

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	17 October 2017
Subject:	Housing, Renewal and Homelessness Strategy Review Monitoring Report
Report of:	Peter Tonge, Head of Community Services
Corporate Lead:	Robert Weaver, Deputy Chief Executive
Lead Member:	Lead Members for Built Environment and Health and Wellbeing
Number of Appendices:	One

Executive Summary:

The Housing Strategy 2017-21 was developed by an Overview and Scrutiny Working Group and it was adopted by Council in January 2017. The comprehensive Housing Strategy incorporates renewal, as well as two distinct sub-strategies: the Homelessness and Prevention of Homelessness Strategy and the Tenancy Strategy.

The Strategy contains 4 key priorities to meet the housing needs of the Borough. These are:

Priority 1: Increasing the supply of housing.

Priority 2: Prevent homelessness.

Priority 3: Meet the housing needs of specific groups.

Priority 4: Improving the health and well-being of local people.

Annual action plans are agreed by Executive Committee with regular reporting to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for review of achievements and future challenges. The action plan priorities focus on developments in the service rather than service performance which is outlined in the performance tracking.

This report presents Committee with a summary of the key activities that have been achieved in the last nine months (January – September 2017) against the 2017-21 action plan. A more comprehensive update of actions achieved against each of the action plan targets can be found at Appendix 1.

Recommendation:

To CONSIDER the achievements made to date in respect of the outcomes identified in the Housing, Renewal and Homelessness Strategy Review Action Plan.

Reasons for Recommendation:

The Homelessness Act 2002 and Local Government Act 2003 require all District Councils to develop a strategy that sets out the Council's policies, commitments and programme for a wide range of housing matters. Following development of the Council's Housing Strategy 2017-21, the Overview and Scrutiny Working Group requested that outcomes identified in the strategy action plan be monitored and regular updates be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Resource Implications:

Staff time and Member time. Resource implications will be met from existing budget allocations and, where they cannot, will be subject to a growth bid within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and a separate report to Members.

Legal Implications:

The Council is required to have a Housing and Homelessness Strategy in place so that its duties under the Homelessness Act 1996 (as amended) and Local Government Act 2003 can be met. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to publish a strategy setting out how it will address homelessness and the Localism Act 2011 places a duty on all local authorities to produce a Tenancy Strategy.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 is expected to be implemented in April 2018 and further actions are likely to be added following the publication of the Local Authorities code of guidance (expected Autumn 2017). The current strategy incorporates the Homelessness Reduction Act, and the action plan is renewed annually to enable the strategy to flexibly respond to legislative changes.

Risk Management Implications:

The review of activities against the strategy action plan has identified that the aims and objectives of the strategy are being delivered in a timely way. This significantly reduces the risk of not meeting statutory housing and homelessness duties.

Performance Management Follow-up:

The Housing Strategy 2017-2021 and associated action plan should be reviewed in January 2018 to ensure that it remains fit for purpose in the future.

Environmental Implications:

There are positive environmental implications in the delivery of the strategy objectives e.g. the strategy supports the delivery of new energy efficient homes and energy efficiency improvements in the existing housing stock across the borough.

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

1.1 The Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and Local Government Act 2003 require all District Councils to develop a strategy that sets out the Council's policies, commitments and programme for a wide range of housing matters. The Housing Strategy 2017-21 was developed by an Overview and Scrutiny Working Group and was adopted by Tewkesbury Borough Council in January 2017. A review of the activities against the strategy action plan has been undertaken as requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Working Group.

2.0 UPDATE AND KEY ACTIVITIES

2.1 The following is a summary of the key activities, identified within the Housing Strategy 2017-21 which have been achieved January – September 2017:

2.1.1 Priority 1 – Increasing the supply of housing (for full details see action plan)

P1.1 Alternative construction methods are being assessed with SVHS development colleagues to deliver new affordable housing on council owned land.

2.1.2 *P1.2 and 3: Detailed affordable housing policies for the Tewkesbury Borough local plan* are being drafted along with guidance notes determining the use of commuted sums.

2.1.3 *P1.4: Empty homes:* An assessment by the council tax team and counter fraud unit resulted in visits to 88 properties identified as long term empty within the borough. Their visits have established that 26 of these have come back into residential use. The evaluation of the remaining properties will commence when the permanent Environmental Health Manager is in post.

2.1.4 *P1.6: Evaluate potential for promotional activities in private sector:* Visits commenced to lettings agents who have let properties to tenants with deposits from the Borough Council to clarify the Council offer to landlords. The advent of Universal Credit across our borough between December 2017 and July 2018, however, will necessitate a new offer to flex with the change in benefits delivery. A meeting for the district Housing Managers and the DWP lead for our area is being arranged to establish how we will incentivise landlords to accept low income residents in the future. Promotional activities will re-commence when the assistance we can offer and the mechanisms for payment are clear.

2.1.5 Priority 2 – Homelessness and Homelessness Prevention (for full details see action plan)

2.1.6 *P2.1 Improving advice process in homelessness prevention* – this action became increasingly important as the number of residents approaching us has increased from 600 per annum in 2013/14 – to 1479 in 2016/17 and the advent of the new homelessness reduction legislation will increase the emphasis on homeless prevention advice and activities. Our suite of advice paperwork for residents was updated to ensure that all necessary bespoke advice as well as a clear outline of how customers are expected to participate can be delivered thoroughly and efficiently.

2.1.7 *P2.2 and P2.7: Prevention Protocol with landlords* – contact has been made with the local social landlords to:

- share the Welfare reform Rental Arrears home visit proforma developed by the Financial Inclusion Partnership. We have also forwarded:
- the mapped 4 universal credit areas in the borough with introduction dates;
- the mapped 2 BRMA (housing benefit) rates in the borough; and
- our intention to introduce a mutual exchange register for those affected by welfare reform.
- and reiterate that Housing Services should be advised of possession action in order to prevent homelessness wherever possible.

2.1.8 *P2.6 – Achieve 60% in the peer review on the DCLG Gold Programme.* Tewkesbury Borough Council Housing Services were peer reviewed in June 2017 by the DCLG and the Forest of Dean District Council and achieved **73%** in the peer review. The borough is now able to make an application for its first Bronze award.

- 2.1.9** *P2.8 and P2.9 – stop the use of bed and breakfast (b and b) and procure effective temporary accommodation:* The average length of time homeless applicants are staying in b and b has fallen from 87 days (2012/13) to 37 days (2016/17) but the numbers of clients placed has risen over the same period from 67 per annum to 99 households per annum. The cost of nightly payments has also risen by 175% over the same period. A paper outlining the challenges and possible temporary accommodation solutions and additional homeless prevention initiatives was submitted to Senior Management Team and a Housing Working Group will be convened in October 2017 to work through these for viability.
- 2.1.10** Tewkesbury Borough Council has recently taken over as the lead partner on the Places of Safety Project for victims of domestic violence for the county. This project now offers 10 properties for victims of violence across the county (as an alternative to bed and breakfast). The project aims to deliver 12 properties but progress in finding the properties has been slow. Two Tewkesbury Borough households have accessed accommodation through the project this financial year to date.
- 2.1.11** The Sanctuary Scheme/Target hardening project has also been recommissioned and extended until July 2018. This scheme has been very successful in preventing the use of bed and breakfast for victims of violence who wish to remain in their own homes.
- 2.1.12** *P2.10 Solutions for high risk/high support/multiple needs homeless households -* Along with the other District Councils, the County Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group, Tewkesbury Borough was successful in securing SIB funding to provide a 'Housing First' project for up to 110 chaotic homeless residents across the county. The partnership has now awarded the contract to P3 – a homeless charity. The project will be operational in the next month.
- 2.1.13** **Priority 3 Meeting the housing needs of those who need it most (for full details see action plan).**
- 2.1.14** *P3.3 Establishing a local connection policy to ensure development via rural exception is prioritised for needs of local community.* The drafting of the policy has been finalised and is now with planning policy and due to be completed by December 2017.
- 2.1.15** **Priority 4 Improving the health and well-being of local people (for full details see action plan)**
- 2.1.16** *P4.2 Help to insulate, adapt and maintain homes –* the Home Energy Conservation Act report has been submitted and the warm and well contract awarded. Tewkesbury borough is participating in a County project review of disabled facilities grants process and provision is underway
- 2.1.17** *P4.3 Respond within three days to complaints about housing conditions:* 10 housing condition service requests were received and all received responses within three days.
- 2.1.18** *P4.4 Reduce poor quality housing by taking appropriate action to deal with HHSRS category 1 hazards.* The number of private sector housing complaints are very low in the Borough, with only six being received and investigated in the last quarter. One complaint resulted in the identification of six category one hazards, leading to a prohibition order being served. This order has been breached and prosecution is pending.

2.1.19 A comprehensive update on the activities achieved to date against each of the objectives outlined in the strategy, can be found in Appendix 1 (Housing Strategy 2017-21 Action Plan Update).

3.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

3.1 None – this is an update on progress made to date.

4.0 CONSULTATION

4.1 None – updates have been provided by the relevant Service Managers.

5.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

5.1 Housing Strategy 2017-21.

6.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

6.1 The main documents driving Government Housing Policy and Legislation are:

- National Planning Policy Framework 2012.
- Homelessness Act 2002 and Housing Act 1996 & 2004 (Housing Standards).
- Local Government Act 2003.
- Housing and Regeneration Act 2008.
- Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (Housing grants, loans and home improvement assistance).
- The Future Home Improvement Agency (CLG 2009).
- Equality Act 2010.
- Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England (Nov 2011).
- Localism Act 2011.
- The Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013.
- Welfare Reform Acts 2012 and 2016.
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- Housing and Planning Act 2016.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

7.1 None directly associated with this report other than staff and Member time. Any resources associated with the actions in the strategy will form part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and Asset Management Plan. Resources implications will be met from existing budget allocations and, where they cannot, will be subject to a growth bid within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and a separate report to Members.

8.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

8.1 The strategy includes considerations of sustainability and energy efficiency in addition to the social and economic implications.

9.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)

9.1 Housing is a basic human need. An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken prior to the Council's adoption of the strategy in September 2016, this is still relevant.

10.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

10.1 The Housing Strategy 2017-21 has been approved and adopted by Council in January 2017.

Background Papers: Existing Strategies and Policies are available on the Council's Website.

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Appendices: 1. Housing Strategy 2017-21 Action Plan Update September 2017.