

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of: Cllr Gordon Bambridge, Portfolio Holder for Growth

To: Cabinet, 30th May 2017

Author: Matthew Hogan, Strategic Housing Manager

Subject: Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2017-21

Purpose: To consider the Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2017-21 for adoption

Recommendation(s):

- 1) That Cabinet considers the Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2017-21 for adoption

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 2017-2021 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

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.

2. How has the strategy been developed?

2.1 A number of key activities have taken place in relation to the creation and development of a 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
- e. Input and feedback on the draft document from the council's Overview and Scrutiny Commission in October 2016.
- f. A full 28 day public consultation on a draft strategy, which attracted comments on the document from key partners, members of the public and employers.
- g. A further policy review, to ensure that the strategy reflects and responds to the latest prevailing national housing policy matters, including the Homelessness Reduction Act and the February 2017 Housing White Paper.

3. The outcome of the public consultation process

3.1 A draft version of the Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2017-21 was made available for a period of public consultation during January and February 2017. As part of the consultation process, the document was made available and promoted in the following ways;

- a. Through the council's website and social media
- b. Through a press release which attracted media attention
- c. Workshop sessions with partners
- d. Presentations to partners involved in affordable housing development
- e. Distribution to professional bodies, such as the National Landlords Association and the Federation of Master Builders
- f. Distribution to parish councils
- g. Shared with local employers

The public consultation exercise on the strategy generated a positive response from members of the public, partners and employers. A significant proportion of consultation submissions received were supportive of the strategy, and were positive concerning its areas of focus and ambitions. Specifically, the consultation process highlighted the importance of (and collective agreement on) a number of key themes within the document, including but exclusive to the following;

- Agreement amongst partners concerning the need to focus on supporting those with complex needs that experience a repeat cycle of homelessness
- Agreement concerning the need to strengthen partnerships between public, private and voluntary sectors in order to prevent homelessness and support vulnerable people to remain in their own home

- Agreement concerning the future importance of debt advice and worklessness as a strategic focus for the authority in preventing homelessness
- Agreement concerning the need to ensure that appropriate and tailored support is in place to assist serving and former members of the armed forces that are in need of accommodation
- Agreement with the assessment of a need to increase the supply of smaller units of accommodation

This process has shaped and supported the creation of the Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2017-21.

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

4.1 The Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2017-21 consists of three sections;

- Section One provides an analysis of the national and local policy context relating to housing.
- 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.

4.2 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' of the document 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 adopt the principles of the Homelessness Reduction Act prior to the statutory implementation of the legislation

- 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.
- Our strategy for supporting victims of domestic abuse, and a commitment to explore ways to support with the rehabilitation of perpetrators of domestic abuse

4.3 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.

4.4 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
- 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

It should also be noted that, since the draft strategy was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Commission in October 2017, progress has been made towards the delivery of a number of actions within the document. This includes, but is not exclusive to, progress of the following actions;

- Progress towards the creation of two Early Intervention Hubs across the district
- Work to strengthen the relationship between housing team officers and charities involved in supporting members of the armed forces
- A service review of the council's Housing Advice and Homelessness Service, with a focus towards providing a more holistic range of advice concerning access to alternative forms of housing options
- Work towards an business case for a Breckland Handy Persons Service
- Ongoing work toward the adoption of a Local Plan, and work to ensure that housing policies within the Local Plan are viable, deliverable and attract inward investment
- Commissioning research in conjunction with Norfolk County Council concerning the demand and need for supported housing designed to meet the needs of an ageing population

5. How will the strategy be monitored and delivered?

5.1 The strategy contains a suite of key actions that the authority will pursue over the lifetime of the strategy in order to deliver on the key strategic aims and objectives of the document. The authority's Strategic Housing Manager will take ownership for the delivery of the strategy. Regular reporting on the progress made with the delivery of actions contained within the strategy will be captured and reported upon through the council's performance management system.

5.2 Furthermore, it should be noted that officers will continue to monitor future shifts and changes to national government policy in relation to housing and homelessness and the impact of such changes upon aims, ambitions and actions contained within the strategy.

6. OPTIONS

6.1 Do nothing (Not recommended). Under this option, the document will not be adopted by the authority.

6.2 That Cabinet considers the Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2017-21 for adoption (Recommended Option). Under this option, the strategy will be adopted by the authority.

7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

7.1 To enable the Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2017-21 to be adopted by the authority.

8. EXPECTED BENEFITS

8.1 The Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2017-21 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.

9. IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues

9.1.1 The strategy itself does not generate any carbon footprint / environmental implications. The specific actions associated with the 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.

9.2 Constitution & Legal

9.2.1. The strategy itself does not generate any constitutional and legal implications. The specific actions associated with the 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.

9.3 Contracts

9.3.1 The strategy itself does not generate any contractual implications. The specific actions associated with the 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.

9.4 Corporate Priorities

9.4.1 The principle purpose of the Breckland 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.

9.5 Crime and Disorder

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

9.6 Equality and Diversity / Human Rights

9.6.1 The strategy itself does not generate any equality, diversity and/or human rights implications. The specific actions associated with the 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.

9.7 Financial

9.7.1 The strategy itself does not generate any financial implications. The specific actions associated with the 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.

9.8 Health & Wellbeing

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

9.9 Reputation

9.9.1 In order to protect against any reputational issues, the council will ensure that the content and delivery of the strategy is kept under continuous review.

9.10 Risk Management

9.10.1 The strategy itself does not generate any risk management implications. The specific actions associated with the 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.

9.11 Safeguarding

9.11.1 The strategy itself does not generate any safeguarding implications. The specific actions associated with the 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.

9.12 Staffing

9.12.1 The strategy itself does not generate any staffing implications. The specific actions associated with the 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.

9.13 Stakeholders / Consultation / Timescales

9.13.1 The strategy has been developed following an extensive process of engagement with key partners, employers and members of the public, including a 28 day period of consultation in January/February 2017.

9.14 Transformation Programme

9.14.1 The strategy itself does not generate any transformation 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.

10 WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED

10.1 All wards

11 ACRONYMS

Background papers:- [See The Committee Report Guide for guidance on how to complete this section](#)

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Key Decision: Yes

Exempt Decision: No

This report refers to a Mandatory Service

Appendices attached to this report:

Appendix A Breckland Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2017-21