

Cabinet

29 January 2020



Title	Housing Strategy 2020-2025		
Purpose of the report	To make a recommendation to Council		
Report Author	David Birley, Housing Strategy & Policy Manager		
Cabinet Member	Councillor Amar Brar	Confidential	No
Corporate Priority	Housing		
Recommendations	Cabinet is asked to recommend to Council to approve the Housing Strategy 2020-25 as appended to this report.		
Reason for Recommendation	The Housing Strategy 2020-25 sets out how the Council will ensure that local residents have an appropriate and affordable range of housing options to meet their needs. The strategy sets out three key areas of focus, and is based upon the findings of an independent review of the Council's performance in affordable housing delivery.		

1. Key issues

- 1.1 The Council currently has a Housing Strategy which covers the period 2014 to 2019. Whilst it is no longer a legal requirement to have a Housing Strategy, Spelthorne has continued to publish one given the importance that access to suitable, affordable housing is locally. Housing is also a priority within the Corporate Plan 2016-19, and affordable housing delivery is one of the main drivers of the Capital Strategy.
- 1.2 Through a project grant-funded by the Local Government Association (LGA) Housing Advisers Programme, an independent review of the Council's affordable housing delivery has been carried out. This review recommended:
 - (a) Affordable housing delivery through the Council – not to pursue the development of council-owned residential accommodation. This is mainly due to the regulatory framework which the Council would need to gear itself up to deliver.
 - (b) Affordable housing delivery through housing associations – to pursue a balanced approach with housing associations, with key recommendations to:
 - i) Diversify the range of housing associations we work with
 - ii) Encourage housing association development locally, which may involve financial incentives

- iii) Engage with housing associations who are seeking to dispose of stock locally
- (c) Affordable housing delivery through Knowle Green Estates – to focus internal resources on this area, including exploring the role of joint ventures, and whether or not to register the affordable housing delivery arm with Homes England to more easily access grant funding.
- (d) Affordable housing delivery through the private sector – a range of recommendations to:
 - i) Review how the Council manages viability assessments from developers seeking to develop uncompliant levels of affordable housing, including providing more training for officers and members on this issue
 - ii) Review standard wording in section 106 agreements to allow Knowle Green Estates to purchase affordable homes delivered in this way
 - iii) Consider the use of viability review mechanisms to capture benefits of improved viability if economics of project improves post-permission
 - iv) Consider lowering the threshold at which developers must make contributions to affordable housing delivery
 - v) Consider putting together a policy of using Compulsory Purchase Orders to deliver stalled development sites or bring back empty homes into use for affordable housing
 - vi) Consider setting up financial incentives for owners of empty homes to bring them back into use for affordable housing
- 1.3 A working group was set up to consider the findings of the LGA report, and to consider which of the main elements / recommendations of the report should be included in the draft framework of the next five-year strategy. This working group consisted of officers of all levels from across the Council, and included the Portfolio Holder for Housing.
- 1.4 The draft framework of the new strategy was open to public and stakeholder consultation in July and August 2019. Comments received as part of this consultation revealed:
 - (a) Uncertainty around the role of Knowle Green Estates in housing delivery
 - (b) Suggestion that we could be more ambitious in our approach
 - (c) Public desire to see clear measures to monitor progress
 - (d) Concerns around meeting social infrastructure needs as well as new affordable homes
 - (e) An overriding need for social housing locally, rather than affordable or market housing
 - (f) Some feedback about the consultation method
- 1.5 As a result of the consultation, some changes were made to the final draft which is presented for approval:

- (a) Instead of having four strategic priorities, the final version now has three, in order to emphasise the role of Knowle Green Estates in the delivery of affordable housing in Spelthorne.
 - (b) Explicit recognition of the need for social infrastructure, referencing work already underway on the Local Plan consultation, and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Task Group.
 - (c) Strengthened reference to need for social housing, although recognising the severe financial challenges on housing providers to provide this form of tenure.
- 1.6 The final strategy contains three strategic priorities, and an associated Action Plan:
 - (a) Enabling the delivery of more affordable homes across a range of tenures
 - (b) Promote independence and wellbeing to enable residents to remain living independently
 - (c) Prevent homelessness and rough sleeping
- 1.7 The Action Plan contains a range of targets, projects and initiatives which work towards achieving the aims of the strategy.
- 1.8 It is proposed that the monitoring of the Action Plan is carried out by the Council's Strategic Housing Group.
- 2. Options analysis and proposal**
- 2.1 The Housing Strategy 2020-25 is the product of work which has been carried out by officers over the past twelve months. Throughout this time, Members have been kept abreast of the emerging strategy. The framework of the strategy has been subject to public and stakeholder consultation, the result of which has contributed to the final document.
- 2.2 The Council is required under the Homelessness Act 2002 to have a Homelessness Strategy, which is currently out of date. The revised Homelessness Strategy cannot be approved until the parent Housing Strategy is refreshed. The Council is at risk of censure from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) if it fails to revise its Homelessness Strategy in the immediate future.
- 3. Financial implications**
- 3.1 A number of the proposed actions within the strategy have a resource requirement which cannot be met using existing staffing levels. The request for this resource is being requested separately.
- 3.2 Individual projects within the strategy may have financial implications in the future, for example depending on the type of empty properties scheme is implemented. Where these costs cannot be met using existing financial resources, additional budget will be requested at the time when it is required.
- 4. Other considerations**
- 4.1 An Equality Impact Assessment of the proposed strategy has been carried out and has not identified any required adjustments or mitigating actions. A copy of this assessment has been appended to this report.

5. Timetable for implementation

- 5.1 Should Council accept Cabinet's recommendation to approve the strategy at its meeting on 27 February 2020, then it is anticipated that the strategy will be in use from Monday 2 March 2020.

Background papers: None

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Spelthorne Housing Strategy 2020-25

Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment for the Housing Strategy 2020-25