



Cabinet 10 September 2013

West Suffolk Housing Strategy: Scoping Report (Sep13/08)

1. Summary and reasons for recommendation

- 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 St Edmundsbury Borough and Forest Heath District Councils.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 It is **RECOMMENDED** that the scope for the new West Suffolk Housing Strategy, as outlined in Section 4.4 of Report E103, and the governance for the Housing Strategy Members' Group outlined in Section 4.3 of Report E103, be approved.

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3. Corporate priorities

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

- (a) Corporate Priority 1: '*Working together for strong, healthy and diverse communities*'.

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 District Council (FHDC) and St Edmundsbury Borough Council (SEBC) 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 Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board will all contribute to how the Strategy will be delivered over the next few years.
- 4.1.4 Appendix A attached 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 with 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 2014/2016, 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 an informal Housing Strategy Members' Group is established and meetings convened to have an overview and input into drafting the Strategy. The Group will continue to meet until the Strategy has been through the Cabinet process at SEBC and FHDC. The meetings will be jointly chaired by the Cabinet Member responsible for Housing from each local authority, namely Councillors Anne Gower and Rona Burt. The following Members have confirmed their attendance of the Group; SEBC Councillors Ms Wakelam, Mrs Rushen, Farmer and FHDC Councillor Barker. The first meeting has been scheduled for 13 September 2013.

4.3.2 In addition to the Members' Group, a cross service Officers' Group will be established and meetings convened to draft the Strategy and Action Plans. The output from this Group will be presented to the Members' Group for comment and discussion. The Officers' 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 and are environmentally sustainable.
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 current economic constraints/initiatives and opportunities to deliver the action plans.

4.5 Timescales

4.5.1 The following timetable is proposed:

4.5.2 SEBC

10/09/2013 – Scoping Document to Cabinet
04/12/2013 – Draft Strategy to Overview and Scrutiny Committee
10/12/2013 – Adoption of Draft Strategy for consultation
25/03/2014 or 20/05/2014 – Final Approval of Strategy

4.5.3 FHDC

01/10/2013 – Scoping Document to Cabinet Planning
15/10/2013 – Scoping Document to Cabinet
19/12/2013 – Draft Strategy to Overview and Scrutiny Committee
07/01/2014 – Adoption of Draft Strategy for consultation
01/04/2014 or 27/05/2014 – Final Approval of Strategy

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 Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Government's and Homes and Communities Agency's future funding arrangements post 2015/2016.

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. Wards affected

11.1 The Strategy will affect all wards in St Edmundsbury.

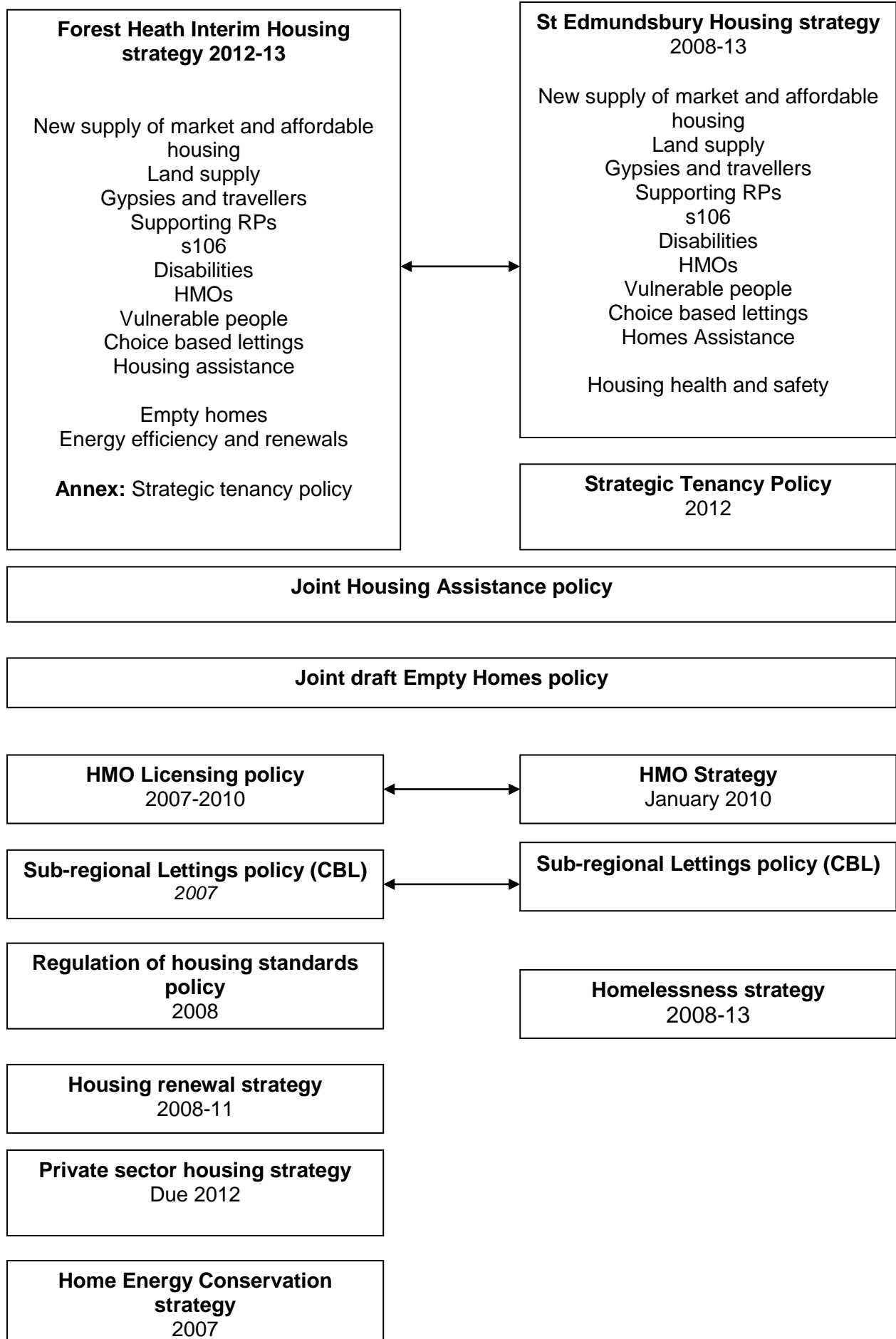
12. Background papers

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 – 2013 to 2017.

Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury – current housing documents



Proposed end point – 2014-17

Joint housing strategy – 2014 - 17

Sets out the Councils' overall approach to providing sufficient, suitable, safe accommodation for the residents of St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath that meets the needs of current and future residents and supports economic activity whilst ensuring vulnerable households are protected.

Supplying new homes

Sub-regional context
Needs assessment
Land supply
Planning policies
New affordable housing
s106

Making the best use of the existing stock

Empty homes
Tenancy strategy
Allocations policy and Choice Based
Lettings (tackling homelessness)
Housing renewal (inc. assistance)
Housing health and safety
Energy efficiency (HECA)

Meeting the needs of vulnerable groups

Disabled facilities
Supported housing
Gypsies and travellers
Park Homes