

Herefordshire and Shropshire Housing Strategy 2011-2015

Summary of Consultation Response

Background information

The Joint Herefordshire and Shropshire Housing Strategy provides the high level vision and housing priorities for the two Authorities to 2015. The Strategy replaces both the Herefordshire Housing Strategy 2010-11 and the Shropshire Housing Strategy 2009-11.

It is worth noting that following discussions with Telford and Wrekin, it was agreed that as they had recently adopted their Housing Strategy 2010 - 2013 they would not be incorporated within the Herefordshire and Shropshire Housing Strategy.

The specific implementation plans relating to the Housing Strategy are being developed separately by each Authority.

The consultation period for the Strategy ran from 8th July – 30th September.

The strategy will ensure there is a focussed, effective and joined up approach to identifying and tackling housing need across Herefordshire and Shropshire. The consultation enabled the views of a wide range of stakeholders to influence the finalised Strategy.

Consultation Summary

The consultation process for the Joint Housing Strategy 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, and could respond to, the draft Housing Strategy. Consultation included:

- summaries of the document being distributed to all Parish Councils through the Association of Local Councils (ALC)
- press releases
- distribution of the Strategy to libraries and main Council offices
- 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 8th July at the West Housing Partnership Standing Conference
- presentations at a number of key meetings including the Social Housing Forum (or equivalent) for both Herefordshire and Shropshire.
- utilisation of the Shropshire People's Panel to which members of the people's panel were asked to make comments on the relevance of the vision and each priority and to make comments. Additionally, the People's Panel survey also gave details as to how the full draft housing strategy and full response document could be accessed

In total, over 800 responses were received from a wide variety of individuals, Parish Councils and other stakeholders. A full consultation response document has been produced and is available.

The responses received varied widely in length and complexity from requesting additional items to be included in the glossary and making suggestions for small grammatical changes to making

policy recommendations and suggestions with regard to issues upon which the Council and partner agencies should focus.

A range of themes were repeatedly mentioned in the consultation responses. Generally, comments were in agreement with the vision and priorities within the draft Strategy document.

The responses which were repeatedly made are outlined below:

Recurring themes in consultation responses	Response within the Strategy
There is strong agreement that it is essential to have a thorough understanding of the housing needs of local people and that meeting <u>local</u> needs should be the priority.	As outlined in the Strategy, thoroughly understanding local housing needs and responding to those needs is a priority. This will also be reflected within the actions plans.
There were significant mentions of empowering local residents and communities to find solutions locally to meeting housing need.	As above, there is strong reference made to identifying local approaches to providing housing solutions.
There is a general concern that there is a lack of affordable housing.	This is recognised within the Strategy.
Concerns that reductions in funding for Supporting People means that it is increasingly important to ensure that there is suitable housing to remain close to existing support from families and friends.	The Strategy recognises these issues. To bolster this, a section will be included which gives more detail on the approach in both areas. The Housing Strategy implementation plans will give further details on specific approaches.
Concerns relating to the Council's liability for exponential and unsustainable demand for Disabled Facilities Grants which adapts unsuitable property for older/disabled occupiers.	
Concerns expressed that there is a lack of smaller accessible bungalows to meet the increasingly ageing population, especially in rural areas and a lack of downsizing opportunities to free up family accommodation.	
There is strong agreement of the need to ensure that homes are effectively utilised, in particular, that long term empty dwellings are brought back into use and that effective options are available to people who are under-occupying in order to release family homes and to ensure that, in particular older, people are living in housing that they can manage.	As identified within the Strategy, these issues are key priorities for both Councils. This has been clearly identified within the Strategy.
Concerns were expressed that given the current financial climate not all of the priorities can be achieved and that costs and sources of finance should be clarified.	The Housing Strategy identifies the broad joint housing vision and priorities for Herefordshire and Shropshire. Along with this both Authorities are producing implementation plans which will, where feasible, detail costs and sources of funding.

	The finalised strategy is being amended to more clearly clarify this approach.
A glossary needs to be included in the final document	A detailed glossary will be included within the finalised Housing Strategy.
Many respondents felt that there was too much jargon in the vision and priority statements and that either terms such as 'appropriate and affordable'; 'community cohesion' and 'diverse communities' needed to be simplified or explained more fully.	Where feasible, technical terms have been minimised. However, where this was not possible the Housing Strategy glossary has been extended to include the technical terms identified.
There should be additional statistics relating to the housing market in Herefordshire and Shropshire.	Whilst the housing strategy does provide background statistics and data in relation to housing markets in both areas, links have now been included to the Local Housing Market Area reports for each area which include detailed background information on the local housing markets.
Concerns relating to the costs associated with provision of affordable housing.	Implementation plans are being produced which will identify the key priorities and, where possible, give details on revenue implications.
The need to work with private landlords and take enforcement action where necessary on poorer quality housing	The Housing Strategy recognises the need to ensure that it is a priority to improve the quality of private sector housing.
Need to ensure that appropriate advice is available to residents.	This is recognised within the Housing Strategy.
Concerns were expressed that the introduction of fixed term tenancies and higher cost 'affordable rents' would cause a negative effect	Both Councils are working closely with social landlords to minimise the negative effects of these changes and maximise opportunities. The Housing Strategy makes reference to the development of Tenancy Strategies by each Local Authority to provide guidance to social landlords as to the expectation of fixed term tenancies and affordable rents.
Lack of houses of all types was identified as an issue.	Many of the issues relating to the increase of housing overall are addressed within Local Development Framework documents.
Need to ensure that progress is effectively monitored and reported.	As stated within the Strategy, implementation plans are being developed. The implementation plans will be actively monitored and an update of progress will be undertaken and published on an annual basis.
The need to ensure that there is appropriate housing related support available was identified frequently as being a necessary priority	This is recognised within the Housing Strategy.
There needs to be more detailed reference made to changes in welfare benefit reforms and the implications of the Localism Bill	Additional detail on the Localism Bill and welfare reforms is being included within the Housing Strategy.