

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	Executive Board
<b>REPORT NO:</b>	HHE/49/18
<b>DATE:</b>	11 December 2018
<b>LEAD MEMBER:</b>	Councillor David Griffiths (Place – Housing)
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	Rebecca Lowry – Service Manager Regeneration (Tel: 315403)
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Local Housing Strategy 2018-23
<b>WARD:</b>	All Council Wards

## 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To seek Members' approval for the adoption, publication and implementation of the Local Housing Strategy 2018-23, setting out a five-year vision for housing needs and housing related services in the County Borough.

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The new Local Housing Strategy 2018-23 has been under development since January 2017 and replaces the now expired Local Housing Strategy 2013-18. The new Strategy is the first produced by the Housing & Economy Department formed following the Council re-shaping in 2016.
- 2.2 The priority themes for the next five-year period are established as “More Housing Choice”, “Better Quality Homes & Communities” and “Better Services to Improve People’s Lives”. These are consistent with the themes of the previous strategy, which following examination and consultation, have been retained due to their ongoing relevance.
- 2.3 The format of the Strategy is comprised of three separate but linked elements:
  - a one page ‘Infogram’ that aims to provide an “at-a-glance” summary of the main areas of focus and activity;
  - a Strategy Document, which presents the detailed evidence and context; and
  - a Strategic Action Plan, which will be measured and reported on.
- 2.4 The development of the new strategy has involved significant consultation and engagement with officers from the Council, partner agencies from different sectors,

tenant representatives and wider community members. Work on the strategy has been reported to the Council's Homes & Environment Scrutiny Committee throughout 2017/18; and has been formally presented to the Tenant & Member Partnership, Wrexham Housing Alliance and the Public Services Board.

2.5 The key actions within the three themes of the Strategy are summarised below:

**More Housing Choice –**

- Increase the supply of affordable housing through the “Build & Buy” programme providing a choice of tenures and property types in locations that meet demand.
- Evaluate existing stock for best use, redevelop, refurbish or reclassify to maintain choice and supply.
- Progress and strengthen existing work on empty properties, using all available means including “buy-back” and compulsory purchase.
- Make it easier for people to apply for housing by working effectively with RSL partners to develop balanced waiting lists and nominations.
- Evolve the Local Lettings Agency to promote good practice, high standards and provide more choice of tenure to meet needs.
- Proactively engage with private developers to maximise the benefit of market housing and ensure effective use of the planning process to deliver affordable housing contributions.
- Bring forward housing development strategies in partnership.

**Better Quality Homes and Communities –**

- Commit to the ongoing maintenance and repair of all Council homes following the achievement of WHQS standards, to ensure homes are economical, attractive and meet the needs and aspirations of customers.
- Positive use of planning legislation, licencing and enforcement to reduce the impacts resulting from empty, poorly managed or maintained properties particularly within the town centre, contributing to better conditions for wellbeing and economic growth.
- Continuing to review our housing management approach to multi-tenure communities to provide an improved and efficient response to quality of life issues.
- Innovate in terms of the design of new homes and adaptation of existing stock, to making best use of resources and improve sustainability.
- Develop and promote energy efficiency strategies and services for both the public and private sector to reduce fuel poverty and protect the environment.
- Remain dedicated to adapting homes where appropriate, supporting the notion of lifetime homes and independent living.

**Better Services to Improve People's Lives –**

- Develop a preventative housing management approach that proactively identifies and responds to complex needs and vulnerabilities and promotes services that maximise the sustainability of tenancies and prevents homelessness.
- Embrace and support use of new technologies to provide health, housing and community solutions making access to services easier and more efficient.

- Enable people to provide timely feedback on their experiences and aspirations of housing and housing related services and demonstrate how this shapes future service provision.
- Continue to promote effective local and regional partnership work for solutions that meet stated needs and make efficient use of resources.
- Review housing and housing services for older people, including support, stock and development of future housing solutions.
- Deliver on commitment to provide additional pitches for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers following the completion of a needs assessment.

### **3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

**That the Executive Board:-**

**3.1 recommend to Council that the Local Housing Strategy 2018-23 as presented in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 be approved;**

**and subject to Council approval:-**

**3.2 agree to publish the Local Housing Strategy 2018-23; and**

**3.3 authorise the Head of Housing & Economy to implement the Strategy with immediate effect.**

### **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (i) To replace the Local Housing Strategy 2013-18 ensuring that the Council complies with requirements in the Local Government Act 2003 and the Housing Act (Wales) 2014 to have a published housing strategy; and
- (ii) to ensure that there is a long-term strategy in place for the County Borough to guide Council departments, partners in the private, public and third sectors as well as tenants and residents to address housing and housing related services over the next 5 years.

### **4. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

(a) Process for Drafting the Local Housing Strategy 2018-2023

4.1 Local authorities are required to produce housing strategies to meet obligations under the Local Government Act 2003 and Housing Act (Wales) 2014. A combination of workshops and discussion groups as well as written correspondence and face to face meetings have been taking place with key officers from across all Council departments and partners in the County Borough.

4.2 Preparation work on the development of Wrexham's Local Housing Strategy 2018-23 began in January 2017. The development of the Strategy has been reported to the Homes & Environment Scrutiny Committee in April 2017 (HHE/23/17s), November 2017 (HHE/49/17s & HHE/52/17s), December 2017 (HHE/57/17s) and February 2018 (HHE/07/18s). In addition, an all Member Workshop was held in April 2018, a report of the discussions and feedback is available in the Background

Papers section of this report. The draft Strategy was also reported to the Public Services Board in June 2018, where it was supported.

4.3 The previous Local Housing Strategy 2013-18 has been thoroughly reviewed and those aspects considered still to be relevant for the forthcoming strategy period have been retained. The priority themes of this Strategy will be:

- More Housing Choice\*;
- Better Quality Homes and Communities; and
- Better Services to Improve People's Lives.

\*This was re-worded following engagement at the Member Workshop. It was previously 'More Housing, More Choice'.

(b) Format of the Local Housing Strategy 2018-2023

The format of the Local Housing Strategy 2018-23 is proposed as follows:

- One page Strategy Infogram (Appendix 1)
- Strategy Document (Appendix 2)
- Five year Strategic Action Plan (Appendix 3)

4.4 These components are designed to operate both as stand-alone documents that each provide a clear vision of the Strategy's key priorities and overall direction; but secondly as a combined, comprehensive resource for those readers who wish to gain a more detailed understanding.

- One-page 'Infogram' - This provides an 'at a glance' overview of the strategy, summarising the three priorities and the overall direction of travel intended within each theme. Readers will be able to identify the essence of the Local Housing Strategy 2018-23 from this document, without being presented with the specific details that support its delivery.
- Strategy Document – This booklet will provide a useful source of information such as evidence, demographics, legislation background, the Council's approach to demand modelling and its application of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This provides context to the strategy priorities and actions set out in both the one page infographic and in the detailed Action Plan.
- Strategic Action Plan – This is the business-end of the strategy. It will list the individual, SMART actions that will ensure the delivery of the three key priorities in the County Borough, spread across the five-year lifetime of the Strategy.

Please note that the format and presentation of the draft documents that accompany this report will be further improved by the Reprographics Unit, following approval.

4.5 The three components demonstrate linkages and compliance with relevant legislation, such as the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2014 and will be published bilingually as per the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

c) Content of the Local Housing Strategy 2018-23

- 4.6 The outgoing strategy set a number of strategic objectives, which are still very relevant today. However, there have been many social, economic and political changes since 2013 with more expected within the five year life of the strategy such as BREXIT, continued austerity, welfare reform and the adoption of the Council's Local Development Plan.
- 4.7 The new strategy sets out a five-year vision for housing supply and housing-related services in the County Borough. It will provide a framework of priority themes that will direct the activities of the Council's departments and influence our external partners, providing a positive environment for collaboration and sustainable development.
- 4.8 The new Local Housing Strategy 2018-2023 is holistic in its approach, recognising the individual and combined strengths of partners in Wrexham that are working to improve housing and housing-related services for our tenants and residents. The Strategy identifies needs related to all types and tenures of housing.

More Housing Choice

- 4.9 As a stock-retaining local authority, the Council manages approximately 11,214 tenancies and clearly has a significant role in providing housing solutions within the County Borough. Significantly, the Strategy will herald the commencement of the first Council-owned house building programme in some 30 years to both increase and replace units within its socially rented stock.
- 4.10 Advancing the previously approved "Build & Buy Programme" to both build and acquire appropriate properties that meet the current and future needs of tenants which includes the "buy back" of former Right to Buy properties is identified as a key action. The approach will be underpinned by a strategic, evidence-based assessment of demand to inform decision-making.
- 4.11 The Council is one provider of affordable housing in Wrexham. The role of Registered Social Landlords (2,160 tenancies in 2015/16), the expanding private-rented sector (approximately 8,200 units at last census) in contributing to the housing offer in the County Borough and our partnership work in this area is therefore recognised with the Strategy as a key contributor to meeting housing needs in Wrexham.
- 4.12 Increasing the range of intermediate and low cost home ownership products available to tenants and prospective homeowners will be a focus over the next five years.
- 4.13 Market housing and private development are also key factors in the wider vision of delivering more, good quality homes for people in Wrexham. In doing so the Local Housing Strategy 2018-2023 supports the Council Plan priority of creating a sustainable and thriving economy.

- 4.14 Work with private developers will further the ambitions around improving the supply of housing in accordance with the Local Development Plan, will support of the North Wales Growth Bid and capitalising on Wrexham's key location relative to the Energy, Advanced Manufacturing and Digital Clusters as well as the Northern Powerhouse. Housing has a key role to play in place-based regeneration and will be considered, where appropriate in the County Borough, i.e. the House Building Accelerator project. Within this, opportunities for employment and skills development linked to house building and related physical activity will be prioritised.
- 4.15 Appropriate treatment of Empty Properties, defined as those empty for more than 6 months, can support the priority of More Housing Choice by bringing existing buildings back into use. The Homes & Environment Scrutiny Committee has examined this topic as part of the development of the strategy and has indicated support for continuation and enhancement of the Council's efforts in this area to include the use of Compulsory Purchase powers.
- 4.16 The process of applications and allocations are important in providing more choice for people seeking a housing solution as this was considered by the Homes & Environment Scrutiny Committee, who recommended that the matter of a Wrexham Common Allocations Policy be considered over the life of new strategy.

#### Better Quality Homes and Communities

- 4.17 The ongoing commitment to the achievement of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard is a key area of work within this section of the strategy. Whilst the Council achieves and then maintains higher standards in its stock, the Council is also "community leader" and regulator to support improved standards in the Private Rented Sector, which includes Houses of Multiple Occupancy and ex-Right to Buy Properties.
- 4.18 The Strategy sets out how the Council will work in partnership with landlords and their representative bodies where possible, but will utilise its regulatory and enforcement role as necessary to ensure people living in the County Borough have access to safe and high quality housing. The Council will continue to make a case for delivery of Housing Renewal activity in support of improving private housing stock within key areas of the County Borough.
- 4.19 The vision of sustainable communities is a theme within the strategy, whilst there remain legal and financial constraints around the role of housing management, there is a focus on recognising that, whilst our communities are mixed-tenure, there are quality of life issues that affect everyone and require partnership approaches to resolve.
- 4.20 In support of new house building, the strategy promotes innovative design solutions and application of technology to ensure homes remain fit for purpose well into the future and can adjust around the changing needs of the tenants or owners to support independent living. This will involve linking with emerging work on Digital Connectivity, which is being developed through the Growth Deal.
- 4.21 Linked to the above, there is a need to ensure that energy efficiency remains a focus in housing provision to reduce the number of people living in fuel poverty and to protect the environment from negative impacts of energy consumption.

## Better Services to Improve People's Lives

- 4.22 The new strategy seeks to identify the type of social landlord the Council aims to be, balancing the business functions and financing of our housing services with the ambition of enabling our tenants to live safe and productive lives as independently as possible in good quality surroundings.
- 4.23 Landlords of all tenures will come under increasing pressure from the continued and emerging impacts of Welfare Reform, including roll-out of Universal Credit and changes in Housing Benefit. In response, the Council will need to work across departments and with partners to ensure that services are in place and able to respond to the housing-support needs of our most vulnerable tenants, which includes older people. The focus will be on prevention rather than reaction, with proactive strategies in place to identify and mitigate impacts on the most vulnerable in our communities.
- 4.24 The new Local Housing Strategy 2018-2023 will identify the Council's statutory duties, such as the prevention of homelessness. It will link across to the new Regional Homelessness Strategy, which is due by the end of 2018.
- 4.25 The strategy intends to outline the Council's aspiration for the well-being of our local communities, as much as the housing units that form them. Estate Management is a key part of the approach required to developing safe, clean and attractive communities and it is our aim to express how Housing Management Staff can provide a positive and enabling environment that fosters well-being and is somewhere that people want to live.
- d) Stakeholder Involvement
- 4.26 Developments in these areas will not be as effective without a place for a strong voice from stakeholders, whether that be tenants, residents or service users. The development of the Strategy has sought to involve as many influences as possible. Full public consultation was undertaken over an eight-week period in April / May 2018 using the Public Services Board's "Your Voice" Hub. A report of the representations received is found in the Background Papers Section of this report and will be made available on the website alongside the published Strategy.
- 4.27 150 people accessed the survey and in summary between 55% and 67% either "agreed" or "strongly agreed", that the draft Strategy they reviewed was likely to achieve the three priorities and so overall, there was no requirement to adjust the form or direction of the draft Strategy.
- 4.28 In July 2018, the Wales Audit Office indicated that it wished to undertake a review on the draft Local Housing Strategy. Over 2 days the auditor met with key Officers from across the Council and Lead Member for Housing to examine the document. Wales Audit Office acknowledged the fact that the examination was of an unfinished, unapproved draft and so only provided informal feedback, which noted that there were improvements that could be made to the draft. As a result, Officers have thoroughly reviewed the documentation and strengthened a number of areas. A consequence of this is that the final document is now significantly longer than first intended. This is not the preferred outcome but is one that takes into account the risk of asking Members to approve a Strategy that fails to satisfy Wales Audit Office feedback.

e) Cross Cutting Themes

4.29 Housing-led regeneration has a key role to play in the County Borough.

- The provision of more housing, whether through new build or conversion and will support economic prosperity by providing opportunities for local contractors at all scales will be able to find opportunities to support new skills development and employment. The availability of suitable housing is key in attracting people into the County Borough with the skills and expertise to further develop and drive our businesses and economy but it is vital to ensuring that people who already have those skills can make a positive choice to stay.
- Provision of good quality, safe housing meets the basic needs of individuals and families and increases the likelihood of them being able to achieve positive outcomes in areas such as health, education and employment, which in turn means they can contribute to the wider economy of the County Borough.
- Delivering the services that meet people's needs also involves opportunities for local skills and employment and where people are able to live more independently, they will be more likely to be able to contribute to the wider economy.

4. The Council has responded to the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 by developing seven Sustainable Planning Principles to be applied within the Council Plan, which include the five listed in the Act.

- Prevention
- Long-term
- Integration
- Collaboration
- Involvement
- Prioritising the most vulnerable
- Welsh culture and language

4.30 As the Local Housing Strategy 2018-23 provides a direct feed into the Council Plan the Sustainable Planning Principles have been incorporated into both the development and delivery of the Strategy and the Action Plan is coded against the relevant planning principle to ensure issues of sustainability and the impact on our future generations are considered during implementation.

4.31 Progress against the Local Housing Strategy 2018-23 will, subject to request, be reported to the Homes & Environment Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis and in order to keep the Strategy as "live" as possible, it will be subject to 6-monthly reviews and predominantly hosted as web-based resource.

## 5. IMPLICATIONS

### 5.1 Policy Framework –

The requirement for a local authority to produce a Housing Strategy is set out in the Local Government Act 2003 and the Housing Act (Wales) 2014. The Local Housing Strategy is key to the delivery of the Council Plan in particular, but not limited to E1, PE2, PL1 and PL3. The Local Housing Strategy will complement other emerging strategies such as the Regional Homelessness Strategy (and local action plan), the Tackling Poverty Strategy, the Economic Prosperity Strategy and the Public Services Board's Wellbeing Plan. The Local Housing Strategy 2018-23 is connected to the emerging Local Development Plan as a means of informing development in the County Borough and will contribute to regeneration work by complementing the Regional Regeneration Plan (HHE/21/18) agreed by Executive Board in May 2018 and the existing Town Centre Masterplan.

## 5.2 **Budget –**

Funding for the delivery of the Strategy has been identified within the Housing General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and their respective Capital Programmes, supported by the utilisation of grant funding. The Autumn Statement included an announcement of the abolition of the Borrowing Cap and the Council is currently taking advice on the steps required to implement this. Partners such as Registered Social Landlords can access their own private finance as well as grant from Welsh Government.

## 5.3 **Legal –**

Section 87 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires Local Authorities to produce Housing Strategies. The Local Housing Strategy is informed by and responds to a number of pieces of legislation, including Housing (Wales) Act 2014, Mobile Homes Act (Wales) 2013, Social services and Well-Being Act 2015, etc.

## 5.4 **Staffing –**

The Strategy has been developed by existing staff within the Strategy & Development Team in the Housing & Economy Department. Delivery of the action plan will be through existing staff in the Council and partners. It is noted that capacity of existing teams is affected by ongoing effects of austerity but the Action Plan has been consulted on to provide assurance that it is achievable.

## 5.5 **Equality/Human Rights –**

Members are advised of their duty to consider the full Equality Impact Assessment, which is available at <http://vmwinsqld/equalityisalive/Menu.aspx> report number HHE/EIA00114/2017. Members of the public can request a copy of the full Equality Impact Assessment from the Contact Officer named in the header box of this report. A summary of the Equality Impact Assessment is attached as Appendix 4.

## 5.6 **Risks –**

There are no specific risks identified.

## **6. CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 The development of the Local Housing Strategy has included many opportunities for consultation with Members, officers from Council departments and external partners. This is covered in the report.
- 6.2 A Member Workshop was held in April 2018 and a report is available in the Background Papers section of this report, which explains how comments and feedback received during this session has been treated. A significant outcome of the workshop was that agreement was reached to modify the first priority theme of “More Housing, More Choice” to “More Housing Choice”. This reflected Member concerns that the original theme might create a perception that the focus was purely on an increase in numbers.
- 6.3 The draft Strategy has been released for full public consultation on the Your Voice Hub. A detail report on the findings, including how individual comments / feedback has been treated is available in the Background Papers Section of this report.
- 6.4 Key partners have had the opportunity to send comments and contribute to the Strategy through specific meetings, and written requests. The development of the Strategy has been reported to the Housing Alliance (all Registered Social Landlords) and the Public Services Board.
- 6.5 The Tenant & Member Partnership has been provided with updates on the Strategy and afforded the opportunity to comment.
- 6.6 The Wales Audit Office carried out an ‘informal’ review of the draft Strategy and met with key officers involved in its production. Its role has been described as a “critical friend” and although no formal recommendations have been made, Officers have identified a number of areas for improvement following this process and have implemented changes to address this.
- 6.7 Overall, the consultation has not resulted in any significant change of direction from the intentions of the proposed Strategy as the priority themes and format have been agreed. The consultation has added significant value in terms of extra detail, inclusion / focus on specific issues and constructive criticism about both presentation and content.

## **7. EVALUATION OF OPTIONS**

- 7.1 **Option 1** - Approve the Local Housing Strategy 2018-23 as presented
- 7.2 **Option 2** - Do not approve the Local Housing Strategy 2018-23 as presented in order to seek revisions to the documents, which would lead to a delay in the Council having a strategy in place to direct housing and housing related services.

## **8. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE COMMENTS**

- 8.1 The development of the Strategy has been reported to various Homes and Environment Scrutiny Committee in April 2017 (HHE/23/17s), November 2017 (HHE/49/17s & HHE/52/17s), December 2017 (HHE/57/17s) and February 2018 (HHE/07/18s).

- 8.2 Members of the Committee have supported the priority themes and proposed format of the Strategy throughout. Following discussion at the meeting in April 2017, Homes and Environment Scrutiny Committee requested that two specific issues be examined in more detail – Empty Properties and the Single Access Route to Housing. These were reported in November 2017, where ongoing work to reduce Empty Properties was supported and commended to the Strategy. In relation to the Single Access Route to Housing, the Committee supported the standing position of the Council, which was not to seek to join the North Wales arrangements but instead, it was agreed that the development of a Common Allocations approach confined to the County Borough was something to be investigated further.
- 8.3 The November 2017 meeting received a copy of the draft one page infogram and concluded that there was insufficient detail included about issues relating to the Private Rented Sector (inclusive of Houses of Multiple Occupancy). The Homes and Environment Scrutiny Committee requested that amendments be brought back to a future meeting. This was done and the draft was supported in the meeting of February 2018, where the draft was also cleared for public consultation.
- 8.4 An Information Report (HHE/41/18) has been provided to members of the Homes & Environment Scrutiny Committee prior to this report being presented to Executive Board. The Information Report included an update on progress since the February 2018 meeting and an overview of the public consultation exercise.

<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>WEBSITE INFO.</b>
Notes from Member Workshop on the Local Housing Strategy	Web	<a href="https://www.wrexham.gov.uk/assets/pdfs/committees/HHE4918-LHS-Member-Workshop-Feedback-Notes.pdf">https://www.wrexham.gov.uk/assets/pdfs/committees/HHE4918-LHS-Member-Workshop-Feedback-Notes.pdf</a>
Report on Feedback from Public Consultation on the Local Housing Strategy	Web	<a href="https://www.wrexham.gov.uk/assets/pdfs/committees/HHE4918-Background-Papers-Public-Consultation-ReportNov18.pdf">https://www.wrexham.gov.uk/assets/pdfs/committees/HHE4918-Background-Papers-Public-Consultation-ReportNov18.pdf</a>