

<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>16 APRIL 2012</b>
<b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b>	<b>HEREFORDSHIRE AND SHROPSHIRE HOUSING STRATEGY 2012-2015</b>
<b>PORTFOLIO AREA:</b>	<b>ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND PLANNING</b>

**CLASSIFICATION:** Open

### **Wards Affected**

County-wide

### **Purpose**

For Cabinet to note and approve the content of the Herefordshire and Shropshire Housing Strategy 2012-2015.

### **Key Decision**

This is not a key decision.

### **Recommendation**

**THAT: the Herefordshire and Shropshire Housing Strategy 2012 – 2015 be noted and approved.**

### **Key Points Summary**

- Due to the wide range of challenges facing services, including reduced Government funding towards housing and housing support provisions, it is important that a strategy is in place to identify Herefordshire Council's key priorities and housing vision for the next three years to March 2015.
- The Council agreed to develop a joint housing strategy with Shropshire in 2011, reflecting that many of the challenges faced are common to both Counties.
- The Strategy considers and reflects the important policy directions and changes relating to housing that are contained within the Localism Act, and the National Housing Strategy. This includes significant changes to the way in which affordable housing will be funded, allocated and utilised in the future as well as reforms relating to housing and planning more broadly.
- With respect to social housing, the Government has expressed a desire to see it used more effectively. These changes are set against a backdrop of a significantly changing environment not least with regard to how public services will be delivered in the future; significantly reduced funding for affordable housing and housing support services; major changes to benefits and reductions in funding to wider services which will impact upon housing services.

- The National Housing Strategy takes forward a range of measures in relation to housing and it is important that Herefordshire Council has in place a strategy to respond to these changes at a local level.
- The Herefordshire and Shropshire Strategy will form a high level approach relating to the key contribution of housing to sustainable, healthy and empowered communities including the opportunities to improve health and economic development outcomes. It therefore tackles some significant issues and challenges for the County.
- The Herefordshire and Shropshire Strategy identifies common priorities and a detailed action plan will be developed and approved by the Cabinet Member during the year. This will be monitored and reviewed by the individual Councils and through the West Housing Market Area Partnership.

## Alternative Options

- 1 Herefordshire could continue with its own Housing Strategy, however through the membership of the West Housing Market Area Partnership, significant housing-market similarities have been identified between Herefordshire and Shropshire. This has provided opportunities for collaboration on projects now and in the future.

## Reasons for Recommendations

- 2 The approval of the Herefordshire and Shropshire Housing Strategy will enable Herefordshire Public Services and its partners to have a common understanding of the key challenges facing the area and more effectively target joint resources to achieve agreed strategic objectives. The strategy requires formal Cabinet approval as it sets out the strategic direction of housing policy for the County.

## Introduction and Background

- 3 Herefordshire Council previously agreed the development of a Joint Housing Strategy between Herefordshire and Shropshire on the 17 March 2011.

The Herefordshire and Shropshire Housing Strategy 2012-2015 replaces Herefordshire's 'Housing in Herefordshire Strategy 2011/12.

The legal requirement for local authorities to produce housing strategies has been removed, however, the National Housing Strategy reinforces that local authorities' strategic housing role is at the heart of achieving social, economic and environmental objectives that shape a community and create a sense of place. The Herefordshire and Shropshire Housing Strategy 2012-15 provides the future strategic direction for housing services.

## Key Considerations

4. Since 2009, Shropshire and Herefordshire Councils have worked together on a range of joint priorities and exchanged best practice through the West Housing Market Area Partnership. More recently, they were joined by Telford and Wrekin Council and this working relationship was developed further by the formation of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).
  - The constituent authorities have jointly commissioned and funded several research studies since the formation of the West Housing Market Area Partnership including:-
    - Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment 2008;

- Strategic Housing Market Area Assessment 2008;
- Healthy Housing Survey 2012.
- The Strategy considers and reflects the major changes to government policy generally, and on changes to housing policy more specifically, as detailed in the Localism Act and the English National Housing Strategy.
- The Strategy will inform the housing implementation plans which are being produced by each Authority and which will be updated to include a progress review annually. The implementation plan will be made publicly available.
- Key challenges identified within the Strategy include:
  - A reduction in funding for housing and housing support as well as for welfare support and funding to partner agencies;
  - The need to ensure that the Localism and Big Society agendas are fully engaged;
  - Demographic challenges including issues surrounding an ageing population as well as the outward migration of younger people;
  - Preventing homelessness;
  - The overall increasing gap between wages and house prices; particularly for young people who want to purchase their first home;
  - The need to reduce carbon emissions; particularly as Herefordshire has ageing housing stock with inadequate levels of insulation;
  - Ensuring that the role of housing continues to fully contribute to achieving healthy, empowered and sustainable communities; these demands are increased due to the rural nature of the county and the pockets of significant deprivation in both rural and urban areas;
  - Ensuring local people have access to appropriate housing and housing support options;
  - Ensuring we meet the needs of our military and ex-military personnel in accessing the housing market.
- The three priorities for the Herefordshire and Shropshire Housing Strategy 2012-2015 are:
 

**Priority 1:** A range of housing, including affordable housing, is provided in partnership to meet the current and future needs of all our communities;

**Priority 2:** All existing stock is of a high quality and used effectively;

**Priority 3:** Residents are able to influence decisions through having access to suitable and timely advice on housing options and support available.
- The constituent Councils will work jointly to share best practice and develop common approaches to tackling key issues where appropriate. Furthermore, sharing resources in the commissioning and funding of key research should create opportunities for financial savings.
- Joint work is already underway on developing expertise, capacity and opportunities, for instance in supporting community-led affordable housing, and opportunities for available

limited funding may be enhanced if applications are developed through a joint strategic approach.

- The Strategy complements the Local Development Framework (LDF) in the delivery of strategic housing priorities for the council, including ensuring an appropriate supply of affordable housing for the county.
- An important aspect of the action plan will be in working to influence developers and the housing market to support the accommodation needs of Herefordshire's growing older population.
- The Strategy action plan will be agreed with the Cabinet Member for Environment, Housing and Planning.

5 Housing will be one of the first services to be considered as part of the first phase of the Root and Branch reviews conducted in 2012/13.

## **Community Impact**

6 This Strategy, along with the supporting action plan, will be made available to the public. The changes and proposed priorities will help ensure those most vulnerable and in need within our communities have access to suitable accommodation, support and advice. The Strategy is based on robust data analysis and consultation, ensuring that this strategy and future work is based on need. A balanced housing market is a key element to creating strong and sustainable communities.

## **Equality and Human Rights**

7 This Strategy is evidence led and will seek to support and advise those identified as in need of additional support and advice. Services will be commissioned to ensure the diverse needs of all members of the community are met and not disadvantaged in any way.

## **Financial Implications**

8 The approval of the Herefordshire and Shropshire Housing Strategy does not commit the Council to any expenditure beyond existing budgets and there are, therefore, no financial implications in approving the Housing Strategy.

## **Legal Implications**

9 The Housing Strategy has no legal status, as it is not a statutory document. There are no significant legal implications stemming from the recommendation in this report, however the Localism Act 2011 provides a range of housing and planning reforms which are met in this strategy.

## **Risk Management**

10 If the strategy is not approved, there is a risk that there would be less clarity on the strategic approach to housing within Herefordshire. This could impact on the development and effectiveness of wider strategies, including the Core Strategy, capital and revenue funding applications and weaken Herefordshire's ability to influence partnerships. Any risks will be managed through the West Housing Market Area Partnership (WHMAP) and the Homes & Community Services Division.

## Consultees

- 11 The Strategy has been developed following a wide ranging consultation. The consultation period for the Strategy ran from 8 July – 30 September 2011. The consultation process included a range of consultation methods in order to ensure as wide a range as possible of residents and other stakeholders were made aware of, or could respond to the draft strategy.

In total, more than 800 responses were received from a wide variety of individuals, Parish Councils and other stakeholders. A full consultation response document has been provided and is available; however a summary of Consultation responses is attached to this report (Appendix 2).

Consultation included the following components:

- summaries of the document being distributed to all Parish Councils;
- press releases;
- distribution of the Strategy to libraries and main Council offices;
- presentations at a number of key meetings including the Housing Partnership for Herefordshire (or equivalent) for both Herefordshire and Shropshire;
- the Joint Housing Strategy being placed on the front page of the Council's website and on the West Housing Partnership website;
- a launch event for the Joint Strategy on 8 July 2011 at the West Housing Market Area Partnership Standing Conference;

The Strategy was endorsed by the West Housing Market Area Partnership Executive at a meeting on 25 January 2012.

## Appendices

- 12 Appendix 1 Herefordshire and Shropshire Housing Strategy 2012-2015  
Appendix 2 Summary of Consultation Response

## Background Papers

- 13 None