

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

23RD JUNE 2011 6.00 PM

SUBJECT:	<i>HOUSING STRATEGY 2011 - 2026</i>
WARD/S AFFECTED:	<i>ALL</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES</i>
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	<i>COUNCILLOR GEORGE DAVIES</i>
KEY DECISION? (<i>Defined in paragraph 13.3 of Article 13 'Decision Making' in the Council's Constitution.</i>)	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- a) seek member's approval and endorsement of Wirral's Housing Strategy 2011 – 2026 including a strategic housing plan (Appendix one to this report) and:
- b) that Cabinet recommends to Council that the strategy be approved as part of the authority's Capital Programme and Policy Framework.

1.2 Members will be aware that although the development of a Housing Strategy statement is no longer a statutory requirement, it is important that locally Wirral sets the strategic framework for future housing policy and investment requirements. The draft Housing Strategy 2011 – 2026 therefore has been developed to be reflective of this as well as aligning with the Councils' Sustainable Community Strategy and the outcome of both the Wirral wide consultation 'Wirral's future' and the specific consultation undertaken as part of the development of the Strategy.

1.3 At Cabinet on 14th October 2010, Members approved the draft Housing Strategy 2011 – 2026 for public consultation. The initial stage of the consultation process, to test the draft strategy and obtain specific views on all of the key issues which inform housing policies and initiatives for the future, commenced on 22nd October 2010 and ran for a six week period ending on 10th December 2010.

1.4 The consultation process involved a wide range of key stakeholders, members of the public, formal Partnerships and Forums, with initially over 340 stakeholders formally contacted directly to ask for their views. The Strategy and a short questionnaire requesting views and comments on the vision, the key issues identified and any issues that people felt needed to be included in the strategy was also made available on the Councils web site for completion. With the help of staff in the Council's One Stop Shops and Libraries, members of the public were able to complete the questionnaire either on line or in paper format providing key feedback detailing their views and comments on the strategy and the issues identified.

1.5 Over the six week consultation process, 1,369 responses were received, providing a significant amount of feedback to be considered when developing the strategy further. Significantly, 94% (out of the 1263 respondents) answered that they

strongly agreed/agreed with the overall long term vision for housing. There was also a significant majority of respondents who agreed that the seven key issues and priorities identified in the strategy were either very important or important.

- 1.6 Officers in the Housing Strategy Team have subsequently collated and reviewed all of the responses received and have adapted and developed the strategy further to incorporate and respond to the issues the consultation process has raised.
- 1.7 A report was presented to Economy and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14th March 2011, following their request on 24th November 2010 for a further report on the outcome of the consultation and draft Housing Strategy.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

2.1 It is recommended that:

- a) Members approve and endorse Wirral's Housing Strategy Statement 2011-2026 including its strategic housing plan and;
- b) Cabinet recommends to Council that the strategy be approved as part of the authority's Capital Programme and Policy Framework.

3.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 3.1 That Wirral's Housing Strategy 2011-2026 is approved by Members as the strategic framework for delivering housing locally in Wirral aligned to Government policy and local priorities and needs.

4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 The Council's current Housing Strategy is approaching the end of its lifespan and to ensure that locally Wirral sets the strategic framework for future housing policy and investment requirements, a new long term Housing Strategy which will run up to 2026 has been developed. The new Housing Strategy has been drawn together using a variety of evidence to establish housing needs and demand, challenges Wirral faces such as tackling empty properties and reviving the local economy and housing market. It also encompasses a range of comments and has been amended to respond to the suggestions and views identified through the consultation process undertaken during the latter part of 2010. This has ensured the final Housing Strategy is reflective of issues which matter most to local people and that these link to key policy and investment opportunities.
- 4.2 As highlighted in 1.4, the consultation process involved key stakeholders and members of the public being asked to complete a short questionnaire which requested views and comments on the long term vision for the Housing Strategy, the key issues identified as priorities which need to be addressed and gave the opportunity for local people to raise any other issues which they felt needed to be included in the strategy.
- 4.3 Analysis of responses indicated that 94% agreed with the long term vision for the Borough '*To make sure all areas in Wirral are attractive places where people can access a home that meets their need*'. Feedback did however highlight a number of issues including concerns that the vision in its existing format was too challenging and it was not realistic to make all areas in Wirral attractive places to live through the work of the Housing strategy alone however the vision should be

one about housings contribution to making Wirral an attractive place. It was also highlighted that the vision is too simplistic in trying to ensure all people can access a home that meets their needs and this should be more about being appropriate to their needs rather than aspiration.

4.4 The Housing Strategy team has taken on board and considered all of these comments and the vision whilst remaining challenging, has now be revised to take account of local peoples views as follows: ***‘to contribute to making Wirral an attractive place by ensuring people can access quality housing that is affordable and appropriate to their needs’.***

4.5 The draft strategy contains seven key issues which were initially identified as priorities to take forward throughout the life time of the strategy, all of which were developed from a robust evidence base which are detailed in a Technical Appendix to Housing Strategy document. Feedback from the consultation on each of the seven issues has recognised that overall the majority of people agree that these issues were important. This is further broken down by each of the key issues as follows:

80% agreed that *“Responding to changes in the long term population makeup of Wirral, in particular older people”* is important.

86% agreed that *“Increasing the availability of new homes including affordable homes”* is important.

90% agreed that *“Making better use of existing stock to meet the housing need”* is important.

90% agreed that *“Making areas more attractive as places to live through improving homes and providing greater choice”* is important.

83% agreed that *“Reducing fuel poverty in the borough particularly reducing the gap between the borough average and those areas with higher rates of fuel poverty”* is important.

91% agreed that *“Meeting the housing and support needs of vulnerable people”* is important.

82% agreed that *“Supporting the economy through housing programmes”* is important.

4.6 The consultation process also identified a number of key issues which people felt needed to be included or developed further. Specifically these related to:

- the general use and understanding of terminology in the strategy being further simplified for example use of language such as fuel poverty. We have responded to this by both changing language used in the document to be more user friendly and also have included a glossary of terms.
- the provision of supported housing available and that this should be where people want to live. We have recognised in the strategy that supported housing should not solely be about new provision but that this should be part of a wider response to support vulnerable people. We will utilise a range of options alongside new provision and existing supply including carrying out home adaptations and providing low level support to help people to maintain independent living.

- the future of social housing in relation to length of tenancies. Since the consultation on the housing strategy commenced the government has launched its approach to social housing reform and the use of fixed tenancies on the basis that a social tenancy should not necessarily be for life. We have included within the strategy our commitment to produce a strategic tenancy policy for the use and review of fixed tenancies by registered providers to influence how this will be managed locally in Wirral.
- the ability of young people being able to access affordable homes irrespective of tenure. The Strategy has been strengthened to take advantage of opportunities such as the potential for shared tenancies and the use of the private rented sector to give wider choice to young people.
- the development of new homes in relation to the quality of open space, landscaping and space standards. We have included a new section within the strategy that focuses on the work housing undertakes with development control, the Homes and Communities agency, registered providers and private developers in relation to ensuring new developments deliver to quality standards and that housing and planning policies are closely aligned.

All of these issues raised have been incorporated into the strategy to reflect local opinion.

4.7 The Strategy statement is supported by a Strategic Plan. The Strategic Housing Plan has been developed to be a high level overarching plan which is measurable, realistic and achievable. The actions contained within it have been developed to meet the long term objectives of the strategy but will be flexible and responsive to changes in market conditions, new opportunities and also introduce new perspectives as they arise, such as changing legislation and government policy. It is intended that the Plan will be reviewed on a yearly basis to ensure it is responsive to change and also to reflect on what milestones have been achieved in respond to our seven objectives for housing.

4.8 We consider the actions and targets developed to be cross cutting in terms of our strategic themes and as such the plan has been designed with this in mind. Strategic actions, baselines and targets whilst placed under specific themes for ease of understanding and future monitoring, should be considered within the context of each of the seven strategic themes. The Plan includes actions that are short, medium and long term and are supported by targets and timescales. Targets include :-

- Implementing a pilot project to address under-occupation and respond to the population needs of the borough;
- Reviewing existing services such as the Disabled Persons Housing Register, services for people with learning disabilities, young people at risk to both support vulnerable people and make better use of existing stock available;
- Reducing energy consumed by households and making homes warmer through implementing in the region of 120,000 insulations measures through the Borough Wide Insulation Programme;
- Bringing back into use 200 empty homes per year to improve neighbourhoods and delivering 300 units of affordable homes by 2013 to

assist in meeting local needs and contribute to increased income generation via the New Homes Bonus Scheme;

- Preventing and alleviating homelessness by providing support and assistance to 450 per annum.
- Commissioning a review of Homeless Services in Wirral to meet legislative requirements and inform a new Homeless Strategy. (This is the subject of a separate report to Members)

5.0 RELEVANT RISKS

5.1 Without a long term Housing Strategy and Strategic Housing Plan, there is an increased risk of not taking full advantage of new housing policy and investment opportunities to develop and make best use of existing and new housing in Wirral.

6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6.1 There were no other options considered.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 The development of a new 15 year Housing Strategy Statement has involved a two stage consultation process. This report focuses' on the results of the main part of this consultation which specifically tested if the draft housing strategy captured all of the key issues which affect housing policies and initiatives for the future.

7.2 We are publishing the results of the consultation and the revision to the finalised Housing Strategy 2011 – 26 and strategic housing plan on the Council's web site following approval by Cabinet . This will give the opportunity for people to see how the strategy has been shaped and changed to reflect their opinion and for people to continuously be able to provide comments to help shape future policies and strategy updates.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

8.1 The housing strategy consultation process was developed to be as inclusive as possible of a wide range of stakeholders, voluntary, community and faith organisations and members of the general public. The Housing Strategy 2011-2026 will as it is delivered, continue to be inclusive.

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

9.1 The development of the Housing Strategy 2011 – 2026 has been lead by officers from the Housing Strategy team, who will also carry out the ongoing monitoring and review of actions in the strategic housing plan.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The Housing Strategy 2011-2026 recognises the needs of vulnerable people, and reinforces the need to address inequalities in the housing market and improve access for all.

11.2 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

(a) Is an EIA required?

Yes – this is currently being completed

(b) If 'yes', has one been completed?

No, this is currently being completed.

12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 The Housing Strategy is a key document supporting the delivery of housing in Wirral. The strategy recognises the need to ensure that both new and existing homes are in the borough are of good quality and provides the evidence base for setting policy and innovative ways of working to address the key housing issues identified.

13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no specific planning implication arising from this report, however the housing strategy will need to be closely aligned with the councils emerging Local Development Framework to further support the delivery of the Boroughs housing priorities.

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APPENDICES

REFERENCE MATERIAL

None

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Economic & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee report ' <i>Housing Strategy 2011-2026 Consultation</i> '	14 March 2011
Economic & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee report " <i>Draft housing strategy and update on consultation process</i> ".	22 Nov 2010
Cabinet report " <i>Wirral strategic housing market assessment update & affordable housing viability assessment – key findings and policy implications for Wirral</i> "	14 Oct 2010