

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**13 JULY 2011**

**REPORT OF HEAD OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Report prepared by Ellie Kershaw**

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

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To consider and comment on the draft Housing Strategy 2011/12-2014/15.

1.2 Recommendation of the Head of Housing and Community Services

1.2.1 That Cabinet approves the draft Housing Strategy 2011/21-2014/15 for public consultation and then on to Council.

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).

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.

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.

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.

### 1.3.7 Our Housing Challenges – Summary

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.

1.3.8 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.

### 1.3.9 Our achievements 2005-10

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 Alternative Action 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 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.5.1 The Housing Strategy forms part of Priority 2, For Maidstone to be a decent place to live and Priority 3, Corporate and customer excellence.

1.5.2 The strategy also contributes to the vision and long term objectives stated in the Maidstone Sustainable Community Strategy 2009-2020

***"We want Maidstone Borough to be a vibrant, prosperous 21st century urban and rural community at the heart of Kent, where its distinctive character is enhanced to create a safe, healthy, excellent environment with high quality education and employment where all people can realise their aspirations".***

#### 1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1 In developing this strategy we have taken into account our research and consultation to develop a broad-based document that takes account of the present economic situation, whilst looking ahead to recovery.

1.6.2 The delivery of this strategy will depend upon effective partnership working between the statutory and voluntary sector and listening to and involving service users. Housing is a cross-cutting issue, affecting many areas of wellbeing and new partners need to come on board and recognize the importance of tackling the challenges identified. This will require an effective strategic partnership that focuses on delivery of successful outcomes across services, combined with robust risk assessment.

1.6.3 There are a number of risk factors that could impact on the delivery of the Housing Strategy. These include:

- **The effects of the public sector grant reductions and continued economic downturn:** the resulting reduction in number of affordable houses delivered, increase in unemployment with mortgages more difficult to obtain and increase in mortgage arrears and house repossession actions;
- **The long-term future of the CLG homelessness grant** which funds our rent deposit scheme and other tenancy sustainment activities. Currently we receive £80,000 per year

which in 2010/11 enabled the Council to assist over 100 households into private rented accommodation. The removal of this grant would severely compromise the Council's ability to prevent homelessness and increase our costs in related areas e.g. use of bed & breakfast;

- **Recruitment and retention of staff:** The need to recruit and retain experienced and effective staff remains an issue across agencies and the high cost of housing locally has a bearing upon this. In addition the Housing Options team relies on voluntary workers through the Vision Project in order to meet the increasing demand for our services. Should this source of assistance no longer be available the Housing Options Team would have difficulty in providing the same level of service with its salaried establishment;
- **The contraction of the private rented** sector as landlords are unable to service more expensive loans;
- **Population and household growth** in line with Maidstone's changing demographics of an ageing population;
- **Supporting People funding** in the longer term and concern that under the funding arrangements for Local Area Agreements the budget will no longer be ring-fenced to housing support and could result in budgets being used for non-housing services resulting in current supported-housing projects contracting;
- **Pressure from the increasing prison population** – Maidstone having a high number of prisons and the County's only probation hostel;
- **Complexity of the client base:** This is likely to be a major factor as support and other services are stretched across agencies to meet the needs of vulnerable families and people with special needs such as alcohol, mental health, learning disability, young people and ex-offenders;
- **Diversity:** The impact of immigration and changing ethnic mix has had only a limited impact on services to date but this can be expected to change over the next few years and appropriate responses need to be developed;
- **Pressures on the ability of the Council to continue to fund** the affordable housing capital programme due to interest rate changes or lower than forecast capital receipts.

## 1.7 Other Implications

### 1.7.1

1.	Financial	X
2.	Staffing	
3.	Legal	
4.	Equality Impact Needs Assessment	X
5.	Environmental/Sustainable Development	
6.	Community Safety	
7.	Human Rights Act	
8.	Procurement	
9.	Asset Management	

1.7.2 Financial – The main financial implications arise through the level and availability of grant funding from two Government bodies – the Homes and Communities Agency and the Department for Communities and Local Government, across the following three service areas:

1. Affordable housing
2. Housing advice and homelessness
3. Private sector housing improvement

The Council’s ability to fully address our housing challenges is dependent on the level of Government grant received – see Risk Assessment section 1.6.

1.7.3 Equality Impact Needs Assessment – The Housing Strategy potentially affects all population sections and groups. An EQIA will be completed following consultation with relevant stakeholder groups.

## 1.8 Relevant Documents

### 1.8.1 Appendices

Appendix A- Housing Strategy 2011/21-2014/15

Appendix B- SCRAIP from the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Appendix B- Our achievements 2005-2010

1.8.2 Background Documents

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

**IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?**

Yes

No

If yes, when did it first appear in the Forward Plan?

September 2010

This is a Key Decision because: It affects residents in all wards in the borough.

Wards/Parishes affected: Potentially all wards could be affected.

