a LASHG contribution to an RSL appears to be the only way of funding housing development. However the funding from the Capital Programme is extremely limited and a review of the funding for Social Housing Support needs to be considered by the Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee.</p>	
<p>5.5 It is clear that following discussions with the DTLR, the Housing Corporation and our RSL partners that Housing Corporation funding will no longer be allocated to RSLs on an individual local authority basis. Instead the Housing Corporation will be looking for evidence of cross-boundary partnerships between local authorities and RSLs at a sub-regional level. In our case the sub-regional level is seen to be the South East corner of Essex and comprises Castle Point Borough Council, Southend Borough Council and this Council. There may also be a need to work together with other Councils at a wider South Essex level.</p>	
<p>5.6 Whilst there may be some reluctance to support such partnership arrangements, it is quite clear that the only choice now is between working together and achieving funding for at least some schemes, or a future with little prospect of Housing Corporation Funding. It is very unlikely that a local authority will get everything for its own individual area.</p>	
<p>5.7 Any partnership arrangements will bring shared nomination opportunities which will be negotiable between respective authorities.</p>	

It is important to emphasise that this Council's share of nominations will be offered to residents in housing need who have a local connection with the Rochford district.

- 5.8 With urgent need for affordable social housing and supported housing in the District as identified in the 1999 Housing Needs Study it would be appropriate to constructively work within this new policy agenda, otherwise funding support is likely to remain difficult to obtain.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

- (1) That the development of the Council's Housing Strategy be noted.
- (2) That the principle of cross-boundary partnerships between local authorities and registered social landlords is supported.
- (3) That the Council's Housing Investment Programme submission to the DTLR contains a statement to that effect.
- (4) That the Head of Housing Health and Community Care be delegated the authority to discuss, negotiate and agree formal partnership arrangements with other authorities and partners subject to no financial commitment to the Council.
- (5) That a review of the current capital programme in relation to Social Housing support be considered by the Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee. (HHHCC)

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Background Papers:

None

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