

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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PART I **FOR COMMENT AND CONSIDERATION**

DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY FOR SLOUGH

1. **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to introduce to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee a draft new Housing Strategy for Slough for the period 2016 to 2021 and to invite the Committee to consider and provide comments on it. Following public consultation, the document will be brought back to Cabinet for final approval.

2. **Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to;

- a) Consider the draft Housing Strategy and consider what comments it would wish to make to Cabinet to be taken into account in the final approved version of the document.
- b) Agree that the Committee should receive an update on progress on the Strategy every 6 months, consisting on each occasion of overall progress against the Action Plan and a more detailed discussion of one of the five major themes in the document.

3. **The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**

The Housing Strategy will act as the delivery mechanism to achieve a number of the Council's corporate aims and is well aligned with the JSNA. The Strategy is specifically aimed at delivering outcome 2 of the Five Year Plan: There will be more homes in the borough with quality improving across all tenures to support our ambition for Slough. The Housing Strategy has been developed in tandem with the preparatory work for the Local Plan.

3a. **Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

The connection between health and wellbeing and good quality housing is well established. The Housing Strategy sets out the Council's ambition to regenerate neighbourhoods, improve the quality of housing and to contribute to the supply of new homes in Slough.

3b. **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

The Housing Strategy is specifically linked to the delivery of outcome 2 of the Five Year Plan:

- There will more homes in the borough, with quality improving across all tenures to support our ambition for Slough

The Strategy also supports the delivery of the following outcomes:

- More people will take responsibility and manage their own health, care and support needs. Having a good quality, secure home is linked to health and wellbeing.
- Children and young people in Slough will be healthy, resilient and have positive life chances. The Strategy specifically aims to develop homes for young care leavers

4. **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. However, given the wide-ranging nature of the policy proposals within the Strategy there will be financial impacts arising from the delivery of those policies. These will be highlighted as each individual policy item is brought forward for consideration.

(b) Risk Management

There are no reported associated with his report. The draft Strategy itself deals with a number of Housing matters and policies where there are risks around delivery, both for the council and for residents. These are discussed in detail in the body of the report.

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

The draft Strategy deals with the Council's statutory responsibilities in a number of different areas of activity, for example;

- Powers of enforcement against private landlords;
- Obligations towards homeless households;
- The Council's responsibilities as a landlord.

Where relevant, legal implications relating to these areas are discussed within the body of the Strategy.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

The strategy advances equality and all reasonable steps have been taken to understand and mitigate negative impact. If following a review of the allocation policy a decision is made to change it a further review will be required to understand the impact on protected groups.

5. **Supporting Information**

5.1 The Slough Housing Strategy sets out the priorities, opportunities and challenges for housing in Slough over the five years to 2021. However, it also forms one of the building blocks for the growth and development of the town over the next 20 years, so that Slough becomes a place where people work, play, rest and stay. It has been developed alongside the preparatory work for the Local Plan to ensure a consistency of approach in looking over this longer timeframe. So in addition to some shorter term objectives the Strategy introduces some ideas which look to the much longer term such as the future of the Council's housing stock, the provision of a better range of homes for older people and providing a balance of homes to rent and to buy.

5.2 The Strategy sets out 5 key themes;

Theme 1; New Housing Supply – ensuring the right supply and mix of new homes and increasing affordable housing through the efficient use of land and capital resources.

Theme 2; Private Sector - that the private housing sector provides sufficient good quality market housing through support for landlords and tenants and, where necessary, robust quality control and regulation.

Theme 3; Council Homes - are managed and maintained to a high standard and the Council builds new homes for Slough residents

Theme 4; Homelessness and Housing Need - that homelessness and rough sleeping are reduced through prevention

Theme 5; Special Needs and Vulnerable Groups - that specialist accommodation is available for vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our community particularly young people, older people, people with disabilities and those on restricted incomes.

5.3 Within the document, each objective is accompanied by key points of evidence and an Action Plan. The latter are reproduced at the end of the Strategy as a consolidated Action Plan which will be the format in which progress will be monitored over the next 5 years. Publication of the final document will be accompanied by an Evidence Base supporting the proposals in the Strategy.

Theme 1; Supply of New Homes

5.4 The Strategy sets out in detail the case for planning for more new homes in Borough over the next 5 years and beyond to meet existing demands and to cater for population and economic growth. This new provision needs to be both to buy and to rent and to be balanced to meet the full range of housing needs, including key workers who currently have difficulty in finding suitable

accommodation. A major priority will be the provision of affordable housing for households who cannot accommodate themselves in the market, incorporating the range of affordable types envisaged by the National Planning Policy Framework. The Strategy sets out how the Council itself intends to take a pro-active lead in ensuring the delivery of new homes. Key points in the Action Plan include;

- Enabling the provision of 927 new units of housing per year for Slough in line with the Strategic Housing Market Assessment.
- A commitment that the Council will directly deliver or facilitate a programme 200 units per year of new housing, including affordable housing, over the life of the Strategy and beyond.
- Maximising the provision of affordable housing on Council-owned land through infill development and estate renewal, including the net gain of up to 1,000 units on HRA land over the period 2016 to 2031.
- Prioritising available funds and council assets to provide for the delivery of affordable housing schemes in partnership with SUR and Housing Associations.
- Working with private and public sector partners to acquire and assemble sites to facilitate the delivery of new housing.
- Developing initiatives to increase housing opportunities for key workers.
- Improving partnership arrangements with housing associations to facilitate the delivery of new affordable homes.
- Extending the programme of Council mortgage lending through our existing LAPP scheme.
- Providing new homes for particular groups within the community where required, for example those needing extra care or care leavers.

Theme 2; Private Rented Sector

5.5 One family in four in Slough rents their home from a private landlord and this number is growing. Whilst most landlords provide a good service a significant minority do not meet their legal obligations and are responsible for tenants living in unsuitable and sometimes dangerous conditions. National statistics show that this is the Housing sector most likely to display poor housing conditions. This is compounded in Slough by very high levels of overcrowding. This can lead to poor health and educational and economic disadvantage. The Council has important legal obligations to ensure good standards in private sector homes.

5.6 The draft Housing Strategy commits the Council to adopting a pro-active approach to supporting good landlords and taking rigorous enforcement action against poor ones. Key action points include;

- Create two wholly-owned Subsidiary Housing Companies to act as exemplar private landlords in the borough and to assist homeless households and others on low or modest incomes to access affordable private sector homes.
- Undertake a feasibility study for introducing a borough-wide Landlord Registration Scheme. This is to protect good landlords and drive out rogue or criminal landlords from Slough.
- Following the announcement of the expansion of mandatory HMO licensing, implement the scheme once the commencement date has been announced.
- Undertake rigorous enforcement and prosecution against rogue landlords who have a history of breaking the law.

- Support responsible landlords and work with them to become professional and grow their business.
- Use all available powers to bring empty properties back into use.
- Work with utility companies and other agencies to insulate homes and improve the energy ratings of older buildings.
- Through partnership working, particularly with Adult Services, Public Health and the CCG, develop services to allow elderly and disabled residents to live independently in their home and reduce the impact of poor housing on the health of borough residents.
- Build a well-resourced and self-financing Private Sector Housing Service to support good landlords and carry out the Council's statutory responsibilities towards tenants and landlords.

Theme 3; Council Homes

5.7 The Council's housing stock is a vital resource for the residents of Slough. The 7,100 rented and leasehold properties are the Council's most valuable physical asset. The finances relating to the homes are handled in a separate financial account – the Housing Revenue Account (HRA.) The Council is committed to investing in its housing stock to further improve the quality of residents' homes and to build new council homes. In the short term the HRA is stable with plans to invest £100m in existing homes over the next 7 years and £40m in new council homes. However, there are threats and uncertainties in the medium term, mainly resulting from changes in Government policy. These issues include a mandatory 1% reduction in rents; a requirement by Government for the Council to pay it a capital sum resulting from the sale of higher value voids; and the outcome (due in January 2017) of a comprehensive new survey of the condition of the housing stock. The re-commissioning of the repairs, maintenance and investment services will offer the opportunity to shift the emphasis of these services to 30% routine repairs and 70% planned maintenance and investment works. The new contract will also provide opportunities deliver a more streamlined, accessible service to residents.

5.8 The draft Housing Strategy proposes the following key action points;

- Publish a baseline 30 year Business Plan for the Housing Revenue Account in the autumn of 2016.
- Undertake a comprehensive survey of the condition of the Council's housing stock, for completion by January 2017.
- In the light of the results of the condition survey and the implementation of the provisions of the Housing and Planning Act, produce an updated HRA Business Plan in March 2017.
- In partnership with residents, undertake a formal asset management review and option appraisal of the Council's housing stock for completion by December 2017.
- Complete the existing programme of 190 new homes on Housing-owned land and seek to continue the programme beyond 2020.
- Adopt the following priorities for improving the services to residents;
 - o Awarding a new Repairs, Maintenance and Investment contract for council homes to improve the quality and responsiveness of repair for residents and to act as a catalyst for the development of local and in-house capacity to provide maintenance services.
 - o Engaging and enabling residents so as to create a culture of accountability and responsibility and to broaden opportunities for tenants and

- leaseholders to be involved in the development and monitoring of services.
- o Increasing resident satisfaction through greater responsiveness to customers and in particular through the greater use of digital technology.
- Develop a new Tenancy Strategy for council tenancies in the light of the Housing and Planning Act

Theme 4; Homelessness and Housing Needs

5.9 The Housing Strategy sets out in some detail how the combination of the pressure of a growing population, rising rents and house prices and static or reducing levels of welfare benefits have led to increasing levels of homelessness in the last 2 years. This is evident both in the numbers of households accepted as homeless and in the scale of the use of temporary accommodation, including Bed & Breakfast. The number of Rough Sleepers also appears to be on the rise. For Slough, unlike other boroughs which are facing some of the same pressures, there is the additional factor of the pressure of the placement of homeless families into Slough by other councils and in particular London Boroughs. This is placing additional pressure on the local housing market, stretching local health and care services and leading to unsatisfactory outcomes for the households concerned. The overall approach of the Strategy is to focus on homelessness prevention in collaboration with partner agencies. The headline action points are to;

- Develop and adopt a Preventing Homelessness strategy in collaboration with clients, landlords, the voluntary sector and other partner agencies.
- Develop new partnerships with private and third sector landlords to maximise opportunities for tenancies for homeless families and individuals.
- Establish a Subsidiary Housing Company to acquire homes to alleviate the pressures on temporary accommodation and Bed & Breakfast provision.
- End the use of Bed & Breakfast for families with children.
- Review the Council's Allocation Scheme to re-evaluate the priority which homeless people receive under the scheme.
- Work with the Health sector and other agencies to monitor and address the health and care needs of vulnerable homeless people placed in Slough by other Local Authorities and require those authorities to review their placement and notification policies.
- Undertake an early review of arrangements for Rough Sleepers during periods of cold weather.

Theme 5; Special Housing Needs and Vulnerable People

5.10 Against a background of a growth in the number of older people in the Borough over the next 20 years the Housing Strategy discusses the requirements for specialist accommodation both for people who need support and for people who have mobility problems or a disability. It also highlights the links between health and poor housing conditions. Going forward the document stresses the need for close collaboration in the development of services between Housing, the Children's Trust and Adult Social Care. Amongst the key action points are to;

- Build on the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) on health and disability housing needs and undertake further detailed work with partners and

stakeholders to examine what housing options are required to best meet current and future demand and changing needs.

- Through our new Subsidiary Housing Company, develop new partnerships with the Children's Trust, Health services and Adult Social Care to maximise opportunities for specialist and alternative accommodation to be delivered locally and more cost effectively.
- In collaboration with the Children's Trust, ensure there is an adequate supply of accommodation for care leavers.
- Deliver up to 3 new mixed use extra care schemes in the borough during the life of this strategy where there is established local need.
- Develop an Older Persons Housing Strategy for Slough.
- Within the review of the Scheme of Allocation, ensure full account is taken of the needs of people with a disability.

Monitoring of the Strategy

- 5.11 The high level outcomes of the Housing Strategy will be monitored under outcome 2 of the Five Year Plan: 'There will be more homes in the borough, with quality improving across all tenures to support our ambition for Slough.' The Strategy fundamentally aims to deliver more and better homes with a focus on local working people. The focus for the monitoring of progress will be the consolidated Action Plan at the end of the document.

Consultation on the Strategy

- 5.12 It is good practice for the Council to undertake a comprehensive consultation on its Housing Strategy before its final adoption and indeed it is a requirement to do so. Following approval by Cabinet, this document will be formally issued for comment to a wide range of stakeholders, including Government Departments, neighbouring authorities, statutory agencies, residents and voluntary groups, housing associations, private developers and other partners. There will be opportunities for residents to comment via the Council's website and social media. It is planned to hold a half-day conference on the Strategy on 23 January 2017. All comments received during the consultation will be reviewed and considered before a final version of the Strategy is brought before Cabinet for approval.

6. Comments of Other Committees

The draft Housing Strategy was approved by Cabinet on 21 November 2016. Cabinet also agreed that the document be issued for consultation, with a final draft to be brought back to Cabinet for approval.

7. Conclusion

The Housing Strategy is the main vehicle for the delivery of Outcome 2 of the Council's Five Year Plan, that "there will be more homes in the borough, with quality improving across all tenures to support our ambition for Slough." This draft strategy is wide-ranging in its scope and covers the range of housing tenures and the key issues Housing issues facing the people of the Borough. It is proposed that this draft now be the subject of a wide consultation before its final approval.

8. **Appendices Attached**

'A' - Draft Slough Housing Strategy

9. **Background Papers**

'1' - Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy 2013-2016

'2' - Learning Disability Plan 2016-2019

'3' - Community Safety Plans

'4' - Children and Young Peoples' Plan 2015-2016

'5' - Centre of Slough Strategy 2015 onwards

'6' - Sustainable Community Strategy 2007-2027

'7' - Economic Development Plan for Growth 2014-2018

'8' - Asset Management Plan 2014-2017

'9' - Get Active Leisure Strategy

'10' - Climate Change Strategy 2011-2014