

**JOINT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY TRANSITION – HOUSING TASK GROUP
12TH MARCH 2009**

INTERIM HOUSING RENEWAL STRATEGY (SUMMARY)

1. Purpose of the Report

To provide the task group with an opportunity to note the progress made in agreeing an interim housing renewal strategy for the council. Copies of the full strategy are available from the task group's support officer.

Introduction

With effect from 1 April 2009 the local government structure in Wiltshire will be reorganised from five councils into one Wiltshire Council. This is an interim Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy and Policy document designed to allow the new council to continue to fulfil one of its key housing roles during its first year of operation. A new Wiltshire strategy and policy will be developed that fully meets local and national priorities. Key actions from this strategy will be reflected in the overarching Housing Strategy for Wiltshire Council due to be published in 2010.

The Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy primarily deals with providing support and assistance to ensure that the private sector stock is kept in good condition and meets the needs of occupants.

Issues that are relevant to the development of the strategy are:

- National, regional and local priorities
- Housing need
- Character and condition of Wiltshire's housing stock
- Legal requirements
- Available funding

National, Regional and Local Priorities**Building Sustainable Communities**

In February 2003 the Government launched its Sustainable Communities Plan, a comprehensive programme to improve people's homes, neighbourhoods and quality of life. The plan set out a vision to meet housing

need in sustainable communities. The Council is committed to building sustainable communities and achieving a balance between economic, social and environmental objectives through community planning and the Community Strategy, the Community Safety Strategy, the Regeneration Strategy, the emerging Local Plan and the Housing Strategy, which has been assessed as fit for purpose.

Housing Act 2004

Providing decent homes for vulnerable people

Following the Housing Green Paper 2000, the main essence of the Government's Housing Policy Statement, "Quality and Choice" was to ensure a decent home for all. The criteria for a Decent Home is:

- That it meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing,
- It is in a reasonable state of repair,
- It has reasonably modern facilities and services and
- It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

In 2000 the Government set a target that all social housing should reach the decent homes target by 2010. In 2003 it extended the target to include vulnerable households in the Private Sector. The target set was that 70% of vulnerable households should live in Decent Homes by 2010.

Vulnerable households have been defined as those in receipt of at least one of the principal means tested or disability related benefits.

The Council is committed to these objectives and works closely with partners in social housing, and planning and building control, to ensure that this target will be met.

Strategy for Wiltshire 2007-2016

The Wiltshire Strategic Board produced a "Sustainable Community Strategy for Wiltshire". The Wiltshire Strategic Board is the County's Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and this plan is the Community Strategy.

It highlights a number of changes to the area including:

- Migration, partly from London and the south East but also from EU states, particularly from Poland.
- An increase in the number of single person households

Action related to Housing include

- Increasing the uptake of energy efficiency measures
- Increasing access to affordable homes

The Local Agreement for Wiltshire (LAW) is an agreement between organisations in Wiltshire to take action over the next three years to improve the quality of life in Wiltshire. Included within the LAW is the Local Area Agreement (LAA) - 35 performance targets that Wiltshire organisations have agreed with government.

The key national indicators (NI) linking in with private sector housing are:

Stronger communities

- NI 12 Refused and deferred Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) license applications leading to immigration enforcement activity

Adult health and wellbeing

- NI 136 People supported to live independently through social services (all ages)

Tackling exclusion and promoting equality

- NI 141 Number of vulnerable people achieving independent living
- NI 142 Number of vulnerable people who are supported to maintain independent living

Environmental sustainability

- NI 186 Per capita CO₂ emissions in the LA area
- NI 187 Tackling fuel poverty – people receiving income based benefits living in homes with a low energy efficiency rating

Supporting People Strategy

Supporting People is a partnership between Wiltshire Council the Primary Care Trust, and the Probation Service.

The 5-year Strategy was recently submitted to the ODPM, following approval by the Partnership Board. It sets out 5 strategic priorities for housing related support services in the county. These are:

- Enabling people to live independently and in their chosen home setting for as long as possible.
- Using floating support instead of accommodation based services to break the automatic link between a tenancy and support and provide as much flexibility and choice as possible.
- Linking with our partners and other agencies to provide housing related support packages as part of integrated services.

- Provide preventative housing related support services to minimise crises such as hospitalisation, institutional care, homelessness, social exclusion and re-offending.
- Work with housing authorities, housing providers and voluntary agencies to ensure vulnerable people are supported to access housing advice and suitable accessible housing of their choice.

South West Housing Body

The South West Housing Body (SWHB) sets housing in the wider strategic context of planning and economic growth. It identifies the priorities for housing in the region and makes recommendations to Ministers on the allocation of capital investment.

The SWHB has produced a Regional Housing Strategy 2005 – 2016 which sets out three strategic aims and a number of actions to take these forward. The strategic aims are:

- Improving the balance of housing markets in the region to tackle issues of housing affordability, homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation
- Improving the environmental quality and design of new developments and improving the quality of existing homes.
- Supporting sustainable communities ensuring housing policies promote social inclusion, and mixed and balanced communities.

A workstream, led by Government of the South West, has been established to take forward the actions in the strategy relating to improving the use and quality of existing housing stock.

The Regional Housing Strategy also provides an investment framework for use of the Regional Housing Pot; the South West region has been provisionally allocated £27million for 2009/2010. An element of this is for Private Sector Renewal and is allocated to local authorities, through a bidding process, with the aim of improving the condition of private sector housing stock. Local authorities use the grant for a range of measures. Details of Wiltshire County's bid to the Regional Housing Board for 2009/2010 can be found in Appendix 5.

Strategic Aims

The aims of the four district councils' housing strategies are as follows:

- To work in partnership across the housing market to deliver more affordable homes
- To improve the quality and energy efficiency of all existing housing including meeting the Government's decent homes targets
- To deal effectively with homelessness as it arises and to provide the support needed by families and single people to avoid them becoming homeless again
- To seek a sustainable solution to the future management and maintenance of Salisbury's council housing in partnership with its tenants
- To enhance the social, economic and environmental context of housing through developing communities, tackling crime and contributing to urban regeneration

The aims of this Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy are as follows:

- To increase the number of privately owned homes that are decent and occupied by vulnerable groups by removing category 1 hazards
- To improve the levels of energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty in the private sector
- To ensure that the private rented sector makes a contribution to meeting housing needs by working with landlords to ensure homes are decent and energy efficient
- To ensure that all rented properties, including houses in multiple occupation, meet all the relevant statutory standards for health and safety and management, and that such standards are maintained
- To look for ways to utilise the county's empty properties to meet housing need
- To ensure that disabled residents are able to live independently in homes that meet their needs
- To investigate ways in which the council can support and raise standards for those living in mobile homes.