

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING
15TH NOVEMBER 2006

Worcestershire Local Area Agreement for Housing

OPEN	
COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME	Improved Health and Wellbeing
CORPORATE PLAN THEME:	Enabling Community Wellbeing
KEY PRIORITY:	Housing and Independent Living
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Mrs. Anne Hingley
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Head of Planning, Health and Environment
CONTACT OFFICER:	Tim Rice, Housing Service Manager Ext 2560 tim.rice@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
APPENDICES	Appendix A Appendix B Appendix C Appendix D

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To obtain Council endorsement of the Worcestershire Countywide Local Area Agreement policies and targets for housing.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Council is asked to DECIDE:

- 2.1 To endorse the three key housing priorities as set out in this report and contribute through its policies to delivering the Housing LAA outcomes.
- 2.2 The Worcestershire LAA Housing Management Team (on which the Council is represented) develop the priorities on behalf of the Worcestershire Partnership Members and agree targets in consultation with the Government Office for the West Midlands.
- 2.3 The priorities and outcomes are agreed as part of the wider review and refresh of the Worcestershire LAA.
- 2.4 The Head of Planning, Health and Environment in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning, Health & Environment consults with the relevant Heads of Service to consider how the Council's existing plans and strategies may need to be reviewed to meet the requirements of the Housing LAA priorities.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Following a countywide stakeholder event in October 2005 to raise the profile of housing and its impact upon the social and economic wellbeing of the local community, the Worcestershire Partnership agreed to include a new housing element into the second year revision of the Worcestershire LAA.
- 3.2 The Worcestershire LAA 2006-2009 was agreed by the Council and under the Stronger Communities Section, allowed for the development of proposals “*To increase the availability of affordable, appropriate and decent housing*”
- 3.3 The updated Housing Strategy Action Plan agreed by the Service Policy Panel on 21st June 2006 and Cabinet on 29th June 2006 includes the proposal to develop the housing element of the Worcestershire LAA.
- 3.4 The Worcestershire Partnership Management Group endorsed the project plan for the development of housing targets for the Worcestershire LAA at its meeting on 10th May 2006.
- 3.5 A second report to the Worcestershire Partnership Board on 26th June 2006 set out further progress and it was agreed that Worcestershire Chief Housing Officers’ Group would report back to the Management Group after a further consultation event with partners and stakeholders on 14th July 2006. Appendix A sets out a summary of the outcomes from the event, which has been circulated to all invitees and participants to keep them informed of progress. The Management Group received a report on 16th October 2006 and agreed the three key housing priorities at 4.1 below and the recommendations set out at 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 in this report.
- 3.6 The work on developing the Housing LAA is being taken forward by an LAA Housing Management Team consisting of the Worcestershire Chief Housing Officers’ Group, the Chair of the South Housing Market Area Partnership and Worcestershire County Council’s Head of Community and Partnerships. The Head of Community Leadership at Worcestershire County Council has also been consulted and kept informed of progress.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 The LAA Management Team has been meeting regularly and its Members have been tasked with working up the three key housing priorities:
 1. To increase the use of public sector and partnership land for affordable housing
 2. The development of a programme of renewable domestic energy systems across Worcestershire
 3. A countywide scheme for the release of capital from private housing to improve housing conditions and maintain peoples independence
- 4.2 All three areas of work are challenging but meet Government priorities, strategic priorities at Regional, Sub Regional and Local Authority level and will impact upon the general wellbeing of Worcestershire citizens. They meet not only housing issues,

but cross cut into health, social and economic well being, and improving the environment.

- 4.3 A significant amount of research has been carried out into best practice on housing and LAAs across the country and there has been attendance at events in London, Harrogate and Birmingham to obtain further information and ideas. It is clear that there has been very slow progress nationally with little innovation often no more than the gathering together of existing targets, particularly in two tier Authority areas, which appear to add little value.
- 4.4 The three priorities being considered in Worcestershire do not follow this approach. They require the full support, participation and promotion by the Worcestershire Partnership and they are not seen as being achievable just by Local Authority activity.
- 4.5 The new Local Government White Paper "Stronger and Prosperous Communities" highlights the importance of LAAs and their focus in future to be more on locally developed priorities. This is the approach that has been taken with the Housing LAA in Worcestershire.
- 4.6 The Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM) have been consulted and kept informed of the proposals and have not at this stage raised concerns about the general approach.

Progress on Developing the 3 Priorities

- 4.7 (1) The use of public sector land for affordable housing:
 - Baseline information on the release of 'public land' (for the purpose of the LAA this extends to land owned by Worcestershire Partnership organisations) is being collated.
 - Each Local Authority policy on land/asset disposal is being identified and the issue will be taken back to Management Teams and Members to consider how the Authority can contribute to the objective. This will involve a consideration of this Council's Asset Management Plan 2003-2006 and the Capital Strategy 2002-2007 at an appropriate time.
 - Non Local Authority Partnership Members with land asset holdings, have been written to request details of their policy and to obtain an 'in principle' support for the objective of disposals to Housing Associations.
 - A briefing paper setting out the basis of and the framework for this outcome and is attached at Appendix B.
- (2) The Development of a programme of renewable domestic energy systems across Worcestershire.
 - A briefing paper at Appendix C following consultation with Local Authorities, sets out the proposal.
- (3) Countywide, private housing capital release scheme:

- Meetings with the West Midlands 'kickstart' consortium to consider joining an existing capital release scheme operating in the West Midlands Metropolitan Council areas.
 - A briefing paper at Appendix D sets out the outline proposal.
- 4.8 Appendices A-D have been drafted at a County Level and have been provided as part of the Report to the Worcestershire Partnership Management Group.
- 4.9 These proposed priority areas and subsequent outcomes will in some instances be work in progress and it is recognised that a staged approach will need to be adopted, particularly with regard to the use of Partnership land for affordable housing. The outcomes and targets will be developed from what baseline information is available and will be realistic while at the same time being seen to have a real impact.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The disposal of any appropriate Council owned sites for affordable housing in the future would be subject to an assessment of the site valuation and the nature of the project on a scheme by scheme basis.
- 5.2 The proposals for private sector capital release and supporting renewable energy schemes would, where necessary, be funded from existing and future private sector housing budgets which form part of the Single Housing Capital Pot or any external capital funding that may be made available for such schemes (including Regional Assembly or GOWM grant funding)

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There will be a need to review the Council's policies on asset disposal for the affordable housing proposal, so that an agreed policy is clear.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 The proposals are designed to contribute to meeting the Council's housing and sustainability objectives and in particular ensuring that sufficient affordable housing for rent and shared ownership is made available to meet the high levels of housing need experienced in the District. Failure to be innovative and bring forward new ways of meeting housing and sustainability objectives could result in the Council not meeting its duties to local citizens or meeting the Government's current and developing national and regional priorities.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The three priority areas for the Housing LAA have been developed following extensive consultation and research. They are designed to bring together the resources, and support of the Worcestershire Partnership in areas that can make tangible differences to peoples lives. This is very much work in progress and the themes will develop further over time. It is important to ensure that the priorities and subsequent outcomes are realistic and achievable as they are entirely voluntary and

subject to no reward or enabling measure. These priority areas will assist the Council in meeting its housing and sustainability objectives. Officers would request that the Council endorses the same approach so that countywide policies and targets can be developed to allow negotiations with GOWM to proceed

9. CONSULTEES

9.1 Cabinet

9.2 Worcestershire Partnership and Stakeholders as part of the LAA development.

9.3 Head of Cultural, Leisure and Commercial Services.

9.4 Head of Financial Services.

9.5 Head of Legal & Democratic Services

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Housing Strategy Action Plan for 2004 - 2007

10.2 Worcestershire Local Area Agreement 2006 - 2009

2.11.06