

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of: Charles Carter, Executive Member Growth

To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee, October 13th 2016

Author: Matthew Hogan, Shared Strategic Housing Manager

Subject: Draft Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2016-20

Purpose: To consider the Draft Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2016-20, prior to the document being made available for a period of consultation with partner organisations and the wider public

Recommendation(s):

- 1) That Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the Draft Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2016-2020, prior to the document being made available for a period of consultation with partner organisations and the wider public.

1. Background

- 1.1** The Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy is a major policy item for the council. The strategy will set out the council's strategic approach, areas of focus and ambitions for its housing agenda over the period 2016-2020 for wide range of housing matters, including;
 - The ambitions that the council has for housing growth across the district
 - How we will respond to government changes to housing policy, including how we will support the delivery of government policy objectives in way that ensures that locally identified needs are met and planned for
 - The means through which we will support the delivery of improvements to the private housing stock
 - How we will seek to add to housing supply, including through the council's direct investment in new housing and activity in relation to addressing long term empty homes
 - How we will align our housing ambitions with the wider health agenda, including our strategic approach to addressing fuel poverty
 - How we will meet the needs of specific groups, such as older people, those with dementia and members of the armed forces
 - How we will seek to prevent and mitigate homelessness, including how we will identify and support those at greatest risk of losing their accommodation
 - The steps that we will take to support our residents in preparation for planned reform to the welfare benefits system
- 1.2** The role and purpose of the Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy is as follows:
 - To define the council's strategic housing priorities and define the agenda in relation to housing and homelessness over the next four years.
 - To define a strategic direction from which housing and planning policy can be developed
 - To assist in providing strategic clarity to partners, investors and commissioners.
 - To provide an opportunity to align the council's housing and homelessness agenda with broader corporate and strategy priorities, such as those within the Breckland Corporate Plan 2015-19.

- To set out a suite of priority activities and work streams that will provide a framework for delivery of the strategy.
- 1.3** To assist in ensuring that the strategy successfully communicates the council's priorities with a broad audience, the Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy has been written in such a way so that it is;
- Relatively brief yet informative in how the strategy has been written
 - Clear and easy to understand for the reader, using simple language wherever possible
 - Specific and clear in the actions that the Council will take to deliver the strategy
- 1.4** It is commonplace for local authorities to have a housing strategy, and it is a legal requirement for local authorities to adopt a homelessness strategy that sets out the approach that the council will take to prevent homelessness. Furthermore, the need to create a refreshed housing and homelessness strategy is also being driven by the fact that national policy in relation to housing is changing at a rapid pace and has changed considerably since the council's last housing and homelessness strategies were adopted in 2010 and 2012 respectively.
- 1.5** Since the time that these previous strategies were written and adopted there has been a significant shift in national government policy in relation to housing and homelessness, specifically since the May 2015 general election. This includes the following changes:
- Plans to deliver a 'housing revolution', with an ambition for one million homes to be delivered across the UK by 2020 by delivering a 'dramatic shift' in housing policy
 - A shift in government investment priorities, away from low cost rented housing and towards low cost home ownership products such as shared ownership. This means that central government financial assistance to deliver general needs rented housing has been diverted into delivering low cost home ownership housing.
 - A change to the statutory definition of 'affordable housing', presently proposed through a national consultation on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, to include a broader range of housing types that meet the definition. This includes new affordable housing 'products' such as the government's 'Starter Homes' initiative, alongside 'Rent to Buy' housing.
 - A proposed change to rules around s.106 housing, including the removal of the requirement for affordable housing to be provided as part of planning applications on sites of 10 units or fewer, alongside a proposal for the first 20% of affordable housing provided on private development sites to be 'Starter Homes'.
 - A shift in the role that many local authorities are playing in driving forward new housing growth, including a recent trend for many local authorities to directly invest in new housing development through wholly-owned companies and/or joint ventures.
 - The extension of the Right to Buy initiative to housing association tenants, which will enable housing association tenants to purchase their home at a discount; a benefit presently only enjoyed by those in local authority-owned affordable housing.
 - A national policy ambition to better support health and wellbeing by better integrating health, social care, in addition to housing addressing the worst housing conditions
 - Changes to the funding mechanisms to improve thermal efficiency and address fuel poverty in private housing
 - A policy ambition to improve the professionalism of the private rented sector by addressing rogue landlords and improving safeguards to protect tenants vulnerable to exploitation and/or intimidation
 - A national policy ambition to increase the rates of self and custom build housing, with a view to mirroring similar levels of Custom and Self-build Housing experienced in other European countries.

- A focus on incentivising out of work households into employment, driven partially by significant and ongoing reform to the welfare system, including the introduction of 'Universal Credit' and an ongoing reduction in expenditure on welfare benefits.

1.6 Consequently, given the recent and ongoing shift in national housing policy and priorities, there is a need for the Council to reevaluate its strategy priorities, aims and ambitions in relation to housing and homelessness. This strategy seeks to capture those priorities, set out our key areas of focus, and define a series of actions that will enable us to deliver the strategy. It also sets the tone for further policy development (including policy developed through the forthcoming Breckland Local Plan), will set the direction for how housing-related council services will be delivered, and guide investment activity in relation to housing. The Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2016-20 will also form the backbone of funding bids, influence how we engage with partners and commissioners, and identify areas where we need to focus our resources.

2. How has the draft strategy been developed?

2.1 Following initial discussions with senior elected members during summer 2016, a number of key activities have taken place in relation to the creation and development of a Draft Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy. These activities include the following:

- a. A full review and assessment of prevailing and emerging national policy in relation to housing, homelessness, planning and welfare reform
- b. A review of evidence, specifically focused upon evidence in relation to demographics, housing demand, housing need, the existing stock and homelessness
- c. Two themed workshops with a range of external partners; one workshop with a focus on the challenges and opportunities in relation to the prevention and alleviation of homelessness, and another in relation to the challenges and opportunities in relation to improving the existing housing stock.
- d. A number of discussions with professional bodies, such as the National Builders Federation which supports small and medium-sized developers

The steps outlined above have shaped and supported the process of creating the draft Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2016-20.

3. What is the structure of the document, and what does the strategy say?

3.1 The Draft Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2016-20 consists of three sections covering three key strategic priorities;

- Section One provides an analysis of the national and local policy context relating to housing. Section One is prefaced by a section setting out the approach to consultation on the draft document.
- Section Two provides a snapshot of the housing market in Breckland, along with information regarding housing needs and specific housing issues.
- Section Three covers the detail of the individual strategic priorities, and is broken down into three sub-sections. Each sub-section covers one of the three overarching objectives of the strategy; those being as follows:
 - Priority One: Preventing homelessness
 - Priority Two: Improving health outcomes by improving our housing
 - Priority Three: Supporting housing growth

Under each of these three objectives we provide details of the key priorities that the council will focus upon over the next four years in order to work towards achieving these objectives.

3.2 Priority One: Preventing Homelessness

Priority One sets out the council's strategic approach in relation to how it intends to alleviate and prevent homelessness. In that respect, 'priority one' forms the authority's statutory homelessness strategy. The strategy makes specific reference to the following:

- Making partnership development a cornerstone of our strategic approach to preventing homelessness. Informal partnerships focused on homelessness already exist between agencies across Breckland and Norfolk. However, in order to deliver a fully joined-up approach and address the challenges to successfully preventing homelessness over the lifespan of this strategy, these partnerships need to be further strengthened and developed. The strategy proposes that the council will take a lead in driving forward partnerships across the district and the county, drawing upon similar partnership models used elsewhere across the UK.
- A focus on preparing households for welfare reform and preventing homelessness by focusing upon debt and budgeting advice.
- A focus on making supporting access to employment and skills training a key strand of our strategic approach to preventing homelessness
- A focus on supporting those with complex, multiple needs from experiencing repeat homelessness
- A commitment to supporting recognising the contribution of serving and former members of the armed forces
- An ambition to remodel our Housing Advice and Homelessness Service. This is with a view to introducing a holistic 'housing options' based approach to service delivery, diversifying the range of advice provided by the team to those in housing need. This includes promoting low cost home ownership to those who can afford to do so, looking at how we can discharge our homelessness duties into the private rented sector, and identifying service users who require support with peripheral issues that impact upon their housing (e.g. debt advice, assistance in accessing skills training and employment, affordable warmth).
- An ambition to develop a 'pathways approach' to move on from supported housing. In essence, this means ensuring that for those entering into supported housing (e.g. hostels, refuges etc...) that there is a clearly defined plan to move them on into suitable accommodation once they are ready to live independently. It requires the council to work with partners to facilitate access to accommodation, including the private rented sector through working with landlords, or affordable housing for those in the highest need.
- Linked to our ambition to develop a pathways approach for those leaving supported housing, a further ambition to explore the creation of a 'tenant accreditation scheme' aimed at those leaving supported housing.
- Details of how we will seek to prepare households for Universal Credit, including through the 'Assisted Digital' project that forms a key part of the council's digitalisation programme.
- Our strategy for supporting victims of domestic abuse, and a commitment to explore ways to support with the rehabilitation of perpetrators of domestic abuse

3.3 Priority Two: Improving health outcomes by improving housing

Priority Two relates to the existing housing stock, supporting a good quality private rented sector, and breaking the relationship between housing and health. The strategy makes specific reference to the following:

- An ambition to explore how the council may develop a focussed and needs-based service to deliver both grant adaptation work, together with a holistic 'handyperson' service, as a means of helping vulnerable people to live safely, comfortably and independently in their own home, in addition to providing targeted support to those experiencing fuel poverty and dementia.

- A commitment to target our activity in relation to fuel poverty in the areas where there is evidence of highest need, through a targeted programme working with a range of partners, including Clinical Commissioning Groups
- Details of how we plan to support those with dementia, alongside other initiatives designed to support the growing needs of an ageing population
- A recognition of the important role that the private rented sector plays in meeting housing need and demand in Breckland, specifically in relation to shared single person accommodation, and a commitment from the council to look at how it supports and encourages the growth of a good quality private rented housing sector. Alongside this, the strategy sets out a commitment to focus our housing enforcement policies and mechanisms on tackling rogue landlords and addressing unsafe and sub-standard accommodation.

3.4 Priority Three: Supporting Housing Growth

‘Priority Three’ relates to the need to continuing to ensure a strong supply and wide range of new housing to meet the identified housing needs of the district. The strategy makes specific reference to the following:

- A clear ambition to develop a local plan that supports a strong supply of new housing, making the positive case in favour of the need of new accommodation to meet housing need and demand
- A focus on ensuring that our housing and planning policies are viable, flexible, and attract inward investment in new housing
- An ambition to explore how the council can play a more direct role in investing in new housing, including how the council potentially holding and managing housing as an commercial investment
- Support for the delivery of new initiatives that are designed to support households into home ownership, such as the Starter Homes and Rent to Buy initiative
- An ongoing council commitment to develop policy and partnerships that maximise the supply of low cost rented housing in the district, especially in the absence of government grant
- A commitment to supporting initiatives that promote the growth of Custom and Self Build housing across the district of Breckland
- A focus on how the council will work with partners to understand and plan for meeting the needs of an ageing population
- A commitment to develop policy that supports the delivery of small developments of rural housing where local and parish-specific need has been identified
- A commitment to focusing effort on how Breckland Council can support small and medium house builders and developers, with a view to helping them to make a positive and continued contribution to the supply of new housing across the district
- A commitment to focusing on how the council can return long-term empty homes to use
- Emerging text in relation to how the council will approach the matter of meeting the needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community. This text will be revised when the findings of a recent commissioned ‘gypsy and traveller needs assessment’ are made available to the council.

4. What are the next steps?

4.1 Following consideration of the draft Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2016-20 by the council’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it is proposed that the document will be made available for a period of consultation with key partners and the public. The aim of the consultation process will be to gauge views and input in relation to the following:

- The three identified key priorities

- The proposed areas of focus, including alternative and/or enhanced areas of focus that will support the delivery of the strategy and its priorities
- The proposed actions, including potential alternative and/or enhanced actions and activities that will support the delivery of the strategy and its priorities

4.2 In addition to making the document available online for a period of 28 days, it is proposed that the council specifically focuses with consultation activity around the following stakeholders;

- Development and housing management teams within local registered providers, including providers of specialist accommodation
- Developers, including larger national 'PLC' house builders alongside small and medium-sized building firms and developers
- Professional organisations and bodies, such as the National Builders Federation, the National Landlords Association, and the National Custom and Self-Build Association
- Local organisations involved in supporting older persons
- Clinical Commissioning Groups
- Private landlords and letting agents
- Support services that help those who are likely to experience homelessness, such as debt advice services and homelessness charities
- Local employers, through our Economic Development team
- Agencies that work to support members of the armed forces, such as SSAFA (formally known as the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association)

4.3 It is proposed that consultation will be undertaken through a series of workshops and/or presentations focused on groups of key partners, through publication of the draft strategy through the council's website, and promotion of the consultation online presence.

4.4 Furthermore, it is proposed that the consultation document will be made available to town and parish councils across Breckland with a view to invite their comments and feedback on the strategy.

5. OPTIONS

5.1 Do nothing (Not recommended). Under this option, the council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee will not consider the document. The input from the council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee is specifically sought and welcomed in order to assist in the process of developing and shaping the emerging housing and homelessness strategy for Breckland.

5.2 That Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the Draft Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2016-2020 (Recommended Option). Under this option, Overview and Scrutiny Committee will play a role in developing and shaping the emerging strategy prior to the draft document entering into a period of public consultation.

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

6.1 To enable Overview and Scrutiny Committee to play a role in developing and shaping the emerging strategy prior to the draft document entering into a period of public consultation

7. EXPECTED BENEFITS

7.1 The Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2016-20 will fulfil the following function and provide the following benefits:

- The strategy will play a major role in defining the council's strategic priorities and define the agenda in relation to housing and homelessness over the next four years.
- The strategy will define a strategic direction from which housing and planning policy will be developed
- The strategy will assist in providing strategic clarity on the housing priorities for Breckland to partners, investors and commissioners.
- The strategy will provide an opportunity to align the council's housing and homelessness agenda with broader corporate and strategy priorities, such as those within the Corporate Plan.
- The strategy will set out a suite of priority activities and work streams that will provide a framework for delivery of the strategy.

8. IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues

8.1.1 The strategy itself does not generate any carbon footprint / environmental implications. The specific actions associated with the draft strategy may have implications in these areas, but they will be dealt with through individual reports, business plans and processes that will flow from the strategy.

8.2 Constitution & Legal

8.2.1 The strategy itself does not generate any constitutional and legal implications. The specific actions associated with the draft strategy may have implications in these areas, but they will be dealt with through individual reports, business plans and processes that will flow from the strategy.

8.3 Contracts

8.3.1 The strategy itself does not generate any contractual implications. The specific actions associated with the draft strategy may have implications in these areas, but they will be dealt with through individual reports, business plans and processes that will flow from the strategy.

8.4 Corporate Priorities

8.4.1 The principle purpose of the Housing and Homelessness Strategy is to define the housing priorities and activities that will support the delivery of the Council's overarching strategic aims and ambitions, such as those included within the Corporate Plan.

8.5 Crime and Disorder

8.5.1 It is the view of the author that there are no known implications.

8.6 Equality and Diversity / Human Rights

8.6.1 The strategy itself does not generate any equality, diversity and/or human rights implications. The specific actions associated with the draft strategy may have implications in these areas, but they will be dealt with through individual reports, business plans and processes that will flow from the strategy.

8.7 Financial

8.7.1 The strategy itself does not generate any financial implications. The specific actions associated with the draft strategy may have implications in these areas, but they will be dealt with through individual reports, business plans and processes that will flow from the strategy.

8.8 Health & Wellbeing

8.8.1 The strategy seeks to define how the council's housing agenda will make a positive contribution to the delivery of wider activity in relation to Health and Wellbeing.

8.9 Reputation

8.9.1 In relation to the process of producing the Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy, the protection of the reputation of the council through this process is dependent upon a number of matters, including the approach that the council takes to consultation and the quality of the adopted strategy. In order to protect against any reputational issues, the council will conduct a full consultation process on the draft strategy, alongside subjecting the post-consultation version of the strategy to full scrutiny through the council's decision making processes.

8.10 Risk Management

8.10.1 The strategy itself does not generate any risk management implications. The specific actions associated with the draft strategy may have implications in these areas, but they will be dealt with through individual reports, business plans and processes that will flow from the strategy.

8.11 Safeguarding

8.11.1 The strategy itself does not generate any safeguarding implications. The specific actions associated with the draft strategy may have implications in these areas, but they will be dealt with through individual reports, business plans and processes that will flow from the strategy.

8.12 Staffing

8.12.1 The strategy itself does not generate any staffing implications. The specific actions associated with the draft strategy may have implications in these areas, but they will be dealt with through individual reports, business plans and processes that will flow from the strategy.

8.13 Stakeholders / Consultation / Timescales

8.13.1 As set out within the report, once the strategy has been considered by the council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee it is proposed that the document will be made available for a period of consultation with key partners and the public. It is anticipated that this period of consultation will take place during October and November 2016.

8.14 Transformation Programme

8.14.1 The strategy itself does not generate any staffing implications. The specific actions associated with the draft strategy may have implications in these areas, but they will be dealt with through individual reports, business plans and processes that will flow from the strategy.

9. WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED

9.1 All wards

10. ACRONYMS

Background papers:- None.

Lead Contact Officer

Name and Post: Matthew Hogan, Strategic Housing Manager
Telephone Number: 01775 764524
Email: matthew.hogan@breckland-sholland.gov.uk

Key Decision: Yes

Exempt Decision: No

This report refers to a Mandatory Service

Appendices attached to this report:

Appendix A Draft Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2016-20