

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

23RD JUNE 2009

**Proposal for the Development of the
Worcestershire Housing Strategy**

OPEN	
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME:	Improving Health and Wellbeing
CORPORATE PLAN AIM:	Enabling Community & Wellbeing
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Mrs T L Onslow
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Director of Planning and Regulatory Services
CONTACT OFFICER:	Sally Horne – Ext. 2561 Sally.Horne@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
APPENDICES:	None

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To agree that Wyre Forest District Council continues to take part in the discussions taking place between partner organisations about the future development of strategic housing within Worcestershire

2. RECOMMENDATION

Cabinet is asked to DECIDE to:

- 2.1 **agree that the Director of Planning & Regulatory Services and his officers continue to further develop the proposed arrangements as outlined within the report and to commence with the development of a Worcestershire Housing Strategy**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Strategic housing functions, which include housing options, homelessness, prevention, affordable housing, supported housing services and private sector housing conditions and enforcement, are predominantly operated through district councils with a very wide range of partnerships and statutory and voluntary sector agencies. Strategic arrangements and revenue funding for supported housing provision is administered through the Worcestershire Supporting People programme and has a major impact on strategic housing.
- 3.2 Increasingly there has been more co-operation and joint development between the six district councils, Worcestershire County Council, its partners and other local authorities outside Worcestershire. Significant examples include the South Housing Market Area Partnership and the development of a sub-regional Choice Based Lettings scheme.

- 3.3 District Councils are required to provide comprehensive, needs led, Housing Strategies and Homelessness Strategies which focus primarily on an area's needs. Increasingly these strategies are required to take a much wider geographical overview and respond to complex policy and strategic policy requirements of Government, key partners and stakeholders. For instance the Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy is a joint approach by all the Worcestershire Local Authorities which shares objectives, policy approaches and best practice and is well placed to attract additional external funding. This is a good example of the direction in which joint Local Authority strategic work has been developing.
- 3.4 In practice the Worcestershire Local Authorities have been working in a close and effective partnership on housing matters for many years through the Worcestershire Chief Housing Officers Group (CHOG) and Worcestershire Supporting People Commissioning Board (SPCB). Recent Government guidance issued by the Communities and Local Government has broadened the approach for the development of Housing Strategies, enabling these to be developed at Local Strategic Partnership or sub regional level as well as locally.
- 3.5 There has been considerable debate between partners as to how best to take these arrangements forward and what would be the most effective way to improve housing and related services and their impact across the wider Worcestershire community.
- 3.6 The same considerations have taken place at the Worcestershire Supporting People Commissioning Body (SPCB) and will be highly relevant to the future direction of strategic housing.
- 3.7 A countywide strategy would pick up national and regional issues as well as Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) priorities for the county. It would include a local focus for each of the districts with Action Plans that reflected the key outcomes for partners.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 Within Worcestershire, in principle agreement has been given by Local Authority Leaders and Chief Executives to progress towards a countywide Housing Strategy. Discussions are underway with Worcestershire County Council and the Worcestershire Partnership (the County LSP) to develop this approach and lock Housing Strategy and Policy into the Local Strategic Partnership.
- 4.2 It is envisaged that this will lead to the likely development of a multi agency Housing Theme Group within one of the LSP theme areas, either Stronger or Safer Communities, to ensure that housing strategy is given the priority that it warrants at this level. That the housing and related Local Area Agreement National Indicators 142, 154, 155 and 187 are given priority support by the Partnership and that the cross cutting nature of housing work links into other priority areas such as community safety, economic regeneration and growth, social care, health and wellbeing, community cohesion, climate change and sustainability.
- 4.3 It is intended that Housing Strategy will sit alongside the existing Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy and the Worcestershire Supporting People Strategy, which are closely aligned.

Agenda Item No. 10.1

- 4.4 This will also greatly assist with Worcestershire's approach to the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), which as you will be aware from the Audit Commissions CAA Framework Document, the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the work of the LSP is central to the way in which the Audit Commission and the other inspection regimes will assess local public services.
- 4.5 The approach outlined sits well with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Guidance on the alignment of Housing and Homelessness Strategies with the Sustainable Community Strategy and the co-operation and joint strategic working between the upper tier Authority and the District Council's reflect an approach to the wide ranging nature of strategic housing and how it will operate across a number of administrative boundaries.
- 4.6 The partnership working between Local Authorities, Housing Associations, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), Government Office for the West Midlands and regional agencies at South Housing Market Area (SHMA) level will be the investment route and delivery vehicle for affordable housing, which is a top priority for the Worcestershire Partnership and is reflected in our LAA targets. The governance and partnership arrangements for the SHMA are currently being reviewed to strengthen the strategic and operational delivery of affordable housing.
- 4.7 There will be continuing co-operation and partnership work which will require strategic work with other Authorities in the outside Worcestershire and we continue to work within the current and emerging regional frameworks for the overall benefit of the West Midlands.
- 4.8 Finally, the HCA have approached Worcestershire County Council to open dialogue on the approach to the 'Single Conversation' (or more likely a range of conversations) about the delivery of affordable housing and our place shaping role and again this will sit very comfortably with the approach we intend to take on the County Housing Strategy, which of course will incorporate the SHMA arrangements.
- 4.9 As the Housing Strategy for Worcestershire is developed, future reports to Cabinet will be prepared.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 At this stage the financial implications of the development of a Worcestershire Housing Strategy are unknown, however, any significant budgetary issues will be subject to Council approval.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no legal or policy implications arising from this report.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 If the Council fails to engage with the development of a County strategy, it risks a range of problems, from failure to deliver NI targets through to failure to secure funding.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 District Councils are required to provide comprehensive, needs led Housing Strategies which focus upon an area's needs. Wyre Forest District Council's Housing Strategy lapsed in 2008. This is a similar situation for many of the other partner authorities within Worcestershire. This combined with a history of strong partnership working, strategic arrangements and the requirement by Government to broaden the approach to developing Housing Strategies at a Local Strategic Partnership or sub regional level, has led the Worcestershire authorities to seek agreement to develop a Worcestershire Housing Strategy. The approach that Worcestershire is pursuing is the most appropriate way in which the authorities can work with and for the local communities to maximise the effect of both mainstream housing services and the cross cutting and associated links with other areas of public services.
- 8.2 Subject to member approval for this approach, a project plan will be developed setting out key milestones and timescales for this work. It is envisaged by officers at this time, that this work will need to be undertaken during 2009/10.

9. CONSULTEES

Corporate Management Team

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Department for Communities and Local Government (2008), Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities – Statutory Guidance