



Report to: Cabinet, 21st March 2017

Report of: Councillor Roger Berry, Cabinet Member for Housing and Heritage

Subject: NEW WORCESTERSHIRE STRATEGIC HOUSING PARTNERSHIP PLAN

1. Recommendation

1.1 That the Cabinet note, prior to consideration by Council, the new Worcestershire Housing Partnership Plan, which is an overarching partnership document setting the strategic direction for housing. If approved, the Plan will take effect from the 1 April 2017, replacing the housing and homelessness strategies in their current format.

2. Background

2.1 As part of their strategic leadership, local authorities need to address the housing needs of all residents across all housing tenures through strategic housing activity. The local authority housing role supports the creation of the right home environment which can improve health and wellbeing, educational achievement of children and young people, employment, crime reduction and sustainable, resilient communities. The Plan will support the delivery of Theme 1, 2, 3 and 5 from the Worcester City Plan 2016 - 21 by "creating the right home environment for Worcestershire residents that is essential to their health, wealth and wellbeing, throughout life".

2.2 To inform the strategic direction of the Housing Services, the following formally agreed strategies set out the previous housing priorities and actions for all six Worcestershire local authorities:-

- Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy 2012-2017 – many of the goals are complete, but this has been more difficult to deliver due to the range of budget cuts impacting on housing related support services.
- Worcestershire Housing Strategy 2010-2015– action plan and goals complete.

2.3 An up to date Homelessness Strategy is a statutory requirement as set out in the Homelessness Act 2002. The strategy is used for "preventing homelessness in each local authority area and securing sufficient accommodation and support for people who are "homeless" or threatened with becoming homeless". In formulating the homelessness strategy "the authority must work in partnership with relevant statutory, voluntary and other appropriate partners.

The Local Authority no longer has a statutory duty to formulate a housing strategy but it continues to have a statutory role in understanding the housing need and creating a balanced community which cannot be achieved without a robust partnership plan in place to do this.

2.4 In recent years there has been a concerted push by central government to join up health and care provision and to promote individuals wellbeing (Care Act 2014, NHS 5 Year Forward Plan, Better Care Fund). Nationally the role housing can play in

improving health and wellbeing is seen as important and housing services / providers are recognised as a partner.

- 2.5 The current strategic housing work across organisations is supported through the Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership (WSHP) which is attended by a range of agencies including Health, CRC (Probation), Homes and Communities Agency and Registered Social Landlords. This group aims to ensure that a wide range of high quality housing and related services are available across all sectors of the housing market, which is secure, affordable, of a high standard and meets varying and changing needs and aspirations.
- 2.6 In 2015 the WSHP adopted a new local Memorandum of Understanding (**Appendix 1**, page 7) which sets out how these organisations will work together to achieve shared priorities.
- 2.7 The WSHP agreed to develop a combined plan setting the strategic direction for housing that incorporated the statutory requirements of the Homelessness Strategy.

3. Preferred Option

- 3.1 The Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership agreed to develop a Worcestershire Housing Partnership Plan (Plan) – attached as **Appendix 1**. This is an overarching document setting the strategic direction for housing and extends on the partnership working achieved through the Housing and Homelessness Strategies. The Plan is high level and contains long term priorities that are directional and fundamental to achieving the vision and as such they will remain the same for a number of years. A number of high level actions have been determined which set out how partners will deliver on the priorities identified within the Plan (**Appendix 2**, p5 & 6). More detailed project plans will be developed by the Partnership to deliver on the actions, adding value and targeting gaps, whilst recognising that customer needs will continue to be addressed within a range of other plans and strategies. The Homelessness Action Plan is attached at (**Appendix 2**). This is the first of the more detailed plans to be developed and has been put in to place as a 12 month interim plan covering the transitional period whilst the Homelessness Reduction Plan is enacted.
- 3.2 The Homelessness Reduction Bill is on track to become law in Spring 2017, with enactment commencing in Autumn 2017 and with different clauses being introduced over a 12 – 18 month period. The Bill is made up of 13 clauses and will require a fundamental change to the way homeless teams currently deliver services. It introduces requirements for local housing authorities to carry out homelessness prevention work with all those who are eligible for help and threatened with homelessness. The Bill changes the point at which a person is classed as being threatened with homelessness from 28 days before a person is likely to be homeless, to 56 days. It also makes changes to the way local housing authorities assess the point at which a person becomes homeless or threatened with homelessness. The Bill requires local housing authorities to carry out an assessment of the applicant's needs, and that the steps agreed between the local housing authority and the applicant are set out in writing – in the form of a personalised plan. A new duty is placed on local housing authorities to take steps for 56 days to relieve homelessness by helping any eligible homeless applicant to secure accommodation. A new duty is introduced which will be owed to certain applicants who deliberately and unreasonably refuse to co-operate with local housing authorities. The Bill specifies that local agencies should refer those who are either homeless or at risk of

being homeless to local housing authority housing teams. Provision is also made for certain care leavers, to make it easier for them to show they have a local connection with both the area of the local authority responsible for them and the area in which they lived while in care if that was different.

- 3.3 The Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership Plan is a well formulated and informed document which has been developed through extensive consultation with key partners and customers, including a 10 week public consultation period which ended on 31 December 2016.
- 3.4 There were 35 stakeholder consultation responses in total, some of these were joint responses. Fundamentally the document is unchanged and, below is a summary of the key document amendments.
- The Plan has been separated into two parts. The core is 6 pages and it then has links to the detail. The document was changed as it was felt by some to be too long. Also, there was feedback that there were areas which were not covered. In many cases this was already in the document, but we think that it may have been hidden in the detail.
 - There was more than one comment that the document contained too many aims, outcomes, high level actions etc. The aims were taken from the MoU and incorporated into the draft plan. These have now been removed and can be found at section 1 of the document or accessed via the link on Page 1.
 - Some of the responses received were considered to be important but will be used to inform the detailed actions at the later stage in the process.
 - Wording of the vision has been amended to make it more of a vision than a statement.
 - The actions remain the same. We received very few comments on the actions and many of the comments received will inform the detailed actions.
 - Generally, wording was amended where required, definitions added and data clarified.
- 3.5 The amended Plan is now a concise easily readable document with a vision "to create the *right* home environment for Worcestershire residents that is essential to their health, wealth and wellbeing, throughout life". This vision is supported by the following three key priorities:-
- Drive the growth of the right type of homes (to promote opportunity)
 - Improve homes and, "transform places"
 - Create a partnership approach to enable people to live as independently as possible (prevention/early intervention)
- 3.6 The document has been developed in partnership and the actions will be delivered in partnership. The plan is currently being taken through the formal decision processes of each of the other local authorities and this will be completed ready for the commencement of the Plan on the 1st April 2017. It also understands that a range of different organisations will already be delivering key housing related actions and it aims to recognise these actions ensuring that we can work together where it will be beneficial. It is planned for the document to continue to evolve ensuring that it continues to deliver for the Council and its partners.

4. Alternative Options Considered

4.1 Although there isn't a statutory requirement to have a Housing Strategy, it was felt by the Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership that this is a sufficiently important topic that a strategic document is required. The current economic situation, changes in the welfare system and the current housing crisis all require a response and defined actions for all the Worcestershire local authorities and its partners. Therefore the option to have no Housing Strategy was discarded. It was also agreed to meet the statutory requirements of the Homelessness Strategy within a combined document.

5. Implications

- 5.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications: The actions from the Plan will be delivered within existing staff resources.
- 5.2 Legal and Governance Implications: Under the Homelessness Act 2002 there is a statutory requirement to understand the housing needs within the community and a statutory requirement to develop a homelessness strategy.
- 5.3 Risk Implications: To fail to deliver on the actions within the plan. The six local authorities have considerable experience in working together and as there is full commitment by all partners and the support of the WSHP the risk is considered very low.
- 5.4 Corporate/Policy Implications: The Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership Plan is one of the documents that will underpin and support the delivery of the Worcester City Plan 2016 -20 21, especially in relation to:
- Theme 1 Stronger and Connected Communities
 - Theme 2 A Prosperous City
 - Theme 3 A Health & Active City
 - Theme 5 Sustaining and Improving our Assets
- 5.5 Equality Implications:
An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the Plan. This Plan will positively support equality by supporting the delivery of a range of housing and support to create a balanced housing market.
- 5.6 Human Resources Implications There are no human resource implications relevant to this report.
- 5.7 Health and Safety Implications: There are no health and safety implications relevant to this report.

Ward(s): All wards
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Background Papers: Cabinet Paper Worcestershire Housing Strategy 2010 -15, 6th April 2011; Cabinet Paper Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy 2012 -17, 11th September 2012