

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 18 December 2008

REPORT FROM: Strategic Director Health and Community

SUBJECT: Housing Strategy 2008/11

WARDS: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek the Executive Board's approval of the draft Housing Strategy 2008/11 (attached as Appendix A).

2.0 RECOMMENDED: that the Executive Board approves the Housing Strategy 2008 to 2011.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The statutory guidance "Creating Strong and Prosperous Communities", published by Government in July 2008, encourages local authorities to take full and proper account of housing as part of the strategic vision for the area and puts greater emphasis on housing's contribution to creating sustainable communities through a local authority's Sustainable Community Strategy.
- 3.2 The guidance gives local authorities greater discretion about how, when and in what format they document their housing strategy representing a move away from the more prescriptive "fit for purpose" criteria against which strategies were previously assessed. Whatever format is chosen, strategies are expected to:
- fully reflect the wider vision of the authority and its partners;
 - reflect a clear and evidenced approach, and;
 - provide a strong focus on how partners will deliver their commitments.
- 3.3 The draft Housing Strategy attached at Appendix A has been the subject of consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including local Registered Social Landlords, relevant Council departments, voluntary organisations, estate agents and Government Office for the North West (GO-NW). The document has also been posted on the Council's website inviting comments from members of the public. In addition the Strategy was presented to the Local Strategic Partnership Board in May 2008, and the Urban Renewal PPB in November 2008.

3.4 Of particular importance was the feedback received from GO-NW, which gave advanced warning of emerging guidance, specifically the need to demonstrate how the Housing Strategy will deliver on the priorities contained within the Sustainable Community Strategy. The priorities within the revised Housing Strategy have consequently been re-organised to mirror those of the Community Strategy to clearly illustrate the strategic alignment between the two documents.

Housing Strategy Objectives

3.5 The objectives listed below have been developed to meet housing needs as evidenced by the Halton Housing Needs Survey 2006, to meet specific Government targets such as the Decent Homes Standard and the introduction of Choice Based Lettings, and to reflect emerging Government priorities such as the housing/worklessness agenda, reducing overcrowding, and increasing knowledge and understanding of local housing markets.

3.5.1 Priority 1 – A Healthy Halton

- Achieve a year on year reduction in the proportion of non decent private sector homes occupied by vulnerable households
- Improve conditions in the private rented sector
- Increase the number of people on income based benefits who live in energy efficient homes (NI 187)
- Improve the provision of supported housing for an ageing population
- Improve equality of access to housing adaptations

3.5.2 Priority 2 – Halton's Urban Renewal

- Monitor progress towards delivery of the decent homes target in the social rented sector
- Ensure plans are in place to meet Decent Homes Plus (subject to an agreed standard being introduced by Government)
- Increase the supply of affordable housing in the Borough in line with the recommendations of the Housing Needs Survey
- Introduce Choice Based lettings by 2010
- Update data on condition of the private sector stock
- Complete the regeneration of the Castlefields estate
- Commission consultants to undertake research to establish and prioritise the regeneration needs of New Town estates
- Work in partnership with local authority partners to improve the housing offer in the Liverpool City Region

3.5.3 Priority 3 – Children and Young People

- Complete the review of the Homelessness Strategy
- Reduce the level of overcrowding within social rented housing

3.5.4 Priority 4 – Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

- Maximise the employment related benefits of physical improvements/refurbishment works
- Expand programme of housing construction/improvement training activity
- Deliver increased employment outreach activity with RSLs through JobCentre Plus and Halton People into Jobs

3.5.5 Priority 5 – A Safer Halton

- Work with housing providers to reduce the incidence and perceptions of Anti Social Behaviour
 - Conduct research into long term vacant dwellings in Halton with a view to participating in the development of a sub regional Empty Homes Strategy
- 3.6 Although it is intended that the Strategy remain valid through to 2011, the pace of change in the housing market and the economy at present is such that it may prove necessary to review the document earlier.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Housing Strategy will set the context for future policy development relating to housing and will have a significant influence on related policies e.g. Planning and Supporting People policies.

5.0 FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The financial implications are outlined in the Action Plan on page 51 of the Strategy.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 6.1 Delivery of the Strategy will require the support of the Homes and Communities Agency, the new organisation formed from the merger of the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships that becomes operational this month. At this stage the policy and investment priorities of the new organisation are unknown, but Halton will seek to raise its profile through early discussions.
- 6.2 In recent years the Council's housing capital programme has benefited from some capital growth funded from Council resources. The prevailing economic climate and housing market downturn could impact on the ability of the Council to maintain such support, which may delay the achievement of some targets.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

7.1 Children and Young People in Halton

The Housing Strategy aims to increase the supply of affordable housing, reduce overcrowding and improve housing conditions which will have a beneficial impact on families with children and improve access to housing for young people.

7.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

The Strategy aims to maximise the role of housing investment in reducing worklessness in deprived communities.

7.3 A Healthy Halton

The Housing Strategy aims to improve the quality of housing in the Borough and improve access to adaptations, which will have a positive impact on the health of residents, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

7.4 A Safer Halton

The Strategy aims to reduce the incidence of Anti Social Behaviour on social housing estates by working with RSL partners to implement the Respect agenda.

7.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

The Strategy aims to improve the quality of housing, which will contribute to the regeneration of the Borough.

8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

8.1 None