



Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny

Meeting 5 September 2019

Report title	City Housing Strategy 2019 - 2024	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Peter Bilson City Assets and Housing	
Corporate Plan priority	Place - Stronger Economy	
Key decision	Y	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable Director	Kate Martin, City Assets and Housing	
Originating service		
Accountable employee	Mila Simpson Tel Email	Service Lead Housing Strategy 01902 554841 Mila.Simpson@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Housing Leadership Team	7 August 2019

Recommendation for decision:

The Panel is recommended to:

1. Endorse that the City Housing Strategy 2019 – 2024 is submitted to October 2019 Cabinet for adoption.

Recommendation for noting:

The Panel is recommended to:

2. Note the contents of the City Housing Strategy 2019 – 2024 and the key themes resulting from the consultation.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 A new City Housing Strategy 2019 – 2024 has been developed to reflect on emerging national and local priorities as well as to align the priorities for the delivery of housing and housing services for the next five years to the new Council Plan.
- 1.2 Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel are asked to consider and comment on a final draft of the housing strategy ahead of seeking adoption by Cabinet in October 2019.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The city's existing Housing Strategy, approved by Cabinet in 2013 achieved a number of successes in 'Improving the City Housing Offer', under the Council's Corporate Plan. A new City Housing Strategy 2019 – 2024, 'Better Homes for All' has been developed to set the framework for how the Council will address the challenges it will face in the coming years, giving direction to our partners and stakeholders involved in housing across all tenures (including residents, registered providers, private developers, government agencies, private landlords and voluntary and community groups), so that housing and housing services can be developed to provide the right homes and support where needed.
- 2.2 Whilst having a housing strategy is not a statutory requirement, having one is considered both best practice and necessary to set out how the Council, with partners, will address the housing challenges and opportunities that are facing the City and its residents.
- 2.3 The Council Plan 2019 – 2024 identifies three priorities for housing; more and better homes, safe and healthier homes and access to a secure home. The City Housing Strategy 2019-2024 sets out how these priorities will be achieved.

3.0 Developing the City Housing Strategy

- 3.1 The Housing Strategy, included at appendix 1 has been developed based on a detailed evidence base, a review of national and regional policy and guidance as well as feedback from stakeholders and members of the public.
- 3.2 Consultation on the strategy was undertaken across June and July 2019 and included detailed discussions with senior officers, presentation at Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny and Council Leadership Teams, attendance at a number of fora, a briefing note shared with all Councillors and an online survey for members of the public (also available in hard copy). In addition, the draft strategy was shared with a wide range of partners (including Registered Housing Provider partners, tenant management organisations and the Wolverhampton Equality and Diversity Partnership), who were encouraged to feedback their views. A summary of the key themes from the consultation is set out at appendix 2, which have been incorporated into the final version of the Strategy.
- 3.3 The final City Housing Strategy is a relatively concise document that clearly sets out the challenges and provides the guiding principles for action over the next five years to drive forward housing growth, investment and improvement. The strategy will be underpinned

by a detailed delivery plan that will be owned by the Better Homes Board. A housing partnership of stakeholders will be established to strengthen the delivery of the strategy, who will monitor its delivery and report this through to the Better Homes Board.

3.4 A summary of the three priorities are set out below:

3.5 **More and better homes**

3.6 This priority focuses on the City's drive to increase the pace and quantum of new homes delivered in the city to meet the needs of our communities and the growing number of households looking to work, study and settle here. This will be boosted by the great opportunity for the City to access resources and support for growth across the Walsall to Wolverhampton Corridor through the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), the establishment of the Councils local housing company, WV Living and the removal of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) borrowing cap with the Council delivering new affordable homes.

3.7 Ambitions to further grow the local economy will need to be supported by a wide-ranging, cross tenure housing offer, through the provision of affordable housing, good quality private rented accommodation as well as homes to attract higher income households, including a contribution to a revitalised City centre. To achieve this, work will be done to understand housing need to build the right homes in the right places, improve the financial viability of sites to ensure land that needs significant remediation can be brought forward for development and contribute to an improved infrastructure by making use of innovative methods and materials. Development also has a role in inclusive growth using local suppliers and the creation and provision of jobs and training opportunities.

3.8 **Safe and healthier homes**

3.9 Aligned to the Social Housing Green Paper, 'a new deal for social housing', this priority is concerned with achieving high quality management and maintenance of housing, and strengthening the tenant voice, particularly for the growing number of people renting in the City, whether from the Council and managed by Wolverhampton Homes or the tenant management organisations (TMO), from a housing association or those renting in the growing private rented sector. This will include a programme of work to ensure the ongoing safety of the City's high-rise stock under Council and private ownership and ongoing responses to the rolling national programme of building safety.

3.10 The City is committed to a programme of redevelopment to ensure communities across the city live in quality neighbourhoods. Large scale stock investment and remodelling of a small number of estates, including the completion of works at Heath Town will be complimented with a programme of neighbourhood uplift, working with communities to improve the quality of local environments.

3.11 Conditions in the private rented sector continues to be a challenge at the lower end of the market. There remain challenges with the incidence of category one hazards, concentrations of poor quality/managed housing and a growing number of houses in

multiple occupation (HMO), which will be tackled through the Council's landlord and property accreditation scheme 'Rent with Confidence', underpinned by a programme of support, licensing and enforcement.

- 3.12 Rented homes will have access to a new cross tenure Home Improvement Agency, as too will vulnerable owner occupiers, which will bring together a range of support, grants and loans to improve the adaptation, condition and energy efficiency of homes so that people can live independently and improve their health outcomes.
- 3.13 Maximising the use of the City's housing stock with a targeted programme to bring empty properties back into use is also a priority.
- 3.14 **Access to a secure home**
- 3.15 This priority focuses on the City's commitment to those residents that need additional support in accessing and sustaining secure accommodation, with the City supporting residents to maintain their independence within their homes, wherever possible.
- 3.16 Local drivers include an ageing population with growth in the over 65 age group outstripping others, who need the right housing and housing services that enable them to remain independent for as long as possible but appropriate accommodation available when it is required. This not only applies to older people but those residents with additional support needs, which by working with social care will be better understood so that people can access a secure home and sustain living there, including those with a visible or non-visible disability as well as those requiring additional support for example those at risk of or experiencing domestic abuse
- 3.17 Nationally the Homelessness Reduction Act introduced in 2018, increases council's responsibilities to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage than before, whilst Welfare Reforms continue to present challenges for residents and landlords. The City will continue to work innovatively to develop measures across partners at a regional and local level to prevent homelessness and reduce rough sleeping, with the City already having adopted a 'Housing First' approach.

4.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 4.1 To recommend the adoption of the City Housing Strategy by Cabinet following any final comments/amendments, enabling the focus to move on to supporting and monitoring delivery.
- 4.2 Not to adopt the City Housing Strategy and to carry on with business as usual operating outside of any overarching strategic framework for housing. This would miss out on opportunities to align work across partners operating within the City to achieve shared aims and maximise resources, which could lead to a duplication of effort or partners working in conflict with each other.

5.0 Reasons for decision(s):

- 5.1 It is recommended that the City Housing Strategy is endorsed for adoption as it has been developed based upon a comprehensive review of evidence and consideration of the national and local context, achievements and progress of the 2013-2018 Housing Strategy and consultation with stakeholders. Adoption of the strategy will allow resources to be spent on strengthening the housing partnership in the City and focussing on delivery.

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 This report has no direct financial implications.
- 6.2 The Housing Strategy refers to matters which are already reflected in approved budgets, and where additional resources are required to deliver the housing priorities set out in the Strategy, the financial implications of these will be evaluated and reported once plans have been developed.

[LT/27082019/Z]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 There is no legal requirement to have a Housing Strategy as the Deregulation Act 2015 abolished the statutory requirement for English authorities to produce a housing strategy as previously required by section 87 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 7.2 It does, however serve as a useful policy document setting out the Council's approach to housing and allows Councillors to scrutinise delivery. There are no other legal implications.
- 7.3 DC/20082019/M

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 An equalities impact assessment has been undertaken based on consultation, with the Housing Strategy addressing issues identified. The equality impact analysis is being reported to the Equality Advisory Group in September.

9.0 Environmental implications

- 9.1 The City Housing Strategy does not have any direct environmental impacts, however the actions it proposes serve to raise the quality of environments across the City through the delivery of new housing, improvement of existing housing and regeneration of estates. The environmental impacts associated with specific projects and work programmes will be identified and addressed in the relevant project documentation and/or reports brought forward for approval.

10.0 Human resources implications

- 10.1 This report has no direct human resource implications with the delivery and monitoring of the City Housing Strategy to be carried out by the Housing Strategy and Policy Team.

11.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 11.1 This report has no direct Corporate Landlord implications. Where implications are identified associated with specific projects and work programmes they will be addressed in the relevant project documentation and/or reports brought forward for approval.

12.0 Schedule of background papers

- 12.1 Report to 11 April 2019 Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel on the Development of a City Housing Strategy.

13.0 Appendices

- 13.1 Appendix 1 – Final Draft City Housing Strategy 2019 - 2024
- 13.2 Appendix 2 – Key themes for City Housing Strategy Consultation