

*PART A

Report to: *Cabinet*
Date of meeting: *Monday 1 December 2014*
Report of: *Housing Section Head*
Title: *Presentation of Watford Borough Council Housing Strategy (2015-2020) for approval*

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 A new Housing Strategy and Action Plan has been drafted to cover the period 2015-20. While there is no statutory duty to produce a Housing Strategy, this is a key strategic document which will have an important role in supporting delivery of the Local Plan and providing an overarching direction for the council's other housing related plans and strategies.
- 1.2 The development of the Housing Strategy has involved extensive evidence analysis and consultation, with a particular emphasis on securing an integrated approach with other emerging corporate strategies such as the Local Plan II and the forthcoming Economic Development Strategy.
- 1.3 The Housing Strategy has been developed with considerable input from the elected Members participating in Housing Policy Advisory Group (HPAG) and Planning Policy Advisory Group (PPAG) and other Members attending open joint meetings of these groups.
- 1.4 The associated Action Plan will be reviewed on an annual basis in order to assess what has been achieved and where priorities may need to be adjusted in the light of emerging evidence, opportunities or resource constraints. This report seeks delegated authority for this annual review to be approved by the Portfolio Holder for Housing.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Watford Borough Council Housing Strategy 2015-20 is approved for publication.
- 2.2 That annual reviews of the Action Plan be delegated to the Portfolio Holder for Housing.

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Report approved by: Alan Gough, Head of Community and Customer Services.

3.0 **DETAILED PROPOSAL**

3.1 Watford is a small and densely populated borough which has seen significant demographic, economic and tenure related change in recent years. The task of maintaining an excellent housing offer to support sustainable growth and ensure a good quality of life for residents is a formidable challenge. It is the role of the Housing Strategy to identify the following:

- Housing related needs and aspirations
- The housing related interventions that should have a high priority in improving the housing offer to meet needs and aspirations
- The resources and opportunities available to implement these

3.2 The Housing Strategy will support delivery of the Local Plan and form the overarching direction for housing-related strategies, policies and plans such as the Nomination Policy, Homelessness Strategy, Tenancy Strategy and Private Sector Renewal Policy.

3.3 The vision is for “A Housing Strategy which will improve the well-being of local people by making Watford a better place to live, with sustainable and healthy homes, and a balanced, vibrant community”.

3.4 The scope of the Strategy is broad, with a focus not only on increasing the supply of housing but also on improving conditions within the existing housing stock and supporting complementary activities aimed at promoting economic growth, health and wellbeing.

3.5 The **Themes** identify particular areas of activity in which housing-related interventions will take place. **Priorities** will identify the activities within each theme which are likely to produce the most beneficial impact. **Tasks** within the action plan are the translation of the priorities into action.

3.6 The themes are as follows:

Theme 1: Improving the supply of housing

Theme 2: Improving the condition and management of housing

Theme 3: Support to specific client groups where intervention is required

Theme 4: Key locations

Theme 5: Wellbeing, economy and health

Theme 6: Communication

3.7 The priorities have been selected based on:

- A high level of recommendation from the evidence base and/or the consultation

- Identified gaps in provision for particular groups
- Identified ability of certain projects/schemes/services to have a high impact on improving Watford's Housing Offer
- The availability of resources to implement the task

3.8 The priorities and tasks reflect the importance of addressing property condition in addition to encouraging sustainable new development. They recognise the council's role in influencing new development through evidence based dialogue with developers and registered providers and the importance of engaging with and communicating with the community in order to promote housing opportunities and maximise the potential benefits to health and the economy. The tasks also reflect the important role of the council's partners including private landlords, registered providers and developers in addition to voluntary and statutory agencies both inside and outside of our own borough. While some of the activities are borough wide, others reflect locally concentrated activity in recognition of the diverse nature of our borough and the major development projects being undertaken by the council and our partners at the current time.

3.9 The Housing Strategy includes a methodology for annual dataset compilation which will identify the council's preferred housing mix to be used in order to inform and influence planning decisions.

3.10 It is a priority to develop a housing related Communication Strategy in order to manage client expectations, engage the community in issues around sustainable growth and promote initiatives which will support economic growth and promote good health.

Key messages will include:

- Watford Borough Council wants to prioritise local homes for local people and to support economic growth.
- Watford is pro-growth, but the growth must be sustainable.
- Watford takes a planned approach to growth.
- Watford may need to look beyond its own boundaries for resources to meet the needs of its residents.
- Watford Borough Council seeks to encourage empowerment and self-reliance among residents in resolving their housing solutions.
- Watford Borough Council recognises its important role in supporting vulnerable people with limited capacity to resolve their housing problems.
- Watford Borough Council wants to work with a wide range of partners – statutory, voluntary and private – in order to meet housing needs.
- Watford Borough Council recognises that housing has a very significant role to play in improving health, well-being and economic prospects in the town.

4.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 **Financial**

4.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there are no financial implications as a result of this report.

4.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)

4.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the legal implications are contained within the body of the report and the Strategy.

4.3 Equalities

4.3.1 An analysis of the effects of the Housing Strategy and Action Plan upon protected characteristic groups has been carried out. The analysis has drawn on monitoring information and the results of research projects. We are satisfied that the outcomes of the Housing Strategy will be positive in terms of furthering equality aims. The analysis of the effects of the Housing Strategy is available for examination if requested.

4.4 Potential Risks

Potential Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Overall score
<i>Lack of capacity or skills to undertake actions within the Action Plan</i>	2	3	6
<i>Unforeseen lack of resources to undertake actions within the Action Plan</i>	3	3	6
<i>Significant changes to the legislative or operating environment during the lifetime of the Strategy.</i>	3	3	9
<i>Those risks scoring 9 or above are considered significant and will need specific attention in project management. They will also be added to the service's Risk Register.</i>			

4.5 Staffing

4.5.1 No changes to staffing are proposed.

4.6 Accommodation

4.6.1 There are no impacts on accommodation.

4.7 Community Safety

4.7.1 The Strategy will see continuing engagement with Community Safety objectives in both the development of new homes and improvement to existing stock condition and the quality of surroundings in Watford.

4.8 Sustainability

4.8.1 The Strategy promotes sustainable growth and energy efficiency.

Appendices

- Appendix A Housing Strategy Introduction (Executive Summary)
- Appendix B Contexts – National
- Appendix C Contexts – County and London
- Appendix D Contexts – Local
- Appendix E Needs analysis
- Appendix F Action Plan
- Appendix G Glossary

Background Papers

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report. If you wish to inspect or take copies of the background papers, please contact the officer named on the front page of the report

- Equalities Impact Analysis

File Reference

- None