

# Forest Heath District Council

(This report is not a key decision. This report has been subject to appropriate notice of publication under the Council's Access to Information Rules)

## Report of the Cabinet Member for Planning, Housing and Transport

**CABINET**

**15 OCTOBER 2013**

**CAB13/113**

**WEST SUFFOLK HOUSING STRATEGY SCOPING REPORT** (Decision Plan Reference: OCT13/04)

### **1. Summary and reasons for recommendation(s)**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the scope of the new single West Suffolk Housing Strategy, explain the approach to drafting the document and how it will be delivered by both Councils.

### **2. Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 That the scope of the new West Suffolk Housing Strategy and the governance of the Member Focus Group are approved.**

#### **Contact details**

Name  
Title

Telephone  
E-mail

#### **Portfolio holder**

Councillor Mrs Rona Burt  
Cabinet Member for Planning,  
Housing and Transport

01638 712309

[rona.burt@forest-heath.gov.uk](mailto:rona.burt@forest-heath.gov.uk)

#### **Lead officer**

Simon Phelan  
Head of Housing

01638 719440

[simon.phelan@westsuffolk.gov.uk](mailto:simon.phelan@westsuffolk.gov.uk)

### **3. How will the recommendations help us meet our strategic priorities?**

3.1 The recommendation meets the following, as contained within the Corporate Plan:

- Provide adequate provision in our planning policy framework to meet current and future housing needs
- Help manage the district's existing housing stock
- Use our influence to bring empty homes back into use

### **4. Key issues**

#### **4.1 Background**

4.1.1 It is no longer a legal requirement for local authorities to have a Housing Strategy in place. However it is recognised that in order to have a strategic overview of how councils will deliver the range of housing options and related assets to communities, it is prudent to develop one. The new approach going forward is to provide a holistic package around housing to the residents of West Suffolk. This will be reflected in the new structure and will include developing and supplying a range of housing options across the private sector, the private rented market and social and affordable housing, ensuring that all tenures will provide sustainable and suitable homes for the residents of West Suffolk. This will continue to be delivered in partnership with other agencies and to build on the relationships that have been established over many years.

4.1.2 The Housing service has completed a Business Re-engineering process looking at improving the way we deliver the service and the outcome of this exercise has been used to inform the new shared service structure.

4.1.3 Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury currently both have housing strategies which are due for updating and review, a new West Suffolk Housing Strategy is planned covering the Government's renewed direction for housing and planning and maximising funding opportunities. The Government's plans as set out in Laying the Foundations – the National Housing Strategy, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Welfare Reform, the Localism Act, and the Health and Wellbeing Board will all contribute to how the strategy will be delivered over the next few years.

4.1.4 Appendix 1 illustrates the current housing documents both Councils have in place. The new West Suffolk Housing Strategy will draw together all housing related policies and plans each having a supporting action plan.

4.1.5 Housing remains a priority for both councils and during recent discussions with Members over potential new priorities for West Suffolk in 2014-16, housing has emerged again as a major theme. Key issues emerging were the need for:

- (a) Increased affordable homes provision
- (b) New homes that are suitable and spacious enough to meet a range of needs; and
- (c) New development that contributes to the community through new infrastructure and facilities

## **4.2 Approach**

4.2.1 There are no templates for new policy or strategy documents for West Suffolk; rather each service should develop its own policies or strategies in a way that best suits its needs and fits into the wider corporate context. The policy team is now working with services through a business partner model to ensure that all policies are evidence-based; consider a range of options; and are appropriately linked to other services' policies. There is also a drive to ensure that policies are structured in such a way to avoid excessive repetition of background information, instead focusing on the strategic context and values of the organisation, supported by time-limited action plans.

## **4.3 Governance**

4.3.1 It is proposed that a Housing Strategy Member Group is convened to have an overview and input to drafting the Strategy and will continue to meet until the Strategy has been through the Cabinet process at each Council. The meetings will be jointly chaired by the Cabinet Member responsible for Housing from each local authority, namely Councillors Anne Gower and Mrs Rona Burt. The following Members have confirmed their attendance at the group; Cllr Wakelam, Cllr Rushen, Cllr Farmer, Cllr Barker, Cllr Lynch and Cllr Simmons. The first meeting was held on the 13 September 2013.

4.3.2 In addition to the Member Group, a cross service Officer Group will be convened to draft the Strategy and action plans. The output from this Group will be presented to the Member Group for comment and discussion. The Officer Group will continue to meet to ensure the delivery of the Strategy.

## **4.4 Content – scope of the report**

4.4.1 The West Suffolk Housing Strategy will cover five broad themes that reflect the Government's National Strategy; this will be put into a local context for members to discuss and approve which actions and initiatives to implement across West Suffolk as a whole and at a more local level in our communities. It will be a 'living' document with the focus being on the delivery of the action plans, these will be updated to encompass new initiatives and programmes the councils wish to implement or explore in more detail.

4.4.2 The themes are;

- (a) Increasing Supply – More Homes, Stable Growth  
Through planning reform, giving local communities more control over new housing and promoting new financial incentives including the use of New Homes Bonus.
- (b) Social and Affordable Housing Reform  
Making better use of social housing to support those who need it most, encouraging registered providers to look at innovative financial packages from the private sector to deliver homes.
- (c) A thriving Private Rented Sector  
Supporting investment in homes to rent, working with the private sector to drive up standards and improve customer awareness.

- (d) Our Strategy for Empty Homes  
Bringing empty homes back into use to increase housing supply and reduce the impact empty homes can have on local communities.
- (e) Houses that are well designed, of the highest quality, are environmentally sustainable and reflect future demographic needs.  
Providing strong leadership on design through national policy, creating opportunities for communities to shape their local areas and having a commitment to delivering energy efficient homes.

4.4.3 A key element running throughout the strategy will be the linkages with other strategies to show how housing is important aspect in the delivery of a wide range of Council priorities.

## **4.5 Timescales**

4.5.1 The following timetable is proposed:

### **4.5.2 St Edmundsbury Borough Council**

10 September 2013 – Scoping document to Cabinet  
 21 January 2014 – Informal consideration by Cabinet of draft Strategy for consultation  
 22 January 2014 – Draft Strategy to Overview and Scrutiny Committee\*  
 11 February 2014 – Approval of Draft Strategy by Cabinet for consultation  
 25 March 2014 or 20 May 2014 – Final Approval of Strategy by Cabinet

### **4.5.3 Forest Heath District Council**

3 September 2013 – Informal consideration by Cabinet of scoping document  
 15 October 2013 – Scoping document to Cabinet  
 21 January 2014 – Informal consideration by Cabinet of draft Strategy for consultation  
 23 January 2014 – Draft Strategy to Overview and Scrutiny Committee\*  
 18 February 2014 – Approval of draft Strategy by Cabinet for consultation  
 1 April 2014 or 27 May 2014 – Final Approval of Strategy by Cabinet

(\*arrangements are being considered for one joint meeting of both Overview & Scrutiny Committees)

## **5. Other options considered**

5.1 This is a new strategy for West Suffolk and has taken into account latest government initiatives and guidelines and latest best practice.

## **6. Community impact**

6.1 **Crime and disorder impact** *(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998)*

The proposed new strategy will cover a raft of housing issues as detailed in Appendix A.

6.2 **Diversity and equality impact** *(including the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment)*

6.2.1 An Equality Impact Assessment of the proposed new strategy is to be undertaken

6.3 **Sustainability impact** *(including completing a Sustainability Impact Assessment)*

6.3.1 A sustainability Impact Assessment will be completed

6.4 **Other impact** *(any other impacts affecting this report)*

6.4.1 None.

7. **Consultation** *(what consultation has been undertaken, and what were the outcomes?)*

7.1 The draft West Suffolk Housing Strategy will go out to consultation during December 2013. All stakeholders will be asked to comment.

8. **Financial and resource implications** *(including asset management implications)*

8.1 Actions within the strategy will be undertaken using existing staff resources and current budget provision. Research is currently underway looking at all potential future funding options and a paper will be coming forward to Cabinet in due course. The delivery of the strategy will also consider the long term view of the MTFs and the Government's and Homes and Communities Agency's future funding arrangements post 2015/16.

9. **Risk/opportunity assessment** *(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)*

Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
Not to produce a West Suffolk Housing Strategy	Medium	Work with partners to produce realistic and deliverable action plans	Low

10. **Legal and policy implications**

10.1 There are no legal implications. The Strategy will be the overarching document to deliver all housing policies.

11. **Ward(s) affected**

11.1 The strategy will affect all wards in Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury.

12. **Background papers**

12.1 No further background papers.

### **13. Documents attached**

- 13.1 Appendix A: Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council's current housing documents and the proposed end point for the new strategy- 2013 to 2017.