

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL**

**21 SEPTEMBER 2011**

**REPORT OF THE CABINET**

Recommendation Made: 13 July 2011

**1. DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY 2011/12-14/15**

**1.1 Issue for Decision**

1.1.1 To consider the draft Housing Strategy 2011/12-2014/15, including the recommendation of the Housing Consultative Board that it be adopted.

**1.2 Recommendations Made**

1.2.1 That Council approves the draft Housing Strategy 2011/21-2014/15 for public consultation.

1.2.2 That the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services and the Head of Housing and Community Services be delegated to amend the strategy as required following consultation.

**1.3 Reasons for Recommendation**

1.3.1 In Maidstone, People Matter and so do the homes and communities where they live. The Housing Strategy is an overarching plan that guides the Council and its partners in tackling the major housing challenges facing the borough. The Strategy contributes to the key aim stated in the Sustainable Communities Strategy of "Developing Maidstone borough's urban and rural communities as models for 21<sup>st</sup> century quality and sustainable living."

1.3.2 The ambition behind this strategy is to ensure that all people in the Borough have access to good quality homes that are affordable for them and meet their needs. Every council has a responsibility to understand what matters most to its local communities and to respond to this through investment, service planning and delivery. We also have to take into account national and regional aspirations and sometimes this requires a balance with local priorities

1.3.3 Our Strategic Housing Role: The transfer of our housing stock to Golding Homes (formerly Maidstone Housing Trust) in February 2004 has enabled the Council to develop its strategic housing role. Over the past 15 years, central government legislation and guidance has encouraged local authorities to take a more strategic approach to the provision of housing, so encouraging better 'place-shaping', and developing a deeper understanding of the relationship between housing, planning and the economy.

1.3.4 The Housing green paper, *Homes for the Future: More Affordable, More Sustainable* emphasised the strategic role that housing services play in delivering new affordable housing and in 'place shaping'. High performing local authorities (3 and 4 stars and 'excellent') such as Maidstone are currently exempt from the duty to renew their housing (and homelessness) strategies, although there is an expectation that such authorities will wish to keep them valid and up to date. Given the economic climate, and the changes in grant funding regimes and mechanisms, there is a compelling case for ensuring that all housing authorities have a housing strategy which is kept up to date.

1.3.5 In the 5 years since our last Housing Strategy was published many new or revised central and regional Government housing and social policies have been issued for consultation and implementation. These include recent Acts of Parliament, Government sponsored reviews, regional and sub-regional policy changes and have been taken into account in the creation of this strategy.

1.3.6 Research and consultation: As well as a review of our existing council plans and strategies, several pieces of research were undertaken to provide evidence for the Strategy:

Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA);  
Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA);  
Gypsy and Traveler Accommodation Assessment (GTAA);  
Private House Condition Survey (PSH).

1.3.7 Extensive consultation took place with housing stakeholders, providers, developers and clients, including Housing Sounding Board, a local housing conference and a domestic violence awareness event. All of this information was used to inform the draft Strategy.

1.3.8 Since the draft Strategy was created, consultation has been undertaken with the Housing Consultative Board, the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and relevant teams within MBC and changes made according to their feedback.

1.3.9 Members of the Housing Sounding Board and the LSP have been asked for their comments regarding the content of the Strategy. It is also intended, if Cabinet approves, that the Strategy is released for public consultation. Results of all feedback will be collated and a decision taken as to whether changes are required as a result.

1.3.10 Our Housing Challenges – Summary

1.3.11 From the analysis of the SHMA, the SHLAA, the stock condition survey, a review of regional, county and local policy and input from stakeholders and partners, the key housing challenges in Maidstone were identified and translated into the following priorities, each of which contains one or more outcomes to be reached by 2014/15;

Priority 1- Increase choice and improve the quality of life for vulnerable people;

Priority 2-Develop sustainable communities;

Priority 3-Improve our existing homes;

Priority 4-Improve access to housing advice and work to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping in Maidstone.

1.3.12 The Council can only achieve the priorities contained in this Strategy by working in partnership with other statutory and voluntary organisations. This strategy has been developed with the Housing Sounding Board that comprises a broad range of stakeholders from housing providers, elected Members, KCC Supporting People & Adult Services, the Primary Care Trust and voluntary sector.

#### 1.3.13 Our achievements 2005-10

1.3.14 During the 5 year life of the previous Housing Strategy much was achieved which made a real difference to peoples' lives. These achievements are described at Appendix A. Achievements that relate to the new priorities and outcomes will be used in the new strategy to demonstrate work that has been successfully carried out.

### 1.4 **Alternatives considered and why not recommended**

1.4.1 The Council could choose not to adopt a new Housing Strategy and instead continue to refresh the 2005-10 strategy. However, the 2010 election and the subsequent forming of the Coalition Government have led to a number of housing reforms which need to be addressed. A new Council Strategic Plan has been written to take these changes into account and new corporate priorities agreed. It is important that the Housing Strategy aligns with these priorities.

1.4.2 If a new Housing Strategy were not agreed this would adversely affect our community leadership and strategic housing roles and would make effective engagement with our partners much more difficult. In addition the Housing Strategy supports the Core Strategy for planning by providing additional information and policy direction that will assist developers in choosing Maidstone as an area to invest in.

1.4.3 The Homes and Communities Agency would be unlikely to direct funds to Maidstone if they could not clearly see an up to date and coherent vision for the area.

### 1.5 **Background Papers**

Housing Strategy 2005-2009

Housing Strategy Review 2007

Homelessness Strategy 2008-13

Maidstone Sustainable Community Strategy 2009

Maidstone Economic Strategy

Affordable Housing DPD

Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2009  
Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2009  
Gypsy and Traveler Accommodation Assessment 2007  
Private House Condition Survey 2009  
Kent and Medway Housing Strategy 2011  
Kent Supporting People Strategy 2010  
Draft West Kent Local Investment Plan 2011-15