

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date:** 16 March 2020

**Title:** Eastbourne Housing Strategy 2020 – 2024

**Report of:** Ian Fitzpatrick, Director of Regeneration and Planning

**Cabinet member:** Councillor Alan Shuttleworth, Cabinet member for direct assistance services

**Ward(s):** All

**Purpose of report:** To seek Cabinet approval for the proposed strategy

**Decision type:** Key decision

**Officer recommendation(s):** Cabinet is recommended to:

- (1) Consider the final draft of the EBC Housing Strategy 2020 – 2024 set out in Appendix 1;
- (2) Subject to there being no requirement for significant amendments to authorise the Deputy Chief Executive to adopt the strategy and produce a formatted version for public release.

**Reasons for recommendations:**

- (1) The current EBC Housing Strategy, *Eastbourne at Home*, runs from 2013 to 2020. A new housing strategy is required.
- (2) There have been significant changes to the wider operating context and local housing market in recent years and the associated challenges facing the housing sector. These need to be addressed.
- (3) This new strategy provides a strategic overview, setting out clear outcomes, targets and plans to be delivered over the next five years. This will enable the Council to address the key challenges faced within the local housing market and to deliver our vision effectively.

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## 1 Background and housing challenges

1.1 Eastbourne is an attractive place to live and work. Despite recent economic challenges, the town has retained its status as a leading retail, education and conference destination. The town is home to 350 more businesses than ten years ago and a steady stream of housing developments have attracted new households, growing the population to over 103,000: an increase of almost 6 per cent. There remains a strong demand for new homes across the local area.

1.2 The majority of Eastbourne residents live in good quality homes and have access to a range of housing options when they need, or decide, to move. However, the town currently faces a series of key challenges, driven by national policy, regional influences and local factors, which have seen significant changes to the housing market take place in the past ten years. These have increased residents' reliance on the private rented sector to meet housing needs, driven rising levels of homeless applications and increased the pressure on the Council and local developers to produce more homes that will need to meet tougher environmental standards.

1.3 As a result, the updated housing strategy needs to address a number of specific challenges, including:

- **Meeting housing demand.** The latest assessment of housing need estimate that meeting demand requires building between 550 and 740 homes each year, but recognises that the supply of land presents a series of physical and environmental constraints to achieving this.
- **Rising housing costs.** Although house prices have dipped from their peak, the average price of a home in 2019 was £241,000, over eight times the local average full-time salary. Meanwhile average rents for all sizes of accommodation have risen significantly high and stand above the maximum levels that those receiving housing subsidies can claim.
- **A changing demographic.** As those with long term health condition live longer the type of accommodation and support needed to sustain their independence will change, whilst new family size homes is key to supporting economic activity in the town.
- **Private rented sector.** The private rented sector doubled in size in the ten years to 2011, when it housed 10,500 people, a quarter of all households in the town. This trend has continued and, as such, the Council now has a significant interest in helping shape a healthy private rented sector by promoting good quality housing management standards and taking steps to monitor and address poor housing standards.
- **Tackling poverty and inequality.** Eastbourne town is a place of contrast, containing neighbourhoods of affluence and significant levels of deprivation. Devonshire & Hampden Park wards contain four areas where Indices of Multiple Deprivation rank amongst the most deprived 10 per cent in the country<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source – Office of National Statistics - Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019.

- **Homelessness.** Heightened legislative duties, Universal Credit and frozen housing subsidies have reduced the supply of accessible rented homes for those on the lowest incomes, increasing evictions and levels of homelessness. Meanwhile, the scale of rough sleeping continues to present a challenge across the town.
- **Tougher environmental targets.** Meeting national and locally set targets will require working with our own teams, local developers and private owners to make a managed transition to new low carbon and water saving technologies that balances the costs and benefits involved.

## 2. Our plans

2.1 The current housing strategy, *Eastbourne at Home*, expires in 2020 and in light of the key challenges set out above we are establishing a new housing strategy to take us forward to 2024. This new document is a strategy for all residents of Eastbourne, regardless of tenure, as well as those facing the challenges of homelessness, changing housing needs, or simply moving into the local area. It sets out a vision to:

*‘Deliver and maintain affordable, high quality homes and promote access to housing options for home owners, residents of social housing and private renters alike. By working with partners to identify housing needs, deliver new homes and promote housing standards across local housing markets, we will help drive economic prosperity, sustain integrated communities and tackle the inequalities faced by many of our residents.’*

2.2 To deliver this vision effectively, the strategy sets out the goals and plans that our teams will seek out to deploy over the next five years, set out under five key themes which cover:

- Increasing the supply of new housing.
- Promoting quality housing that meets modern standards.
- Reducing homelessness.
- Effectively managing & maintaining Council homes.
- Promoting homes that sustain health & wellbeing.

Each theme contains an opening section that sets out the immediate context, goes on to review the ‘current position’ in relation to the local challenges and sets out our future plans. Each plan section is organised into clear objectives and goals and provides commentary on how these goals will be achieved. This commentary will help measure the success of delivering the strategy.

## 3. Outcome expected and performance management

3.1 The strategy needs to remain adaptable, particularly given the uncertain operating context presently facing the sector and local housing market. To keep the strategy responsive, the objectives set out at the end of each theme will be implemented through a series of associated action plans, policies and processes that can flex to meet the latest circumstances.

3.2 We have highlighted the goals that we intend to tackle more immediately and identified how and who is responsible for taking these forward. The remaining goals remain in place to guide the overall objectives of our approach, but will be reviewed in mid-2021 to check they remain relevant and fit for purpose in keeping our wider strategy on course.

#### **4. Consultation**

4.1 Following initial discussions to set key themes for the strategy with the Portfolio Lead, an initial draft of the strategy was developed drawing on desk top research and the engagement with key operational teams across the Council. Eastbourne Homes Limited Board was consulted at an early stage. A five week public consultation was launched on the Borough's website in January, with an accompanying questionnaire providing respondents with a ready means of providing feedback. This complied with A summary of the views received has been since been published on the website.

4.2 The consultation received a high level of response, with a total of 106 questionnaires completed online, including a number from teams at East Sussex County Council, local districts and boroughs, housing associations, voluntary sector agencies and groups representing residents with protected characteristics.

4.3 The response was broadly supportive of the strategy themes and identified the need to tackle high housing costs, homelessness and meeting the need for new homes in the borough as leading concerns. When asked to rank the most important issues within each of the themes, building more social housing, bringing empty homes back into use and keeping Council homes in a good state of repair were some of the leading things respondents were keen to see addressed. All these issues were addressed in the existing draft of the strategy.

4.4 An analysis of comments made by respondents identified other leading concerns as; the need to invest in transport and infrastructure alongside new homes; meeting the needs of those with mobility issues and other disabilities; and the need to support private sector tenants. Key elements of the plans have been revised to reflect these views, whilst other updates have been made to ensure that the strategy aligns with key initiatives that address the needs of young people, care leavers, children with complex disabilities and the new supported housing framework.

#### **5. Corporate plan and council policies**

5.1 Housing & Development is one of the key themes that shape the vision for Eastbourne set out in the 2020-2024 Corporate Plan. The five themes of the housing strategy has been drafted to align with the objectives and success measures that this themes contains and contribute to the wider plan objective of making Eastbourne a great place to visit, live and work..

5.2 A number of key (current and future) Council policies, plans and strategies will be aligned to help deliver the objectives and goals set out the housing strategy, including the Allocations Policy; Commercial Strategy; Homelessness Strategy; Housing Revenue Account Business Plan; and Local Plan. Work on the local

plan will take forward discussions with neighbouring local authorities, Wealden District in particular, about how *duty to co-operate* provisions can be used to boost Eastbourne's housing supply.

## **6. Business case**

- 6.1 There is no business case associated with the delivery of this strategy. Separate business cases will be developed as required, in order to deliver future projects and activity arising from the adoption of the associated plans, such as those relating to the provision of new homes, homelessness services, housing management, and environmental sustainability.

## **7. Financial appraisal**

- 7.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. Any financial implications arising from the priorities contained within this strategy will be reported to Members alongside the established budget monitoring and performance monitoring reports.

Successful implementation of the strategy will help:

- Improve our capacity to boost the supply of new homes, working with our partners to support viable and cost effective delivery that meets housing need and supports the local economy.
- Reduce the cost of addressing homelessness, by focussing on preventative measures to reduce demand and putting in place lower cost solutions to meet temporary housing needs.
- Ensure the most effective use of the resources we deploy to support the local housing market and improve the availability of housing options.
- Deliver better quality housing management and maintenance services that provide better value to residents, reduce costs and make the best use of available resources.
- Shape a more integrated approach to housing, health and wellbeing, providing homes and services that adequately meet changing needs of our customers and reduces the demand on public services.

*Finance consulted*

*Date/ref: 20/02/2020*

## **8. Legal implications**

- 8.1 Whilst there is no statutory requirement on the Council to adopt an over-arching housing strategy, it is good practice for all local housing authorities to do so. Adopting the updated housing strategy is an executive function and therefore within the decision-making remit of Cabinet.

*Lawyer consulted 20.02.20*

*Legal ref: 009009-EBC-OD*

## **9. Risk management implications**

- 9.1 The risk of not developing and implementing a clear housing strategy is that the organisation will lack a clear framework to help; address housing supply & demand, reduce homelessness, tackle poor quality housing standards, and the

effective management of Council owned housing stock. Having no clear strategy in place could have the impact of reducing the access that local residents have to quality housing, increasing the costs of management activities and a mean that the Council fails to take advantage of effective partnership working opportunities.

## **10. Equality analysis**

- 10.1 A high-level Equality Analysis has been completed. This identified broadly positive outcomes for protected groups, with a commitment to complete supplementary Equality Analyses for specific projects at an operational level. The analysis explores the needs and challenges of vulnerable groups including those facing or experiencing homelessness, people with disabilities and people living in rural locations. A copy of the analysis is available from the report author.

## **11. Environmental impact analysis**

- 11.1 The council is committed to delivering a net carbon zero Eastbourne by 2030. This strategy will contribute to achieving that objective by setting the context for the transition to low-carbon heating systems and reduce the environmental footprint of local homes. In doing so we it will frame a balanced approach which encourages adoptions across different tenues and enforces new regulations. The sections of the strategy covering new homes, supporting the private sector and managing our own Council stock, all contain outline commitments that will seek to; help owner occupiers and private landlords to access funding and high quality advice; enforce any new regulations to building standards through the planning system; and implement a balanced transition to low-carbon and water saving technologies in the newly built and refurbished Council owned homes.
- 11.2 Deployment of the strategy also presents a real opportunity to counter falls in the locally recognised levels of pollinating insects by adopting wildlife friendly gardening practices. Maintaining these commitments will help ensure that the action plans and policies used to help implement this strategy will work towards meeting agreed Council climate and bio-diversity targets.

## **12. Appendices**

- 12.1 The following appendices are attached to this report:
- Appendix 1 – Final draft of the EBC Housing Strategy 2020-24

## **13. Background papers**

- 13.1 The following background papers are associated with this report:
- At Home in Eastbourne: Eastbourne's Housing Strategy 2013-2020
  - Equality and Fairness Screening Document
  - Government consultation principles - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance>