

Forward Plan reference number: Not applicable

Report title: Consultation on Essex County Council Housing Strategy	
Report to: Lee Heley, Head of Housing Growth	
Report author: Dan Baker, Housing Growth Lead	
Date: 7 th February 2020	For: Decision
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County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To agree to commence consultation on proposals to prepare an Essex County Council (ECC) Housing Strategy.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To consult on the proposal to prepare and publish an ECC-owned housing strategy.
- 2.2 To consult using a *Draft Consultation Summary Document (Appendix 1)* which sets out the proposed focus and goals of the emerging ECC housing strategy across three strategic priority areas: *Growing Essex while protecting the best of the county*; *Enabling people to live independently throughout their life*; and *Supporting people to have a stable home*.
- 2.3 To consult for six weeks.
- 2.4 To develop a final draft strategy and action plan informed by the comments received through the consultation. To note that the approval of the strategy will be subject to a separate decision.

3. Summary of issue

- 3.1 The provision of the right amount, type and quality of housing is an important enabler of many of ECC's Strategic Priorities including: to enable economic growth, support older people with care needs and other vulnerable groups to live independently, reduce health inequalities and create great places to grow up live and work.
- 3.2 We are proposing to develop a Housing Strategy for Essex County Council to outline the actions we will take to achieve our strategic priorities and how we will work with our partners in the wider housing system.
- 3.3 ECC is not a strategic housing authority, but we play an important role in the complex housing system in Essex, through activities including:
 - Planning, funding and delivering infrastructure to support housing delivery;
 - Working with borough, city and district partners and government on proposed garden communities, new settlements and locally led regeneration projects;

- Through Essex Housing as a developer of new open market, specialist and affordable homes on surplus public sector land, helping to meet housing need across the county;
 - Coordinating, commissioning and market shaping activity to ensure housing is available for vulnerable people and those with special requirements; and
 - Strategic coordination on crosscutting issues e.g. homelessness prevention, improving health and wellbeing, and integration support for resettled refugees.
- 3.4 The Housing Strategy provides a way of signalling ECC's ambitions on housing, articulating the work already being done and opportunities to do more, and setting a framework for how ECC will engage with our housing partners.
- 3.5 A *Draft Consultation Summary Document* **Appendix 1** has been prepared as a way to engage internally and externally on the proposed focus, goals and high-level actions of an ECC housing strategy. The document sets out three Strategic Goals:

ECC will work with our housing partners to support their ambitions for housing, so that over the next 15 years collectively we will see:

Strategic Goal 1 - Growing Essex while protecting the best of the county;

- The delivery of new homes which meet **Garden Community** principles across planned new garden communities in Essex
- Every part of Essex has the **policies** and **land supply** in place to deliver the number of **new homes** - including **affordable homes** – expected in line with local aspirations
- Increased investment secured to deliver supporting **infrastructure** that enables sustainable development of *new* communities and meets *existing* communities' needs
- Planning, delivery and maintenance of housing in Essex that helps to realise wider aims including to – transition to a **zero-carbon economy**, create **beautiful homes and places**, and **embed sustainable and active travel**.

Strategic Goal 2 – Enabling people to live independently throughout their life

- An increase in the availability of well located, well designed mainstream housing that is flexible to people's changing needs and enables more Essex residents to remain in their homes and live independent and healthy lives for longer
- ECC service users who require it are able to access high quality specialist and supported accommodation
- Adaptation and digital technologies widely adopted through co-design with residents to support people to live independently and healthily for longer and allow people to remain in their home

Strategic Goal 3 – Supporting people to have a stable home

- Partnership working to end the need for people to sleep rough in Essex, in line with the government's national ambitions; and
 - A whole system focus on homeless prevention to stem the use of inappropriate temporary accommodation and end B&B and hotel use.
- 3.6 The summary document has been developed in line with officer feedback from across ECC. Through this process a number of opportunities have been highlighted for further consideration as part of developing the action plan.
- 3.7 The summary document has been developed in line with comments from the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth. A copy of the summary document has been shared with ECC Cabinet Members and amended in line with their comments. Views from Essex city, borough and district housing officers have been sought as part of the drafting process for the summary document. The summary document has incorporated changes based on comments made by members of ECC's Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.8 Consultation will focus on posing the questions included in the summary document with activity during the six-week consultation to include:
- Publish strategy summary document on ECC website – promoting feedback from partner districts, developers, housing associations etc.;
 - Consultation through existing housing officer meetings;
 - Convening meeting of borough, city and district Housing portfolio holders to seek comments
 - A further session at ECC Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee; and
 - Internal officer workshops at ECC to develop strategy/action plan;

4. Options

Option 1 – Do nothing

- 4.1 This option would see ECC's work around housing continue in the absence of an overarching ECC housing strategy. There is no statutory requirement for ECC to develop a housing strategy. This option has been discounted as it would not allow for the anticipated benefits of developing a strategy – a way of signalling ECC's ambitions on housing, articulating the work already being done and opportunities to do more to engage in housing to meet our corporate priorities, and setting a framework for how ECC will engage with our housing partners.

Option 2 – Develop an ECC-owned Housing Strategy in consultation with partners

- 4.2 This is the preferred option as it will allow for further exploration of the potential benefits of developing an ECC-owned housing strategy.

5. Next steps

- 5.1 We will work with external partners alongside colleagues across ECC to collaboratively develop the final strategy and action plan.
- 5.2 We will develop a final strategy and action plan for agreement and publication in 2020.

6. Issues for consideration

6.1 Financial implications

6.1.1 The consultation on the draft strategy and development of a draft final strategy and action plan will be carried out using existing budgeted resources and will not require any additional funding. The final strategy and action plan will require an additional decision to be approved. Any resource implications identified for inclusion in the final strategy and action plan will be considered as part of this subsequent decision.

6.2 Legal implications

6.2.1 The decision to start a consultation can be taken by an ECC officer with delegated powers in the constitution or as authorised by an officer named in the constitution.

6.2.2 Any consultation needs to be carried out when the proposal is at a formative stage, include such information as is necessary to allow an intelligent response and be open for a reasonable time. The output of the consultation must be considered by the person or body making a decision on the proposal.

7. Equality and Diversity implications

7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:

- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful.
- (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

7.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).

7.3 The equality and diversity implications of the strategy will be considered as part of the wider consultation process. Policy work to robustly assess the equality and diversity implications will be completed as part of the development of the final strategy and action plan. An equality impact assessment will be developed and included as part of the decision to agree the final strategy and action plan.

8. List of appendices

Appendix 1 Essex County Council Housing Strategy: Draft Consultation Summary Document

I approve the above recommendations set out above for the reasons set out in the report.	Date
Lee Heley, Head of Housing Growth	10th February 2020

In consultation with:

Role	Date
Councillor Tony Ball, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth	3rd February 2020
Mark Carroll, Executive Director for Place and Public Health	13th January 2020
Executive Director for Finance and Technology (S151 Officer) James Cook (on behalf of Nicole Wood)	29th January 2020
Director, Legal and Assurance (Monitoring Officer) Paul Turner	6 February 2020