

Version Number:

BRIEFING REPORT

Environment and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 12 February 2021

Report Title: Housing Consultation update

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1. Introduction and Policy Context

1.1. In July 2020, Overview and Scrutiny committee were presented with the Vulnerable and Older Persons' Housing Strategy which was produced by the Strategic Housing service. At the time, this draft strategy was in the process of public consultation following Cabinet approval to consult.

1.2. In October 2020, Strategic Housing's draft Tenancy Strategy was approved for external consultation by Cabinet, as well as the decision to present the outcomes of the consultation to committee members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

1.3. This report provides a summary of the consultation responses and the amendments which have been made to both strategies. The Vulnerable and Older Persons' Strategy has now been amended following consultation and is due to be imminently approved in line with the delegated authority outlined within the respective Cabinet report. Amendments are being made to the draft Tenancy Strategy with a view to submit for formal adoption following the implementation of the new committee system.

2. Background

2.1. Vulnerable and Older Persons Housing Strategy - Members of the Environmental and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee were presented with the draft strategy in July 2020, following Cabinet approval to consult on a revised draft strategy in May 2020. Consultation took place between 18th May 2020 and 10th August 2020. This was an extended period due to the COVID restrictions to ensure that everyone received an opportunity to comment.

2.2. The aim of the strategy is to provide an updated version, following a review of the evidence base and the strategic priorities set out in the 2014 strategy, ensuring that it remains relevant and applicable. In addition, consideration was also given to the local and national policy frameworks, which could affect service delivery.

2.3. The revised strategy gives a clear indication of the housing needs of a number of client groups and outlines the strategic outcomes, which are as follows:

- People are supported to live in their own homes independently for longer
- When required, people can receive the support they need in a wide range of specialist, supported accommodation within the Borough
- People are able to make informed choices about the accommodation, care, and support options within Cheshire East

2.4. Tenancy Strategy - The draft strategy was approved by Cabinet for consultation in October 2020 and was circulated to a range of stakeholders including Members, Town and Parish councils, Housing Providers, and residents via an online survey/questionnaire.

2.5. The Tenancy Strategy sets out the matters that registered housing providers must consider when they are preparing their own tenancy policies. This can include:

- the types of tenancies that they will grant
- the circumstances under which different tenancies are granted
- when to grant 'fixed-term' tenancies and for how long, and
- the circumstances where a further tenancy is granted following the expiry of a fixed-term tenancy.

2.6. The objective of the new draft strategy is to ensure the best use is made of Cheshire East affordable housing stock to meet local housing need and to

benefit vulnerable households, contribute to strengthened communities, and enable households to make realistic choices based on their own circumstances.

2.7. Consultation for the Tenancy Strategy took place between 29th October 2020 and 18th January 2021

3. Briefing Information

3.1 Due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, advice was taken from CEC Legal Services to determine a suitable method of engagement with the consultation process. Both strategies were subject to 12 weeks consultation each, comprised of a wide range of engagement activities to ensure adequate opportunity for responses. Reports outlining the consultation responses are appended to this document.

Vulnerable and Older Persons' Housing Strategy

3.2 The Vulnerable and Older Persons' Housing Strategy was sent to all Members, all Town and Parish Council Clerks within Cheshire East, Registered Housing Providers and 3rd sector organisations who may have an interest in the draft strategy, as well as a comprehensive press release and social media campaign by CEC Communications to make the public aware of the consultation. The online survey was also listed on the Council's website.

3.3 Responses were received either via the online survey, or as an email to officers where further comment could be provided. In total, there were 32 responses via the online survey.

3.4 Responses could be specific to different client groups included within the strategy, to allow those with relevant knowledge and interest to not have to respond to the full document. Some headline responses from the consultation are included below:

- 52% of respondents felt the scope of strategy was good, 26% thought it was average and 22% felt it was not good.
- For older adults, whilst 75% thought the evidence base was either good, or gave no opinion, just over 50% felt the actions wouldn't be effective in achieving the priorities.
- For mental health, 78% felt the evidence base was good, but only a third felt the actions would be effective to achieve the priorities.
- For learning disabilities, it was positive to see that all respondents felt the evidence base was accurate, however only 40% of respondents felt the actions would be effective.

- 3.5** One of the most consistent comments across a number of client groups was in relation to the effectiveness of the actions for each client group, and whether they would address the issues outlined. As such, an overhaul of the action plan was completed and now forms part of the amended strategy. This provides significantly more information, as well as outcome measures and anticipated completion dates, to give the reader a clearer understanding of the process CEC officers will undertake.
- 3.6** Another area which has been significantly improved is in relation to supported living accommodation. This type of accommodation is relevant for a number of cohorts including learning disability, autism and mental health. Additional data was retrieved post-consultation to clearly outline the current provision by location, as well as the client group and whether the units were shared accommodation, or a single occupancy unit. The learning disability and mental health sections have been updated with this data.
- 3.7** As well as the above, additional data for a development pipeline of new supported living units was accessed and incorporated into the strategy. This breaks down development by cohort and location and allows for a clearer strategic view on where Cheshire East Council are keen to see developments, and how they should be delivered.
- 3.8** As requested at July 2020's OSC, information was added regarding the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups. An update has been included to the introduction of the strategy, and additional paragraphs have been included in a number of individual chapters to provide a more tailored overview of the impacts of COVID on that particular group, as well as the local authority's response.

Tenancy Strategy

- 3.9** The Tenancy Strategy was subject to the same rigorous consultation process as the Vulnerable and Older Persons' Strategy, totalling 12 weeks and responses received via an online survey/questionnaire.
- 3.10** Similar to the Vulnerable and Older Persons' Housing Strategy, 32 responses were received, consisting of 31 responses via the survey, and 1 as a direct email to officers. Overall comments for the strategy were very positive, as below:
- 74% agreed the strategy is relevant
 - 70% agreed the strategy is good
 - 63% agreed the strategy is comprehensive
- 3.11** There were a mix of comments received during the consultation which referred to issues that weren't within the remit of a Tenancy Strategy. These mainly included references to private rent amounts, which this strategy doesn't relate to.

Whilst the comments were welcomed, these didn't form part of any amendments to the document.

3.12 Similarly, comments were made around the grounds for eviction for tenants within social housing. Concerns were raised by some responders regarding anti-social behaviour, and how these should be managed by relevant agencies. It wasn't felt necessary to include responses to these in the amendments for the strategy as housing providers will have their own procedures for tackling ASB within their housing stock. ASB can constitute a legal ground for eviction and a court must award possession of the property back to the housing provider, subject to them issuing the correct Notice Seeking Possession Order. Rent arrears were also raised, perhaps more relevant an issue now due to the potential for impacts on finances during COVID. The strategy clearly states that housing providers should make use of a Pre Action Protocol for rent arrears to seek arrears resolution, rather than ending any Fixed Term tenancy.

3.13 Amendments which are to be made to the strategy include updated Local Housing Allowance (LHA) figures to give more updated information, and additional work is ongoing regarding the types of tenancies issues for those fleeing domestic abuse. This particular amendment is to be managed internally by CEC officers, ensuring that those fleeing domestic violence are able to access safe and secure tenancies. Meetings to discuss this are currently ongoing, and the strategy will be suitably amended following this.

4. Implications

4.1. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications for the Vulnerable and Older Persons' Housing Strategy. The Tenancy Strategy is a statutory document which the local authority must publish. However, Registered Housing Providers only need to take due regard to the Council's ambition for tenancies when they are devising their own in-house tenancy procedures.

4.2. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications for either Strategy. Any workstreams included within the Vulnerable and Older Persons' Housing Strategy will be met within existing budgets, and there is no additional financial ask from either the local authority or from stakeholders

4.3. Human Resources Implications

There are no human resources implications for either Strategy. Any workstreams included within the Vulnerable and Older Persons' Housing Strategy will be met within existing staffing resources.