



Service Policy Panel

Report of: Housing Services Manager
Date: 21 June 2006
Open

Housing Strategy Action Plan Review and Update

1. Summary

- 1.1 To report progress on the implementation of the Council's Housing Strategy 2004-2007.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council's Housing Strategy 2004-2007, which has been approved by the Government Office for the West Midlands as "Fit for Purpose", has an Action Plan, with key milestones to be achieved between 2004-2007.
- 2.2 The performance against these milestones and general progress on implementation, have previously been reported to the Housing Health and Rural Affairs Policy and Scrutiny Panel and then onto Cabinet.
- 2.3 Progress will also have been reported to the Services Policy Panel on 21st June 2006.
- 2.4 Housing Policy, both nationally and regionally is being developed and implemented at a rapid pace, and the Council is fully participating in this work. The Housing Action Plans for 2004 – 2007 are attached at Appendix 1 and the final column contains commentary on progress against the key priorities.
- 2.5 Where there are significant new areas of work that have come to the fore more recently, these have been added to the Action Plans (*in bold italics*) and have targets set for their achievement. The Cabinet is requested to agree the new targets.

3. Key Issues

- 3.1 Appendix 1 highlights performance, but set out below is a brief summary of the most significant elements:

Priority One – Meeting Affordable Housing Needs

Very good progress is being made, with the Council on track to meet its target in relation to 120 affordable housing units receiving funding, which was a focus for the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) inspection in 2004. Additionally, by working with partner Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), the Housing Corporation and through the South Housing Market Area Partnership, £6 million of Housing Corporation grant funding has been secured for the period 2006-2008. Progressing rural housing schemes has been more problematic but a Cookley scheme has obtained an allocation from the Housing Corporation.

Priority Two – Tackling Homelessness and Providing Housing Options

Previous reports to Members in relation to the updated Homelessness Strategy have highlighted major successes in reducing the level of homelessness in the District, although there are still serious concerns about the longer term availability of affordable housing to meet local need.

A focus on the allocation of existing affordable accommodation through the implementation of Choice Based Lettings and introducing a Lettings Plan for the Hurcott Road estate in Kidderminster are significant areas of work that are currently being taken forward.

Priority Three – Maintaining the Independence of older and vulnerable people through housing and support

The setting up of a new North Worcestershire Care and Repair Agency, with its local office in Stourport has been a long standing objective of the Council and the Agency has had a very successful year, establishing itself as a leading partner in assisting older and vulnerable people remain independent in decent housing conditions. A new countywide strategy for Older People with a focus on housing, will assist in pulling together the complex array of plans and strategies in the health, social care and housing fields, ultimately providing more effective and joined up services for older people.

Priority Four – Improving conditions within Private Sector Housing.

The preparation for and introduction of new working arrangements around the Housing Act 2004 (from April 2006) has been successfully completed and will enable the Council to be more proactive in ensuring that we meet Government targets on decent homes and ensure that housing standards are enforced where necessary, particularly in the private rented sector.

The Council continues to progress very active policies in relation to domestic energy efficiency and affordable warmth and is being very proactive in trying to bring empty properties back into use. Government targets in both of these areas are being met.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 All of the Council's housing activities are covered by divisional revenue budgets and the Single Housing Capital Pot.

5. Risk Management

- 5.1 The Housing Strategy is essential to meet a range of statutory duties and targets, and the Council's own corporate objectives. The risk in not fulfilling these requirements and could be increased homelessness and poor housing conditions, having a very negative impact upon peoples social, health and economic wellbeing.
- 5.2 The monitoring of the Actions Plans highlights some major achievements for the Council but also that there are many areas of work that require significant and ongoing momentum to enable the Council to meet its duties and overall objectives.

6. Options

- 6.1 Officers are of the opinion that there are two potential courses of action that could be recommended to Cabinet to agree, as set out below.
- 6.2 The first course of action is to decide to endorse the new targets set out in Appendix 1 and note the progress made in delivering the Council's Housing Strategy as endorsed
- 6.3 The second course of action is to decide to amend the new targets set out in Appendix 1 and again noting the progress made in delivering the Council's Housing Strategy.

7. Appendices

- 7.1 Appendix 1 – Action Plans

Officer Contact Details:

Tim Rice
Housing Services Manager
01562 732560