



# Northumberland

## County Council

### CABINET

DATE: 6<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2019

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### **HOUSING STRATEGY FOR NORTHUMBERLAND 2019 - 2021**

**Report of** Paul Johnston, Interim Executive Director, Place

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor John Riddle, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing & Resilience

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#### **Purpose of report**

The following report presents members with the draft **Housing Strategy for Northumberland 2019-2021** providing details of the proposed strategic objectives for the Council's Housing Service for the following three years.

#### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that members approve the draft Housing Strategy, which outlines Northumberland's housing vision, priorities and ambitions.

#### **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to the "We want you to feel Safe, Healthy and Cared for" [LIVING] " priority included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2021 which states

*Having a decent roof over your head is fundamental to this health and well being. None of you should be forced to live on the streets, or in a "home" that is a health hazard or physically impedes independence... We acknowledge that this will mean increasing the supply of both affordable and specialist supported housing, including extra care housing for older people. This remains a priority for us but any new building needs to be in the right place, at the right scale and for the right end-user.*

#### **Key issues**

1. The current Housing Strategy for Northumberland was developed in 2012, in place from 2013-2018 and now needs to be refreshed to reflect current corporate

priorities, regional and national Government priorities and the current financial climate.

2. The Corporate Plan 2018-2021 reflects the aspiration of the Council's leadership to support the delivery of affordable housing whilst supporting rural communities and encouraging community-led housing
3. The Northumberland Local Plan currently being developed will set a minimum requirement across the whole county. Planning policy on housing numbers and specifically affordable housing the delivery of which will be supported by the Housing Strategy.
4. As agreed by Cabinet in April, a four-week consultation has been undertaken across the council and with partners and stakeholders. Twenty one responses were received all of which were generally supportive of the Strategy with only minor amendments being made.
5. A Delivery Plan profiling the plans for delivery of the Council's aspirations will be produced separately for discussion and approval by members following approval of the draft strategy.

## **Background**

The Council's Housing Strategy 2013 -2018 detailed 3 key strategic priorities for the delivery of suitable homes for Northumberland residents. These were;

1. Priority 1: - Affordable and Quality Housing
2. Priority 2 - Healthy People
3. Priority 3 - Sustainable Economies & Communities

We achieved a great deal during the period of our last Housing Strategy, helping to shape and inform the quality, quantity, and choice of housing, and providing support to residents in Northumberland. The following is a summary of some of the achievements during the life of the previous strategy:

### **Priority 1 - Affordable and Quality Housing**

- The Council's Housing Development programme, working in partnership with Private Registered Providers enabled the delivery of 1082 affordable homes to rent, of which 296 are council owned properties
- To enable increased homeownership a total of 426 affordable homes to buy or part buy have been delivered through the use of Discount Market Sales Units where their value is set at 70% of the open market value or Shared Ownership where the tenant buys a percentage of the property and rents the remaining percentage from a Registered Provider.
- A successful bid of £1.314m to the Government's Community Housing Fund has enabled the Council to work in partnership with local communities to develop Community Led Housing.

- A range of energy efficiency measures such as the installation of solar photovoltaic panels have been installed on the Council's houses to improve the energy efficiency of its properties. As part of this project, NCC installed solar photovoltaic panels on 706 of their domestic properties
- A total of 902 empty properties have been brought back into use
- Using Empty Dwelling Management Orders the Council has brought nine properties back into use that had been empty for two years or more. They are managed by the Councils' Housing Management team.
- The arms-length housing management company Homes for Northumberland was brought back into the Council bringing over 8,500 homes directly under the Council's control

### **Priority 2 - Healthy People**

- A framework was developed and introduced to provide a greater range of supported accommodation for vulnerable young people, meaning that the right homes are sourced to meet their individual needs
- The Council's Common Allocation Policy has been amended and updated twice to reflect changes in government policy such as welfare reform and changes to the homelessness legislation
- Two additional supported accommodation services have been commissioned to address the needs of our most chaotic single homeless people and for young people with low support needs.
- A total of 1379 homeless applications were processed assisting 957 homeless households to be rehoused
- A total of 4077 households were prevented from becoming homeless through targeted prevention initiatives
- A joint scheme with the NHS in Haltwhistle delivered 12 'extra care' apartments
- 27 Refugee families (121 people, 48 adults, 73 children) have been supported to resettle in Northumberland
- The Gypsy Roma Traveller Service has managed 391 Unauthorised Encampments which included a total of 2016 trailers.
- To meet the housing needs of our GRT community the council has built 6 new pitches between Hartford Bridge and Lyneburn Cottages

### **Priority 3 - Sustainable Economies and Communities**

- Through the Private Rented Property Accreditation scheme there have been 785 properties accredited, ensuring that the condition of a property meets certain standards and is suitably managed properly.
- Linking into the property accreditation scheme a Tenant Accreditation scheme has been developed to give landlords a free reference-checking service with a view to making the tenancy more sustainable and avoiding issues of anti-social behaviour and non-payment of rent. So far there has been 65 successful applicants
- To enable people to access to affordable housing in the private rented sector a Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme has been developed and assisted 86 households into private rented accommodation and ensuring that the private rented sector remains a sustainable housing option

- A total of 902 empty properties have been brought back into use through giving advice and assistance and utilising measures such as a lease and repair scheme and empty homes loans.

The ambition in the strategy was to provide an additional 1300 new affordable homes over the period of the strategy, stipulating who could access this housing, and the assumption that the properties must remain affordable into the future. During the period covered by the Housing Strategy there have been 1,405 affordable housing completions.

### **Housing Strategy for Northumberland 2019 - 2021**

**Our vision is to improve access and supply of affordable housing by delivering the right type of homes in the right places for both existing and future communities.**

The new strategy supports the Council's aspirations for housing growth and the delivery of the Northumberland Local Plan which states;

*Our strategic approach to housing provision is underpinned by the Government's NPPF requirement to positively seek opportunities to meet our identified needs for housing, significantly boosting the supply of housing to help support wider opportunities for economic growth while enabling sufficient flexibility to quickly adapt to changes in circumstances that may occur*

Our ambitions will be achieved by extending housing choice across Northumberland through the delivery of homes for existing and future communities and to support the Northumberland economy, alongside providing well-designed and affordable homes to meet the diverse needs of an ageing population.

The updated Housing Strategy supports the delivery of the Council's Corporate Priorities and the delivery of the principle within the Northumberland Local Plan that having a decent home is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of everyone living in Northumberland.

The priorities identified within the updated strategy are;

1. Growing Our Communities
2. Supporting our Residents
3. Improving Homes and Communities

### **Priority 1 - Growing our Communities**

**Developing homes to meet the needs of residents and aspirations of the Council through the provision of affordable housing - *We want you to love where you live [Enjoying]***

Investing in building new homes creates and supports local jobs and businesses therefore the availability of the right type of housing in the right places is key.

The Council is committed to the delivery of 1000 new council-owned homes across Northumberland during the life of the strategy, recognising the needs of our ageing population and rural communities.

The delivery of affordable housing is important, but it is recognised that the delivery of all types of housing will support the wider economic growth and community benefits. Government guidance states that in order to create mixed and balanced communities affordable housing should be provided on-site and integrated with the market housing wherever possible. The Northumberland Local Plan supports this guidance stating that a minimum of 20% of homes on new permissions will be expected to be provided as affordable housing product and that on-site affordable housing provision will comprise of 50% affordable homes to rent and 50% affordable home ownership products.

The Housing Strategy supports that we will seek to secure affordable housing on all planning applications for 10 or more units. In the Northumberland Coastal Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty the contribution is expected to be on all developments of 5 or more units. Affordable housing will be secured through Section 106 planning obligation agreement and dependent upon the latest Strategic Housing Market Assessment and a number of other conditions such as viability and need.

## **Priority 2 - Supporting our Residents**

### **Supporting vulnerable groups and providing specialist housing for older people and those with support needs - *We want you to feel safe healthy and cared for [Living]***

Northumberland has an ageing population with the number of the over 65's set to increase by 42.4% by 2031<sup>1</sup> which is greater than predicted for the rest of the North East at 37.2% and England 41%. This presents challenges to make sure older people are properly housed and supported.

Information taken from the Director of Public Health Annual Report (2017) states that approximately 3,000 people report that they have housing needs, and 800 wheelchair users are thought to be living in accommodation that is unsuitable to their needs. Furthermore, around 34,000 households in Northumberland have at least one family member with a physical disability; half are over 65 years of age. Housing provision for an ageing population and households with disabilities and other long term conditions and ensuring affordability are key areas for the strategy actions.

There will be a need to ensure that our own housing stock as well as homes provided by developers and Registered Providers are suitable and adaptable to changing needs as well as being affordable and in the right locations. This is supported by the main objectives outlined in the **Northumberland Extra Care and Support Housing Strategy (2018)**.

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<sup>1</sup> Know Northumberland Issue 26 – Population and Health March 2018

The Council's **Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy (2019 -2021)** sets out the priorities and future actions for tackling homelessness over the next three years. Future levels of homelessness will be influenced by the wider economic and social environment and tackling these issues comes at a time when the Council is faced with making significant budget savings.

The Homelessness Reduction Act came into force in April 2018. The aim of the Act is to reform the homelessness duties placed on local authorities, placing greater focus on preventing and relieving homelessness. These new duties require a cultural change across the homelessness services which support residents to find the best solutions to prevent or resolve their homelessness.

The Council will ensure services are delivered with a renewed strategic focus on preventing homelessness and rough sleeping, through the development of a specific strategy which identifies the resources, prevention and relief activity and the supply of settled and temporary accommodation to meet local needs.

### **Priority 3 - Improving Homes and Communities**

#### **Making better use of existing housing stock - *We want to be efficient, open and work for everyone [How]***

Empty and derelict properties are a wasted resource that could be better used to relieve homelessness and address housing needs. Empty homes can also have a negative impact on their surrounding communities.

Consequences of long term empty properties can include attracting crime, thereby reducing the value of neighbouring properties, being an eyesore, costing time and money to local authorities and being costly for the owner to maintain. There are clear economic and social benefits in overcoming these problems by returning empty homes to occupation. To address these issues in Northumberland a number of initiatives are currently being delivered by the Private Sector Housing team with funding secured from Homes England. By 2021 a total of 35 empty properties will be brought back into use through the following schemes:

- **Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO)** - Through the use of EDMO powers 30 long term empty properties will be brought back into use. The Council will then manage the property for a period of up to seven years
- **Purchase and Repair Scheme** - Under this scheme 5 properties that have been empty for more than six months will be purchased, repaired and managed by the Council.

As part of our drive to meet housing demand, achieve sustainable communities across the county and secure lifetime homes we will work to ensure the best use of existing homes across all tenures in the County.

- When appropriate we will use statutory enforcement powers to enforce the legislation to improve housing standards and ensure the health, safety and welfare of all private sector tenants
- We will promote landlord self-regulation in the private rented sector through the Northumberland County Council Property Accreditation Scheme and the Landlord Forum

The Private Sector Housing Strategy for Northumberland 2015-2020 outlines Northumberland County Council's plans to meet people's housing needs by maintaining and improving the existing private housing stock in the County, contributing to the delivery of the Council's Corporate priorities.

### **Consultation and amendments to the Strategy**

Following consent by Cabinet a consultation exercise was undertaken with partners and stakeholders on the draft Strategy. The consultation period closed on 31 May 2019.

Feedback on the draft Strategy was obtained by:

- Emails sent to Town and Parish Councils
- Emails sent to partners both external and internal
- Informal presentation at the Housing Partnership meeting – a stakeholder group attended by social housing providers.
- Online access to the consultation was also made available through the Council's website

The consultation asked the following questions:

- Are the priorities we have identified appropriate?
- Are there any additional client groups that we need to identify?
- Are there any other areas of work you would like to see included?

A range of responses were received from a mixture of Town and Parish councils, Registered Providers, individuals and other council departments. The responses mainly showed support for the Strategy and there were no formal objections.

Comments received from Planning Policy have been included and ensure that the draft Housing Strategy conforms with the draft Local Plan. The majority of suggestions were for the use of alternative wording and to amend some figures.

The final Strategy is appended to the report for consideration by Members.

## Implications

<b>Policy</b>	Supports the delivery of the Corporate Plan and Local Plan
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	Additional / new revenue or capital investment will be required to deliver the aspirations within the strategy. Costs will be determined as part of the delivery plan development. At its budget meeting on 20 February 2019 the Council approved the creation of an Investment Reserve which will allow £22.5 million of new investment in Council Housing up to 31 March 2024
<b>Legal</b>	The strategy meets the legal obligations determined by relevant legislation
<b>Procurement</b>	Any procurement identified for new development of capital works will be procured following appropriate regulations.
<b>Human Resources</b>	none
<b>Property</b>	Details the council's ambitions for housing services delivery, both in social housing & private housing, for the next 3 years. This is likely to lead to an increase in council-owned stock.
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	As part of the consultation an EIS will be completed to ensure that fair access to housing for all residents is considered.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	none
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	none
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	Enables provision of suitable accommodation for all residents
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	The strategy recognises the need for consideration of Modern Methods of Construction and energy efficiency to contribute to carbon reduction
<b>Wards</b>	All

### Background papers:

As set out within the draft Strategy

### Appendices

Draft Housing Strategy 2019-2021 (appendix 1)



**Report sign off.**

***Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:***

	initials
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