



Report of the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods

Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods)

Date: 9th February 2009

Subject: Updated Housing Strategy

Electoral Wards Affected:

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In
(Details contained in the report)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Leeds Housing Partnership Executive decided in 2008 to review and update the existing Leeds Housing Strategy to ensure that it better reflected current housing challenges and wider strategic priorities. The strategy will be framed around the strategic vision: 'Creating opportunities for people to live independently in quality, affordable housing'. The strategy will have three key themes:

Increasing the supply of affordable housing

Improving housing quality

Promoting independent living

The draft of the strategy will be presented to Scrutiny Board during April 2009 and the final strategy draft will be presented to the Council's Executive Board in July 2009.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To give Scrutiny Board members an overview of the emerging Leeds Housing Strategy with particular focus on issues relating to older people's housing.

2. Background

- 2.1. The Leeds Housing Partnership is a multi-agency/partner body, affiliated to the Leeds Initiative that drives and oversees housing development and delivery in the city. The Partnership is responsible for the monitoring and review of the Leeds Housing Strategy. In 2008, the Leeds Housing Partnership Executive decided to review and update the existing Leeds Housing Strategy, to ensure that it better reflected current housing challenges and wider strategic priorities.
- 2.2. The updated Leeds Housing Strategy will need to respond to the housing affordability challenge in the city. The 2007 Housing Market Assessment identified that there was a need for 1889 affordable housing units to be developed on an annual basis to meet housing need. It was also identified that a household would need an annual income of £37,000 in order to purchase a starter level property in the city. The affordability challenge, whilst significant, had emerged during a period of economic buoyancy for the city and conformed to standard economic principles: demand for housing exceeded supply, precipitating price rises that were higher than wage inflation. Households have been assisted to secure affordable housing through an increase in housing supply and innovative home purchase initiatives. However, the recent economic downturn has exacerbated the affordability challenge. Mortgage lending practices have become more restrictive and prospective house buyers have been deterred from purchasing through uncertainty over employment status and falling house prices. This in turn is deterring developers from continuing and starting house building. The Council and partners will need to be flexible and innovative to respond to the evolving challenges.
- 2.3. The focus of the Leeds Housing Partnership is also shifting from meeting the decency standard towards the wider challenge of improving housing quality and sustainability. The Council and the Leeds ALMOs see the attainment of the decency standard for council housing as being an important milestone, rather than an end in itself. Longer-term investment options will need to be explored between the Council, ALMOs and tenants. The Council is also aware of the significance of the private sector housing challenge: 33% (over 81,000 properties) of private properties fail the decency standard with 13% (34,000) having one or more Category 1 hazards. The scale of the challenge is even more pronounced with regard to back-to-back housing, with 75% of the 19,500 units failing the decency standard and 45% having one or more Category 1 hazard. The 40% increase in energy prices has meant that the proportion of the Leeds population who are experiencing fuel poverty (more than 10% of household income spent on energy costs) has risen from 19 to 24%.
- 2.4. Enabling vulnerable people to achieve or maintain an independent living arrangement is a key housing, health and social care challenge. Services such as housing-related support, adaptations and assistive technology all contribute to promoting independent living and will particularly assist older people to remain in their own homes. Modernising housing provision for older people and people with learning disabilities will promote independent living and enable vulnerable people to exercise greater choice and control over their lives. Providing personalised services that maximise prevention opportunities will also contribute to objectives relating not only to reducing

homelessness and temporary accommodation placements but also the need for placements into residential care.

2.5. The Leeds Housing Strategy will also reflect the strategic themes, outcomes and improvement priorities set out within the Leeds Strategic Plan. The links between housing services and the 'Thriving Places' strategic theme are clear, with strategic outcomes relating to increasing the supply of affordable housing, improving housing decency and reducing homelessness. The Leeds Housing Strategy will give equal precedence to the 'Health and Wellbeing' strategic theme, recognising the contribution housing and housing services make towards health outcomes. For example, reducing dependency on residential and day care services, preventing hospital admissions, tackling the link between poor thermal comfort and reduced health outcomes. The strategy will seek to contribute to joint working between the council and health and compliment the outcomes identified which aim to improve older people's health and well being.

2.6. The updated strategy will include a strategic vision, themes and goals. The latter will include a series of actions and accompanying success measures. This will form the basis of the strategy action plan, which will be monitored and reviewed through the Leeds Housing Partnership.

3. Main Issues

3.1. The Leeds Housing Strategy will be framed around a strategic vision: 'Creating opportunities for people to live independently in quality, affordable housing'. Three strategic themes seem to flow from this vision:

3.1.1. Increasing the supply of affordable housing

3.1.2. Improving housing quality

3.1.3. Promoting independent living

3.2. The 'Increasing the supply of affordable housing' theme includes the following strategic goals:

3.2.1. Help people become and remain home-owners

3.2.2. Increase the supply of rented housing

3.2.3. Make best use of existing housing stock

3.2.4. Improve the mix of available housing options

3.2.5. Increase the supply of accessible housing including 'Lifetime Homes'

3.3.

The theme around increasing the supply of affordable housing has been affected by the economic downturn. Historically, affordable housing has been generated through wider housing development: Section 106 planning gain and mixed tenure development. The downturn in house building activity will have an impact on affordable housing secured through such routes. The Council is looking to generate affordable housing by encouraging local housing associations to purchase empty new build housing, partly through the receipt of Homes and Communities Agency

funding. Such properties would be let on a social or intermediate rental charge and could be offered to key workers as a 'rent now buy later' option. Greater emphasis is being placed on helping existing homeowners to remain in their homes and the Golden Triangle 'Home Buy Plus' initiative is being reconfigured around a Mortgage Rescue model. Additionally a stronger emphasis is being given to working with the private housing sector to increase supply and improve quality. The need to develop more family sized housing remains pressing, as does the need to develop more accessible housing, so people can continue to live comfortably, even when their health conditions change. All housing developed through the Affordable Housing Strategic Partnership conforms to the 'Lifetime Homes' standard. The Council's plans to modernise sheltered housing provision are framed around the concept of accessible homes in accessible neighbourhoods.

3.4. The 'Improving housing quality' theme includes the following strategic goals:

- 3.4.1. Bring social housing stock up to the decency standard
- 3.4.2. Identify investment options for council housing
- 3.4.3. Increase the number of private homes meeting the decency standard
- 3.4.4. Improve the long-term sustainability of housing stock
- 3.4.5. Improve the standard of temporary accommodation
- 3.4.6. Contribute to improving and developing deprived neighbourhoods

3.5. The Council and the Leeds ALMOs are committed to bringing all council owned housing up to the decency standard by 2010/11. The Council very much considers attaining the decency standard as an important milestone, rather than an end in itself. The Council and the Leeds ALMOs are exploring options for maintaining and enhancing the level of investment in council housing post-2011. The Council is also exploring options for securing investment to tackle the private sector housing challenge. Just under 70% of older people live in the private sector and therefore success in this area will significantly impact on the lives of older people in the city. The government's economic stimulus package may well result in the Council being able to bid for additional funding. The Council has also noted the precedent of Liverpool where the local NHS Trust is investing £9 million in improving private sector housing quality.

3.6. The 'Promoting Independent Living' theme includes the following strategic goals:

- 3.6.1. Enable people to find their own housing solutions through quality information and enhanced housing options
- 3.6.2. Use support, adaptations and technology to promote independent living
- 3.6.3. Maximise opportunities to prevent homelessness
- 3.6.4. Reduce use of temporary accommodation and incidence of rough sleeping
- 3.6.5. Modernise housing provision for vulnerable people

3.6.6. Contribute to promoting community cohesion, reducing worklessness and tackling anti-social behaviour

3.7. Maximising opportunities for vulnerable people to live independently and to exercise choice and control over their lives is a key priority for the updated housing strategy. Services such as housing-related support, adaptations and assistive technology, Telecare, play an important role in reducing dependency on residential and day care services and preventing hospital admissions. The strategy will seek to highlight the 'invest to save' benefits of housing services on wider health and social care priorities. Housing advice and homeless assessment services are being reconfigured around a Housing Solutions model. The aim is to provide personalised services that maximise prevention opportunities and give people a wider range of housing options, so that they are able to find their own solution to a housing need. The Council is also committed to modernising housing provision for vulnerable groups, such as people with learning disabilities and older people, where current accommodation provision is outmoded and does not promote independent living outcomes.

4. Implications for Council Policy and Governance

4.1. The updated Housing Strategy will set out the key challenges and actions of the housing authority and partners over the next three years. The updated housing strategy will be presented to the Council's Executive Board in July 2009.

5. Legal and Resource Implications

5.1. The updated housing strategy will set out the investment requirements relating to the housing challenges facing the city. There is no legal obligation on the part of the Council to develop a housing strategy for the city. The updated housing strategy will have regard for all relevant legal duties relating to the authority.

6. Equality Considerations

6.1. The updated housing strategy will be subject to an Equality, Diversity and Community Cohesion Impact Assessment, to ensure that it effectively covers housing challenges relating to the six equality strands.

7. Conclusions

7.1. The updated housing strategy will set out the key housing challenges for the city and the actions that will be taken to address these challenges including those relating to housing for older people. The Council and partners recognise that housing is a dynamic service area, and the Council and partners will need to be flexible to respond to evolving challenges. The Leeds Housing Partnership will monitor the strategy action plan on an ongoing basis.

8. Recommendation

8.1. To note the contents of the report.