

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath
District Council

Title of Report:	West Suffolk Housing Strategy: Progress Report against Action Points	
Report No:	OAS/FH/16/005	
Report to and date:	Overview and Scrutiny	10 March 2016
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Purpose of report:	To review progress against the West Suffolk Housing Strategy 2015-2018.	
Recommendation:	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that, Overview and Scrutiny Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Notes the progress to date against the actions arising from the West Suffolk Housing Strategy 2015-2018; (2) Notes the challenges facing delivery of the West Suffolk Housing Strategy; and (3) Keeps progress under review and receives a further update report in early 2017 in order to monitor delivery in 2016. 	
Key Decision: <i>(Check the appropriate box and delete all those that do not apply.)</i>	<i>Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?</i> No, it is not a Key Decision - <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

Consultation:		The production of the West Suffolk Housing Strategy itself was the result of extensive consultation. The delivery of the Strategy, as here reported, is dependent on close collaborative working across West Suffolk Councils' various departments, and with parish and town councils, other authorities across Suffolk and beyond, Suffolk County Council, developers, housing associations, voluntary groups and the public. Specific partners are mentioned within the report as appropriate	
Alternative option(s):		No monitoring or scrutiny of delivery of the Housing Strategy – REJECTED . The West Suffolk Housing Strategy is ambitious and far-reaching, thus it is imperative to invite regular scrutiny of officers' efforts to deliver against the 40 objectives it contains	
Implications:			
Are there any financial implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> None arising directly from this report – see section 3	
Are there any staffing implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> None arising directly from this report – see section 4	
Are there any ICT implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> None arising directly from this report – see section 5	
Are there any legal and/or policy implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> None arising directly from this report – see section 6	
Are there any equality implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> None arising directly from this report – see section 7	
Risk/opportunity assessment:		<i>(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)</i>	
Risk area – KEY RISKS	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
	Low/Medium/High*		Low/Medium/High*
Very little new affordable housing delivered	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With Planning Department, ensure up-to-date planning policies and affordable housing guidance • Provide evidence-based advice to developers and housing associations and challenge viability assessments purporting to yield low, non-policy compliant levels of affordable housing • Work with parish councils to promote small-scale rural development • Establish a housing development company 	Medium

Poor conditions in the private sector unchallenged	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update regulatory policies • Target poorest quality private sector homes first • Encourage high standards in the private rented sector through the West Suffolk Lettings Partnership's engagement with landlords 	Low
Too many disabled and low income households living in unsuitable homes	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission Housing Improvement Agency and introduce performance-related outcomes • Revise the Housing Assistance Policy • Work with Suffolk County Council and others to identify disabled households and design individual remedies to enable them to remain living independently at home 	Medium
Too many homeless households living in high cost, unsuitable temporary accommodation	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase and improve accommodation to use as a high quality alternative to unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless households requiring interim accommodation 	Low
Ward(s) affected:		All	
Background papers: <i>(all background papers are to be published on the website and a link included)</i>		West Suffolk Housing Strategy 2015-2018 http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/Council/Policies_Strategies_and_Plans/upload/WestSuffolkHousingStrategy.pdf	
Documents attached:		Appendix A – Progress against Housing Strategy Objectives, Actions and Targets – December 2015	

1. Key issues and reasons for recommendations

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 It is no longer a legal requirement for local authorities to have a Housing Strategy in place. Both Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council recognised, however, that in order to have a strategic overview of how the Councils will deliver a range of appropriate housing options, it was prudent to develop one and so a West Suffolk Housing Strategy was drawn up in 2014-2015 following extensive consultation.
- 1.1.2 In drafting the Strategy, the overall aim was to ensure a range of housing options across the private sale, private rented and social and affordable housing sectors, such that all tenures can provide sustainable and suitable homes for the residents of West Suffolk.
- 1.1.3 The draft West Suffolk Housing Strategy was considered in detail at a joint meeting of Forest Heath's and St Edmundsbury's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23 July 2014. It was ultimately approved by Forest Heath Council on 8 October 2014 (and St Edmundsbury Council on 23 September 2014).

2. Delivery against the Strategic Objectives

- 2.1 The West Suffolk Housing Strategy includes a series of ambitious objectives against which key actions and targets have been formulated. These actions and targets are reviewed and, if necessary, amended, deleted or added to on an annual basis. The Housing Service reviews progress against the Housing Strategy actions on a quarterly basis.
- 2.2 The Housing Strategy groups the objectives under the following headings:
- planning
 - rural housing
 - developers and providers
 - private sector housing
 - adaptations and improvements
 - community
 - energy efficiency
 - land and resources
 - homelessness
 - efficiency and effectiveness
 - care and support.
- 2.3 **Appendix A** gives a detailed update on progress at December 2015 against the 40 objectives under these headings. The remainder of this report summarises, under each of the headings, key achievements to date and work underway and highlights challenges and external factors impacting on delivery.
- 2.4 The tables below give the latest position on actions monitored on a quarterly basis, that is, the position at the end of December 2015. If more up-to-date details are available, these have also been included.

Planning

Achievements

29% of homes delivered on s106 sites completed April – December 2015 were affordable
Negotiation over affordable tenures on a small Ixworth site resulted in 31% affordable homes rather than just 13% as proposed by the developer

On the latest phase at Moreton Hall, flexibility over the size mix of the affordable homes has yielded 30% affordable housing when earlier negotiations suggested only 20%-25%

Work underway

The Housing Service is assisting Planning colleagues undertake the Single Issue Review of housing targets and allocations in Forest Heath DC's Local Plan

The Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document is being reviewed to further strengthen the Councils' negotiating position with developers

Challenges

The National Planning Policy Framework is being reviewed. It is likely to widen the definition of affordable housing to include Starter Homes. Local policies will need to reflect this to benefit from these new tenures

Rural housing

Achievements

An 11 unit scheme of affordable houses, bungalows and flats in Clare opened in summer 2015

Planning policy has been amended to allow a small proportion of market housing on any rural exception site if this will make the delivery of affordable housing on the site viable

Work underway

The Housing Service is exploring the benefits of running a 'rural enabling conference' with parish councils in summer/autumn 2016 to cover how West Suffolk Councils can assist local people address affordable housing need in their localities

Challenges

It remains unclear whether the extension of the right-to-buy to housing association tenants will apply to homes developed on rural exception sites. Providing affordable homes in the long run is often crucial for eliciting local support

Developers and providers

Achievements

The current affordable housing target is 145 affordable homes delivered in West Suffolk in 2015/16. In the period April – December 2015, 147 homes were delivered

Work underway

2015/16 out-turn estimated to be around 180 affordable homes

Challenges

Some housing associations are struggling to maintain their development programmes given rising building costs and the Government's changes to the national rent policy

In addition, at present, the 2016/17 programme appears heavily skewed towards one and two bedroom homes

Private sector housing

Achievements

Seven empty properties brought back into use in April 2015 to December 2015

Working arrangements with ARP (Anglian Revenue Partnership) in place to maximise new homes bonus

Fully revised Housing Regulatory Policy now in place

Better management and practice in the letting of private rented housing is being achieved by the West Suffolk Lettings Partnership Officer working closely with the Housing Standards Team to carry out an initial assessment of both landlord and property

Work underway

Targeting the most hazardous properties and non-compliant landlords through effective preventative and enforcement action – target of 10 properties per quarter so far being met in 2015/16

Challenges

Ensuring private rented accommodation at or under Local Housing Allowance rates (the maximum that can be covered in full by housing benefit) is proving difficult due to local private rent inflation. The West Suffolk Lettings Partnership is being reviewed to better understand whether incentives, including extended rent guarantees, could increase supply

Adaptations and improvements

Achievements

New Suffolk-wide Housing Improvement Agency, HIA, contract is now in place; the service commenced in December 2015. New model of working has a greater emphasis on efficiency and performance

The funding allocation from the Better Care Fund was increased in 2015-16, partly because the Housing Service is delivering Disabled Facilities Grants, DFGs, through a Suffolk-wide HIA and partnership approach

Revised Housing Assistance Policy approved by Cabinet in November 2015. The new policy has been simplified to provide a single form of grant to simplify uptake. At the same time, there are more safeguards to ensure repayment of grant monies if the property is sold/transferred

Work underway

Work being carried out to establish a database of Occupational Therapy, OT, clients who require adapted housing, assess needs of disabled people against adapted stock available and determine what type of new build is required

Group established in West Suffolk, chaired by Suffolk County Council OTs, to action and monitor this issue

Challenges

Now the new HIA has commenced, the challenge is to:

- design systems between Housing, Suffolk County Council and Clinical Commissioning Group, CCG, to allow more residents to remain living independently in their homes

- explore closer working with CCG to encourage more referrals from GPs, hospital and the like to help vulnerable residents adapt and repair their homes
- help to prevent hospital admissions, delays in hospital discharge and maintain health through better housing

Community

Achievements

In October 2015, the Housing Service provided supporting commentary on Hargrave Parish Council's application to become a Neighbourhood Area with a view to developing a Neighbourhood Plan

Work underway

Working with Stanningfield Parish Council on a proposal to develop affordable housing on a rural exception site in the village

Challenges

As noted above, it remains unclear whether the extension of the right-to-buy to housing association tenants will apply to homes developed on rural exception sites. Providing affordable homes in the long run is often crucial for eliciting local support

Energy efficiency

Achievements

Energy survey training undertaken in September 2015

County-wide Warm Homes Healthy People programme launched in October 2015 and being promoted to vulnerable households across West Suffolk

134 properties in West Suffolk have received insulation measures through Suffolk Energy Action partnership initiative by the end of November 2015

Work underway

Surveys being undertaken to establish total cost and householder contribution for solid wall insulation

So far in 2015/16, six events have been run by the Council's partner organisation Suffolk Climate Change Partnership and one by West Suffolk Councils. Over 300 residents have attended

24 park homes in Stanton are currently having external wall insulation installed onto their properties. The works are almost complete, with suitable weather conditions required before applying the final top coat.

New scheme has been launched to provide new central heating systems to low income households across Suffolk. £2 million is available to Suffolk residents and work has just begun on promoting this scheme. The scheme will run until March 2017

Challenges

The procured insulation contractor for the external wall insulation went into administration in September, a new supplier was quickly appointed and works are now progressing. All installations are programmed to be complete by August 2016

Land and resources

Achievements

West Suffolk / Suffolk County Council application to Open Public Estate (OPE) 3 approved in December 2015

Housing Development Company proposals approved by St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath Councils and Suffolk County Council's Cabinet in November 2015

Work underway

First potential sites for Housing Development Company identified with feasibility study due to complete February 2016

Company's first Annual Business and Delivery Plan due to put to members in April/May 2016

Challenges

The challenge is now to identify suitable development sites in FHDC's and SEBC's ownership that are viable for the Housing Company to develop. A review of suitable land is being conducted by the Housing and Property Services

Homelessness

Achievements

Fully revised joint West Suffolk Homelessness Strategy adopted by the Councils in February 2015. Previously Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council have had separate policies

Five units of temporary accommodation at Lake Avenue, Bury St Edmunds, became available in June 2015 reducing the call on expensive and unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless households. Spend on bed and breakfast accommodation peaked in 2013/14 at £290,000. The forecast for 2015/16 is £100,000 based on spend to quarter 3, representing a 66% drop in annual expenditure over two years

Work underway

Refurbishing an additional property in Bury St Edmunds that will provide a further seven units of temporary accommodation by June 2016. It is anticipated that this will further reduce bed and breakfast expenditure to a significant degree with the ultimate aim being to eradicate bed and breakfast use completely

Challenges

Homelessness due to family breakdown and friends and family no longer able to accommodate remains high. A Young Persons Action Group has been established with the primary objective of developing a joined up approach to preventing homelessness for young people and families, including appropriate interventions for relationship breakdown. Cross-service working is needed to:

- complete a County-wide Action Plan
- build on experience of what already works and determine effective interventions aimed at assisting in times of relationship and family breakdown

Efficiency and effectiveness

Achievements

Joint Suffolk Housing Fraud Forum in place and Housing Service has established a protocol with ARP for investigating cases

Choice Based Lettings, CBL, contract reviewed in March 2015 with new partner selected in July 2015

Work underway

New CBL IT system to go live in May 2016

Challenges

The timescale for implementation of the new CBL system in May is challenging. Of note, all staff using the new system will reacquire training in April 2016 once the new software is fully loaded onto the ICT system

Care and support

Achievements

Housing and Health Charter adopted by Suffolk Health and Well-being Board in July 2015

Work underway

Current work includes:

- Design in the Public Sector – review led by Housing, involving SCC Adult and Community Services and West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group, to reduce unnecessary emergency admissions to A&E and doctor call-outs to older people living in sheltered housing
- Human Centred Design – working with East of England LGA, Suffolk County Council Adult and Community Services and West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group to (a) reduce time older, but medically fit, patients' length of stay in hospital and (b) achieve the best possible outcomes on return home
- Housing is actively working as a member of the Sudbury Connect programme group (focusing on the Clare area) to enable early identification of need and joined-up approaches to deliver efficiencies across the health and public sectors

Challenges

Initial phase of call for short term Gypsy and Traveller transit sites completed, sites now being assessed and those considered suitable by Suffolk Public Sector Leaders in January 2016 will move into the second phase of consultation and assessment

No sites were submitted for permanent Gypsy and Traveller Sites through the call for sites process – Local Plan preferred options due to be completed April 2016. Currently exploring the potential for sites on larger strategic sites, seeking advice from Gypsy and Traveller Advisory Service

Funding reductions due in Suffolk County Council's Supported Housing budget from 2017/18 onwards

3. Financial implications

3.1 The revenue and capital costs associated with delivery the various objectives, actions and targets have been included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

3.2 There are no revenue or capital implications arising directly from this report.

4. Staffing implications

4.1 There are no staffing implications arising directly from this report.

5. ICT implications

5.1 A number of actions have ICT implications, for example the implementation of the new choice based lettings system, however, provision for this has already been made in the relevant services' budgets and work programmes.

5.2 There are no ICT implications arising directly from this report.

6. Legal / Policy implications

6.1 Delivery of the West Suffolk Housing Strategy is a crucial contributor to furthering West Suffolk Councils' three strategic goals. The contribution of the Strategy to providing *Homes for our communities* is perhaps self-evident.

6.2 The Strategy, however, also has a crucial role to play in providing *Increased opportunities for economic growth*. For example, national research has found that every new home built supports 2.4 long term, sustainable jobs.

6.3 The Strategy's role in ensuring *Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active* can also be seen in the efforts to increase standards in the private rented sector, reduce the use of bed and breakfast to accommodate homeless people temporarily and the strides being taken to support local communities develop neighbourhood plans and devise small-scale housing developments on rural exception sites that local people want to see come forward to meet localised needs.

6.4 The Housing Strategy is well embedded in West Suffolk Councils' policies, and any legal input required to deliver specific objectives has already been identified, thus there are no legal or policy implications arising directly from this report.

7. Equalities implications

7.1 The Housing Strategy was subject to a detailed equalities impact assessment at its time of drafting. The objectives, actions and targets are primarily focused on those most disadvantaged in the housing market.

7.2 Of note, analysis of the Forest Heath DC's and St Edmundsbury BC's Housing Registers indicates that applicants with a disability are likely to have lower incomes than those without – (56% of applicants on the two Registers taken together report a gross annual income from all sources of below £10,000, compared with 50% of those without a disability). The Housing Strategy aims to assist people with a disability into specialist housing for rent and to ease access to disabled facilities grants to assist in making adaptations to the current home.

7.3 Reported gross incomes vary by ethnic background. Taking £20,000 as perhaps the lower threshold for home ownership on a shared ownership basis indicates different levels of access between groups, with those on the lower income benefitting particularly from rented options:

Group	Number on FHDC and SEBC Housing Registers – combined figure*	Number on Registers with income below £20,000 a year	% within the group with income below £20,000 a year
Mixed background	28	27	96.4%
Gypsy and travellers	9	8	88.9%
Black background	27	23	85.2%
White British	1,925	1,610	83.6%
White Irish	17	14	82.4%
Asian background	28	22	78.6%
White – other background	257	191	74.3%
Chinese / other background	23	16	69.6%
* excludes households not giving income data (31 White British, 9 White – other)			
NOTE: there is no ethnicity data held for 94 households on the Housing Registers and in a further 10 cases there is no ethnicity and no income data held. These households have not been counted in the above analysis			

- 7.4 The affordable housing the Strategy is delivering will help those on lower incomes. Certain other groups may also have lower incomes, including younger people, including young families and people with caring responsibilities. While these groups will have lower access to the market housing, with again affordable options benefitting them.
- 7.5 There are no further equalities implications arising directly from this report.