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Supplementary information for Scrutiny Board (Housing and Regeneration) on 9 December 2014

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Advisory Board

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Scrutiny Board (Housing and Regeneration)

25 November 2014

Draft Housing Strategy

Draft comments to Housing Advisory Board

Members of the Scrutiny Board (Housing and Regeneration) considered the draft Housing Strategy proposals through a working group meeting on 25 November 2014. The Scrutiny Board makes the following comments and proposals for consideration in finalising the strategy to be presented to the Housing Advisory Board in February prior to formal adoption by the council.

General

- Members supported the overall direction of the draft strategy.
- They also welcomed confirmation that the current draft would be proof read and edited to give a more consistent presentation throughout the document, before the strategy is finalised.

Specific comments

Priority 1 – Affordable housing growth

- Members queried the inclusion of a specific annual affordable housing target, which appeared to be based on dividing the overall target for the core strategy period by the number of years the strategy covers. It was felt that this was potentially over simplistic and could lead house builders to try to make arguments for use of greenfield sites. **The Board recommends that any target for affordable housing be expressed over the life of the plan and not annually.**
- Members noted that the overview referred to Housing Market Assessments informing tenure mix. Members advised that there should be careful consideration of Housing Market Assessments produced externally to the council, to ensure a sound evidence base to back up the Assessment. **Members recommended that, if the reference is intended to be specifically about Council produced or commissioned assessments, this should be made clear.**
- It was suggested that it may be helpful to include some indicative house building costs in the document.

Priority 2 – Improving housing conditions

- It was suggested that the section on energy efficiency should clarify that there will be target areas and categories of housing. Members supported the policy of targeting the majority of funding where the most significant improvements could be achieved for the greatest number of homes for the best value for money.
- Members agreed that a clear definition of fuel poverty was an important feature for this section, as many people might not realise that they fell into this category.

- The working group welcomed the use of incentives and encouragement to return empty properties to occupation.
- Members highlighted the ongoing work of the student accommodation working group in relation to concerns about surplus student housing.

Priority 3 – Enabling independent living

- Members generally supported the activity outlined in this section and the proposed actions and targets to make best use of available resources. In particular they noted the closer working between housing and both Children’s Services, Adult Social Care and Health to identify where addressing housing issues could provide the most appropriate and cost effective way of addressing assessed needs.

Priority 4 – Improving health through housing

- Some concern was expressed about the impact of council tenants with drug and alcohol dependencies on those living around them. Some members felt that areas without local lettings policies were susceptible to see more of these tenants allocated property, leading to potential disruption within their communities. The working group discussed the availability of appropriate support services for tenants and the proposed introduction of ‘intelligent lettings’, with a view to promoting more sustainable communities. **Members recommended that these issues be addressed under Priority 5 of the strategy – creating sustainable communities – which is still in development.**

Priority 5 – Creating sustainable communities

- **Members recommended that children’s play space and physical activity levels are addressed under this section of the strategy**