

**PERFORMANCE AND MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
22 MARCH 2005**

Report of the Head of Housing Services

ITEM 8 REVIEW OF CHARNWOOD'S HOUSING STRATEGY 2005-2010

Purpose of the Report

To update the Committee on the review of the Housing Strategy and the timetable for completion.

Recommendation

That the Committee note the content of the report.

Reasons

To endorse the work currently being undertaken to review the Housing Strategy.

Policy Context

Meets most of the key aims in the Corporate Plan, particularly "Decent Homes and Neighbourhoods" and "A Clean and Healthy Environment".

Background

All housing authorities have a duty to assess local housing requirements and establish policies and programmes to address local housing problems in a formal Housing Strategy. While many authorities have traditionally focused on addressing affordable housing issues, there is now an expectation for local Housing Strategies to look at the wider housing market and supply and demand issues across all tenures.

The Sustainable Communities Plan (2002) states that all local authorities should separate their landlord function from their strategic housing responsibilities. Best Value reports show that landlords' concerns often dominate local authorities' thinking on Housing when they should be considering strategies for whole local housing markets. Separation helps to ensure that proper attention is given to both the strategic and landlord functions.

The Local Government Act (2003) reinforces this requirement by placing a statutory duty on local authorities to produce 'fit for purpose' local housing strategies to ensure that regional, sub-regional and local strategies and priorities work well together and deliver an integrated programme.

The strategic housing role is being shaped by a number of key policy developments and drivers of change. These include: effective understanding, management and balancing of local housing markets with a shift towards broader housing market analysis of housing needs assessments, greater strategic working between authorities and partners to provide more joined-up responses, and collaborative approaches

towards investment options with the aim of developing a SMART action plan to deliver these outcomes.

Charnwood, in common with all local housing authorities, has for many years produced a local Housing Strategy, and historically the process was linked to the allocation of Central Government funding to carry out the authority's Housing Investment Programme (HIP).

At Charnwood work is now underway to review and update the current Housing Strategy and ensure that it will be "signed-off" by the Regional Government Office (GOEM) as "fit for purpose" by the deadline date of 31 July 2005. In performance terms, in order to achieve "fit for purpose" sign-off by GOEM, the Strategy will be assessed by GOEM and scored 1-3 against ten features. It must achieve scores of 3 (i.e. 100%) against all ten features, namely: Corporate Context, Local Priorities, Wider Priorities, Options, Partnership Working, Needs Analysis, Action Plan, Progress against Previous Action Plan, Resources and Accessibility. Once the Housing Strategy is "fit for purpose" the authority is exempt from producing annual reviews, although as the Strategy is a key working document the authority will nevertheless wish to keep it under continuous review.

During 2003 a review of the current document was undertaken by GOEM. We were found to be "fit for purpose" in two of the ten criteria, with room for improvement in a further three and not "fit for purpose" in the remaining five criteria. This would produce an overall score of 17/30. GOEM have given a clear review of what needs to be done and will continue to work with Charnwood to achieve this.

The review should examine key features of the local housing market, the condition of the housing stock across all sectors and tenures, the role of housing in community cohesion and wider issues such as neighbourhood renewal. Priorities should be consistent with regional priorities as well as with the wider objectives in the local Corporate Plan. Increasingly the extent of any central funding to meet local priorities is linked with the extent to which local priorities reflect agreed regional priorities.

The objectives and priorities should be agreed with local stakeholders, and to this end the consultation event "Who needs housing?" held at Loughborough Town Hall on 11 February 2005, to which all Borough Councillors were invited, was a major opportunity to obtain feedback from our wider stakeholders.

The Consultation Day was attended by over 100 delegates representing a wide range of partner agencies within the Charnwood Strategic Partnership and beyond. Delegates were invited to identify and agree, through workshop discussion, three priorities from each of nine emerging key themes in the Strategy and the feedback from the event will be incorporated in the final Strategy for Charnwood.

As a further check that the Housing Strategy fully reflects the views and ideas of stakeholders put forward at the Consultation Day we invited volunteers to join a "virtual panel". Panel members will be asked to look at drafts of different chapters

within the Strategy to ensure that the views of stakeholders have been represented and to effectively validate the document.

The timetable for the remaining work on the Strategy is as follows:

By 23 March the various draft chapters will be circulated to relevant internal and external partners for comment and feedback.

By 8 April comments returned from partners.

By 13 April comments returned from “virtual panel”

28 April Cabinet considers draft Housing Strategy.

June - Cabinet and Council approve final version of the document for sign-off by GOEM.

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