

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL**

**2 MARCH 2016**

**REPORT OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON**

**17 FEBRUARY 2016**

**MAIDSTONE HOUSING STRATEGY 2016-2020**

**1. Issue for Decision**

- 1.1 The current Housing Strategy 2011-2015 expires this March, so the Council needs to put in place a new Housing Strategy for the period 2016-2020. The Maidstone Housing Strategy is a fundamental and critical piece of work which helps to identify the main housing issues and key challenges for the local area that the Council and its partners need to address over the next five years.
- 1.2 The Maidstone Housing Strategy is an overarching plan that guides the Council and its partners in tackling the major housing challenges facing the Borough. It sets out the priorities and outcomes that the Council wishes to achieve and provides a clear strategic vision and leadership in an uncertain economic climate. The Strategy contributes towards the Council's corporate priorities for Maidstone, 'to keep the Borough an attractive place for all and to secure a successful economy'. The Housing Strategy is also intrinsically linked with other plans and strategies of the Council shown within the Maidstone Housing Strategy at **Appendix A**.
- 1.3 It is proposed that the new Strategy looks ahead for five years, covering 2016-2020. The Chancellor's Autumn Statement in 2014 included measures to extend capital investment to the current Affordable Homes Programme 2015-2018, for a further two years, up to 2019-2020. It is unclear, however, as to what will be in place after 2019-2020. The Council's Strategic Plan also runs from 2015-2020, so it is not considered appropriate to set a longer term than five years for the new Maidstone Housing Strategy, so that future direction of travel, both nationally and locally, can be responded to.
- 1.4 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. It must also take into account national and regional aspirations and sometimes this requires a balance with local priorities.

## **2. Recommendation Made**

- 2.1 That the Maidstone Housing Strategy 2016-2020 be adopted by full Council.

## **3. Reason for Recommendation**

- 3.1 It is considered that the best course of action to take is for the Council to adopt a new Housing Strategy for Maidstone for the next five years (2016-2020). The Maidstone Housing Strategy is a fundamental and critical piece of work which helps to identify the main housing issues and key challenges for the local area the Council and its partners need to address over the next five years.
- 3.2 The adoption of a new Maidstone Housing Strategy will clearly set out the Council's priorities in tackling the housing challenges in the Borough, and provides strategic vision and leadership in an uncertain economic climate. It will help to improve clarity and certainty for investors and strengthen public/private sector partnerships in order to support its delivery.
- 3.2 The Council's Strategic Plan also runs from 2015-2020, so it is not considered appropriate to set a longer term than five years for the new Maidstone Housing Strategy, so that future directions of travel both nationally and locally can be responded to.
- 3.3 Following local elections, together with the development of many national and regional policy initiatives, it is considered appropriate to review the Maidstone Housing Strategy during 2018 to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.
- 3.4 The Maidstone Housing Strategy 2016-2020 will launch in April 2016, and thus this review would take place half-way through the life of the Strategy. The review will focus on the Action Plan to ensure that it can respond to future directions of travel both nationally and locally.

## **4. Alternatives Considered and Why Not Recommended**

- 4.1 The Committee could have chosen not to adopt a new Housing Strategy for Maidstone and instead continue to refresh the 2011-2015 Strategy, or not have one at all post 2015-2016. However, to not agree a new Housing Strategy would mean a diminution of the Council's community leadership and strategic housing roles and would make effective engagement with partners much more difficult. It would also mean that the Homes and Communities Agency and other potential investors would be much more likely to direct funds away from Maidstone if they could not clearly see an up to date and coherent vision for the area.

## **5. Appendices**

- 5.1 Maidstone Housing Strategy 2016-2020 – **Appendix A.**