

REPORT TO: Environment and Urban Renewal Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 13th March 2013

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Communities

PORTFOLIO: Neighbourhood, Leisure and Sport

SUBJECT: Draft Halton Housing Strategy 2013-2018

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to present Halton's Housing Strategy 2013-18 as a draft for public consultation.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION: That PPB note and comment on the content of the draft Housing Strategy and evidence paper**

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 **Background**

3.1.1 Under Part 7 of the Local Government Act 2003 local authorities are expected to produce a Housing Strategy which gives an overview of housing in their district and sets out priorities for action.

3.1.2 The 2003 Act states that:

"A local housing strategy is the local housing authority's vision for housing in its area. It sets out objectives and targets and policies on how the authority intends to manage and deliver its strategic housing role and provides an overarching framework against which the authority considers and formulates other policies on more specific housing issues."

3.1.3 That strategic housing role is defined, in the Department for Communities and Local Government's 2007 document Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable, as providing "vision, leadership, planning and delivery to:

- assess and plan for current and future housing needs of the local population,
- make the best use of existing housing stock,

- plan and facilitate new supply,
- plan and commission housing support services which link homes to support and other services that people need to live in them, and
- have working partnerships that secure effective housing and neighbourhood management."

3.1.4 The statutory guidance "Creating Strong and Prosperous Communities" published in July 2008 reaffirmed this expectation and placed greater emphasis on housing's contribution to the authority's vision for sustainable communities as set out in its Sustainable Communities Strategy.

3.1.5 The guidance states that local authority housing strategies must:

- fully reflect the wider vision of the authority and its partners;
- reflect a clear and evidenced approach and
- provide a strong focus on how partners will deliver their commitments.

3.1.6 There have been significant achievements since the last Housing Strategy was published in 2008 including:

- Successful delivery of phase 2 of the Castlefields regeneration programme, this has so far resulted in £30 million of new development replacing the last deck access dwellings remaining in the Northwest.
- A further £5 to £10 million of development is being sought for Castlefields in the proposed draft strategy.
- Halton Housing Trust delivered on its commitment to bring all former council housing stock up to the Decent Homes Standard 12 months ahead of the Government's 2010 target date.
- Since that time the Trust has developed a comprehensive neighbourhood investment programme which will see £262 million investment in the former Council stock between 2009 and 2015 and has built its first new affordable homes in the Borough.
- Development of an additional 256 new affordable homes bringing approximately £30 million of external investment into the Borough. This includes the development of an additional extra care scheme in Halton. The outcome of further pending investment bids to the HCA are due to be reported by February, 2013.
- Crisis intervention in the form of emergency support has helped prevent homelessness for over 600 families over the last three years.
- Clearance of all backlogs in adaptations in 200 socially rented homes.;

- Development and implementation of a new Homelessness Strategy with increased emphasis on prevention which has drastically reduced levels of statutory homelessness to an all time low.
- In the last financial year, 187 appeals on benefit decisions were attended by the Council's welfare rights team with an 84% success rate. These have resulted from referrals through the improved tenancy sustainability service offered by the Housing Solutions team.
- Since January 2010, The Housing Solutions dedicated Mortgage Rescue Adviser has provided advice to 187 households and as a result 94 cases were prevented from repossession.
- Through the Castlefields Regeneration programme approximately 15 apprenticeships/ traineeships has been secured through construction of new build homes and external makeover of retained projects. As the Programme has been 'on the ground' for over 10 years several phases of apprentices have graduated into permanent employment. The creation of the Village Square has created further local job opportunities. Additional the involvement of HPIJ within the Programme has created/safeguarded a further 139 jobs.

3.2 Draft Halton Housing Strategy 2013 - 2018

3.2.1 The draft Strategy takes a slightly different approach from previous years in that two documents have been produced. The Strategy itself (Appendix A) is a short, easy to read document which focuses on the strategic objectives, priorities and planned activities for the next three years which are detailed in an action plan. This is supported by an evidence paper (Appendix B) which sets out the context in which the Strategy has been developed and brings together key data and information on housing issues and services which have helped to shape the strategic objectives and priorities.

3.2.2 It is important to note that the draft Strategy has been developed in a time of rapidly declining resources for public services generally and for housing, in particular, due to the discontinuation of the Regional Housing Pot which previously was the main funding stream for the housing capital programme. Consequently the strategy reflects a realistic assessment of what can be achieved within existing and likely future resources. However the strategy means we can provide an evidence base when potential funding streams become available in the future and we will continue to explore all sources of funding on an ongoing basis to ensure we deliver the Strategy.

3.3 Housing vision, objectives and priorities

3.3.1 The Strategy contains three overarching strategic objectives with

priorities within each as set out in the paragraphs below. The objectives are designed to contribute to the vision for housing:

Housing vision

Halton offers a broad range of good quality housing which meets the needs of existing communities, helps attract new residents to the Borough and contributes to the creation of sustainable communities.

3.3.2 Strategic objective 1 – To plan for and facilitate housing growth and support economic growth

Priority 1A: To increase the supply of market and affordable housing through partnership working and support to developers and Registered Providers;

Priority 1B: To support the implementation of the Liverpool City Region Local Investment Plan.

3.3.3 Strategic objective 2 – To meet the housing and support needs of Halton's communities and promote choice

Priority 2A: To increase the supply of housing for vulnerable people;

Priority 2B: To review Gypsy and Traveller pitch provision;

Priority 2C: To prevent homelessness;

Priority 2D: To improve access to social housing and home ownership and promote choice;

Priority 2E: To target housing support to those who need it most

3.3.4 Strategic objective 3 – To improve housing conditions and make the best use of the housing stock

Priority 3A: To complete the regeneration of Castlefields estate;

Priority 3B: To explore the implications of private rented sector growth;

Priority 3C: To improve the energy efficiency of housing and tackle fuel poverty;

Priority 3D: To make the best possible use of the existing housing stock.

3.4 Next steps

3.4.1 The draft Strategy is the subject of a seven week consultation period with partners, stakeholders and residents between 4th February and 22nd March 2013. This has been achieved through distribution to various partnerships, including the appropriate Policy and Performance Board and stakeholder groups, other local authorities and a copy will be placed in Halton Direct Links, main Council libraries and on the Council's website.

3.4.2 The Strategy has also been publicised via the usual media outlets including the Civic magazine which is distributed to every household

in the Borough. A questionnaire attached as Appendix C to this report has been developed to collate feedback from the consultation process.

- 3.4.3 Barring the need for any major changes to the document as a result of the consultation, it is intended that the Strategy will be presented to Executive Board for consideration before May 2013.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The Housing Strategy will set the context for future policy development relating to housing and will have a significant influence on related policies and strategies e.g. Homelessness Strategy and Tenancy Strategy

5.0 **OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The financial implications of delivering the Strategy are outlined in the Action Plan contained in the draft Strategy. In particular the delivery of affordable housing is dependent on future levels of resources from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). At the time of writing Government announcements regarding future funding levels for the HCA are awaited although it is not clear when such announcements will be made.

- 5.2 The draft Strategy is deliverable within staffing resources prevailing at the time of writing, however, any change in staffing levels as a result of the need to make efficiency savings could impact upon successful delivery of the Strategy.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

The Housing Strategy aims to increase the supply of affordable housing and improve housing conditions which will have a beneficial impact on families with children among other household groups.

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

None directly although programmes to increase the supply and energy efficiency of housing could result in additional jobs and skills for the Borough.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

A number of priorities contained within the Strategy e.g. around fuel poverty, provision of supported housing and improving conditions in the private sector will have positive health benefits for some of Halton's most vulnerable residents.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

A number of priorities contained in the Strategy e.g. prevention of homelessness and regeneration of Castlefields will contribute to the creation of safer and stronger communities.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

The draft Strategy aims to promote housing growth and support economic growth in the Borough which will have a positive impact on the built environment.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 As described in 5.2 above the draft Strategy is capable of delivery within existing staffing resources, however, a reduction in staffing levels of relevant staff as a result of the need to make efficiencies could impact upon delivery of the Strategy.

7.2 Delivery of some of the Strategy is dependent on the continued availability of resources from external funding streams e.g. from the Homes and Communities Agency. Future reductions in funding levels could impact upon the ability to deliver some of the targets contained in the Action Plan.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The Strategy specifically aims to meet the housing needs of vulnerable people due to age or disability and will therefore have positive impacts for these groups.

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

| Document | Place of Inspection | Contact Officer |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Housing Strategy 2013-18 | Runcorn Town Hall (second floor) | Joanne Sutton |
| Housing Strategy evidence paper | Runcorn Town Hall (second floor) | Joanne Sutton |