

SUSTAINABLE GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 5
13 OCTOBER 2011	Public Report

Report of the Executive Director of Operations

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Draft Peterborough Housing Strategy 2011-15 (incorporating the Peterborough Strategic Tenancy Policy)

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek comments from committee on the attached draft Peterborough Housing Strategy 2011-15 (incorporating the Peterborough Strategic Tenancy Policy). It is a statutory requirement to prepare a Housing Strategy, under the Local Government Act 2003. A Strategic Tenancy Policy is likely to be a statutory duty shortly. Comments made by committee will be reported to Cabinet on 7 November 2011, prior to Cabinet deciding whether to approve the Strategy for the purposes of public consultation.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Committee make comments as they see fit on the attached draft Housing Strategy (incorporating the Peterborough Strategic Tenancy Policy), with such comments to be reported to Cabinet on 7 November 2011.

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Housing Strategy cuts across all four priorities of the SCS:
- Priority 1 - tackling inequalities (including supporting vulnerable people such as the homeless and regenerating neighbourhoods)
 - Priority 2 – Creating Strong and Supportive Communities (including the empowering of local communities in delivering housing in their area)
 - Priority 3 – Creating the UK’s environment capital (such as tackling fuel poverty in homes)
 - Priority 4 – Substantial and Truly Sustainable Growth (especially the goal of creating better places to live).

4. BACKGROUND & KEY ISSUES

4.1 Introduction

The Peterborough Housing Strategy is a major policy item for the council. It sets out the council’s policies, commitments and programme for the period 2011-2015 for a wide range of Housing matters, including:

- How we will assist vulnerable people, such as the homeless;
- What our priorities are for delivering new homes, including prestige and affordable homes;
- How we will endeavour to regenerate existing housing stock, whether that be private or social housing;
- How we will assist people to get access to housing, including the council’s Mortgage Scheme;
- How we will tackle Gypsy and Traveller housing issues; and

- How we will respond to the Government's reforms to social housing

4.2 In clearly setting out the council's priorities in these matters, the public has full knowledge of what to expect and how to make the most of the services we offer.

4.3 The draft strategy recommended for consideration by Committee today has been written so that it is:

- Brief, yet informative;
- Clear as to what the council's proposed policies are; and
- Specific in actions we will take.

4.4 **Structure of the draft Strategy**

The Strategy is in three main parts:

- An **introduction** to the Strategy and an explanation as to **how to submit comments** on the draft during the consultation period (scheduled to commence towards the end of September, for a four week consultation period):
- A set of **four priorities**, each with their own set of policies and actions (see below).
- A summary '**Action Plan**', so we are clear who is to do what by when. This will also form the template for regular monitoring and reporting on whether we remain on track with delivering the Strategy.

4.5 **The Housing Strategy Priorities**

There are four headline priority areas within the Strategy. First, **supporting the delivery of substantial yet sustainable growth**. A range of key objectives are identified to contribute to the delivery of growth in Peterborough. These include confirming that we are to maintain the current targets for additional dwellings in Peterborough but also ensuring that growth is sustainable and achieves high environmental standards. Supporting other important initiatives such as ensuring a supply of suitable accommodation for Peterborough's growing student population, meeting the accommodation needs of the new City Hospital and supporting Government's promotion of self build, are all identified as important objectives. The council's asset disposal plans and ways of stimulating the local housing market through the council's 'mortgage scheme' are also identified as key areas that can contribute to Peterborough's growth.

4.6 The second priority is **securing the regeneration and improvements to Peterborough's housing stock**. This priority focuses on utilising a range of preventative and proactive measures that will improve living conditions in Peterborough's existing homes. The key objectives identified are tackling empty homes, addressing serious disrepair in the private sector through grants and through enforcement and maximising the energy efficiency of existing housing.

4.7 The third priority is **meeting existing and future housing needs**. The key objectives that are identified to contribute to achieving this priority are: maximising the supply of affordable housing within the context of Government's new social housing funding regime; preventing and alleviating homelessness and rough sleeping in Peterborough through a range of measures with a strong focus on homelessness prevention; ensuring the suitability of accommodation for households with specific housing needs both within the existing stock through aids and adaptations and within future stock by ensuring the provision of a range of property types that will cater for different specialist needs; and meeting Gypsy and Traveller needs (especially in terms of short term transit provision).

4.8 The fourth priority is **encouraging the development of mixed and sustainable communities**. The key objectives identified in this section are; ensuring that new housing developments are

planned and managed to ensure a sense of community is developed; ensuring a balanced mix of property types and tenures; ensuring the sustainability of rural communities through affordable housing provision to address local need; supporting community led housing solutions (in both rural and urban neighbourhoods); and ensuring that allocation policies and tenure policies for social housing promote mixed and sustainable communities in the light of Government's social housing reforms.

4.9 **Peterborough's Strategic Tenancy Policy**

Included as an appendix to the Housing Strategy is a draft 'Peterborough Strategic Tenancy Policy'. Whilst it is not a statutory requirement yet to have an adopted Strategic Tenancy Policy, the clear message from government is that it will become a statutory requirement once the Localism Bill is enacted. As such, we are taking the opportunity to issue a draft Strategic Tenancy Policy alongside the wider draft Housing Strategy, and are seeking comments upon it.

4.10 The purpose of a Strategic Tenancy Policy is to set out what the council expects from housing associations which operate within the district. To be clear, it does not dictate what housing associations must do, but rather what we expect and prefer them to do. For example, it covers matters such as:

- The minimum length of tenancy to be granted to new tenants
- The circumstances where it is appropriate for tenancies to be offered that exceed the minimum term
- The circumstances where it is appropriate to retain the offer of lifetime tenancies
- The criteria to inform whether to renew a tenancy at the end of a fixed term
- The appropriate cap to rent levels for homes let as 'affordable rent' tenure, to ensure affordability
- Any other matter to be taken into consideration by social landlords to determine how their stock is let

4.11 In preparing the draft Strategic Tenancy Policy, officers have informally consulted with our housing association partners and have attempted to prepare a policy which is fair yet consistent with the council's wider housing policy aspirations. The housing associations will have the opportunity to formally comment on the draft prior to its adoption by the council later this year or early next.

5. **IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 **Financial:** Preparation of the Housing Strategy (and associated Strategic Tenancy Policy) has minimal costs, and can be met within existing budgets. However, the Housing Strategy, once adopted, commits the council to undertaking various activities in the future, each of which have varying cost implications. These tasks, however, have been agreed with the applicable teams concerned, and therefore it is anticipated budgets are in place in order for reasonable endeavours to be taken to achieve the policies and actions proposed. As such, there are no new financial implications directly arising from agreeing this draft Strategy for the purposes of consultation, other than those already accounted for in existing budgets.

Legal Implications: The Housing Strategy, once adopted, should be adhered to by the council in the way it conducts its housing-related business. Failure to do so could result in challenges, but these are unlikely to have any legal standing as the commitments being made in the Strategy are not legally binding. Of course, the council has a number of legal duties across the housing agenda, but there is nothing in this draft Strategy which we believe to be contrary to such legal duties or that create new legal duties. Cabinet will only be asked to approve a draft for consultation, rather than adopting the Strategy. The bigger risk in not achieving what we set out in the Strategy is a reputational risk, rather than any legal risk.

Environmental: sections of the Strategy relate to environmental issues, such as tackling fuel poverty and bringing empty housing back into use. Overall, the Strategy can be regarded as having a positive impact on tackling environmental issues.

6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Housing Strategy and Enabling team has coordinated the preparation of the Strategy, in association with a considerable number of teams across the council, reflecting the wide range of issues which the Strategy covers. As such, subject to the outcome of the public consultation, officers across the council understand and are 'bought into' the policies and actions which are proposed.
- 6.2 Comments of this Sustainable Growth Scrutiny Committee will be made to Cabinet.
- 6.3 Assuming it is approved by Cabinet in November public consultation will take place on the attached document during November and December 2011. Issues raised during that consultation period will be fully considered, and changes made to the Strategy where appropriate, before submitting the final version of the Strategy to Cabinet in February 2012. As this is a Major Policy Item, Council will be asked to formally adopt the Strategy (target date 22 February 2012).

7. NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 Cabinet approval and public consultation, as described above.

8. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 8.1 None

9. APPENDICES

- 9.1 Draft Housing Strategy