

Agenda Item: 13

Report for:	Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting:	25 January 2012
PART:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	STRATEGIC HOUSING UPDATE REPORT
Contacts:	Julia Hedger – Strategic Housing Group Manager Jack Burnham, Housing Strategy and Development Team Leader Luke de Kretser, Housing Strategy and Partnerships Lead Officer
Purpose of report:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To summarise the updates in national policy and their impacts on local policy and the proposed timeline for updating relevant policies 2. To update members on the development programme for the Council's affordable housing policies.
Recommendations:	<p>That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee comments on the direction of policy and supports the proposed timeline for developing Council policy and the following recommendations :-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not to issue Flexible Tenancies on DBC stock until the Strategic Tenancy Policy and any linked policies have been adopted by Cabinet. 2. To expect Affordable Rent properties to be let following the council's existing Allocations Policy and following existing nominations agreements. 3. To write the Council's Housing Strategy as a live document that contains key points from the suite of DBC housing policies.
Corporate and IDP objectives and benefits:	<p>This project contributes to Affordable Housing.</p> <p>The benefits it will deliver are: a clear policy position and action plan for updating the Council's strategic housing documents.</p>
Implications:	<u>Legal</u>

	This document will provide a steer on the position of members on issues that are not currently covered in policy.
Risk implications:	There is a risk of not having a clear policy position that could be challenged at appeal and in day to day operations.
Equalities implications:	Not required at this stage however EIA will be completed for each policy when required
Health and safety implications:	N/A
Sustainability implications:	N/A
Monitoring Officer/S.151 Officer comments:	<u>Monitoring Officer</u> <u>Section 151 Officer</u>
Consultees:	Mark Gaynor -Corporate Director, Housing and Regeneration James Doe – Assistant Director, Housing and Regeneration
Background papers:	Localism Bill Government Housing Strategy National Affordable Housing Framework 2011-15

1. Introduction

This report lays out two areas where new government policy has left a gap in our existing policies. The report then goes on to provide an explanation of how we are proposing to implement a series of policies and strategies.

All of the points raised in sections 2 and 3 are going to be addressed in the near future by strategies such as the Strategic Tenancy Policy, the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document and the overarching Housing Strategy. These imminent strategic documents will go through the full consultation process and will then be subject to approval by Cabinet.

An indicative timeline for the new policies is attached as Appendix A to this document.

2. Flexible Tenancies

Flexible Tenancies were introduced by the government last year as a way for social housing providers to manage their stock better and regain possession of a socially funded property at a given time. The passage of the Localism Bill to an Act on the 15th November 2011 also gives Local Authorities the power to grant flexible tenancies.

It is recommended that Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) will not issue Flexible Tenancies on its stock until their Strategic Tenancy Policy and any linked policies have been adopted.

DBC expect Registered Providers who wish to let properties under Flexible Tenancies to have clear and transparent policies on who will be granted flexible tenancies, how long the tenancies will be for, and what processes occur when a flexible tenancy comes to an end and / or it is renewed. We require that these policies are available to the prospective tenant before an offer is made of a flexible tenancy.

The property should be let subject to existing nominations agreements as well as our existing Allocations Policy. The properties should be advertised through our Choice Based Lettings system, and clearly state the tenancy length, that the property is being let as a new flexible tenancy, and where an applicant can find the details on the tenancy that are required above. This is so that applicants know exactly what they are choosing. Flexible Tenancies and their allocation will be covered by the forthcoming Strategic Tenancy Policy and Housing Allocation Policy.

3. Affordable Rent

Affordable rent (set at up to 80% of market rent) has replaced Social Rent as the main affordable housing rented tenure in new developments. Affordable Rent properties are recognised as affordable housing in changes made to the government's Planning Policy Statement 3 in June 2011. The proposed Core Strategy highlights that 75% of affordable properties should be "rented" with the proposal in the new Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to be that these properties are delivered mainly as Affordable Rent units (to assist delivery).

Our forthcoming Strategic Tenancy Policy and the review of the Housing Allocation Policy will identify how DBC expect Affordable Rent properties to be let in more detail. It is planned to take a Draft STP to Cabinet in March 2012 and to consult over the early summer period.

It is recommended that until such a policy is adopted, DBC expect Affordable Rent properties to be let following the council's existing Allocations Policy and following existing nominations agreements.

Furthermore, the properties should be advertised through our Choice Based Lettings system, and clearly state the rent, and that the property is being let under the new Affordable Rent tenure so that applicants know exactly what they are choosing.

4. Housing Strategy

The Housing Strategy is the overarching strategic document that links all the policy within Strategic Housing – our current Housing Strategy is up to 2012.

As such we are proposing to lay out the new Housing Strategy as a link document that provides a detailed executive summary of all the Housing Policy in Dacorum Borough Council, and then directs the reader to the correct area and relevant policy.

Previously the Housing Strategy has drawn together much more of the detail and rationale from the different strategic documents in to one, very large and unreadable document. The proposal to make the document shorter, more strategic and to

reference the more detailed and specific policy will result in a number of benefits, some of which are outlined below.

Benefits:

- Will ensure that duplicate policies are not produced.
- Will ensure that DBC is more responsive to Central Policy changes.
- Will not require a rigid update as the Strategy will be a live document.
- Will result in a more “customer friendly” strategy.

The timescales for creating a Housing Strategy in this way are slightly different to those previously agreed, as some sections, such as the Allocations Policy review, will take time to complete. However, if this format is adopted then an overarching Housing Strategy can be in place by Spring 2012 (subject to Cabinet approval) and the different sections will be refreshed and inserted into the strategy document as and when they are approved by Cabinet. Once the different sections are all updated, the Housing Strategy can be reviewed and any changes to the executive summary can be made when required.

The core sections that will make up the Housing Strategy are the Housing Allocations Policy, the Homelessness Strategy, the Strategic Tenancy Policy, the Affordable Housing SPD and the Housing Needs Study, all of which are being reviewed or re-written in 2012. Other elements include a rural housing strategy and an older person's strategy, a young people's strategy; all to be addressed in due course with outline proposals included within the service plans for 2012/13.

It is recommended that the proposal to write the Council's Housing Strategy as a live document that contains key points from the suite of DBC housing policies is supported.

5. Homelessness Strategy

The Homelessness Strategy will also be reviewed in 2012. The strategy runs until 2013 so is not yet out of date, however it does need to be brought in to line with current homeless legislation.

Furthermore, the Strategic Housing Service, in association with Shelter, will be undertaking a Homelessness Service Review in Q4 2012. The results of this will feed in to the update of the homelessness strategy and the Strategic Housing service plan for 2012/13 .

6. Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document

The Affordable Housing SPD will define the requirements for developers and housing associations on delivering affordable housing within Dacorum. A timeframe has been drawn up for the completion of this document and is attached in the appendix. The SPD will be based on the Housing Market and Needs Assessment 2012, which is currently being undertaken by a consultant and is due to be completed by March 2012. This will provide evidence that can ensure that the SPD is not only meeting local need, but is also defensible at planning appeal. In order to tie the SPD up with the current Core Strategy work, the plan will be to propose formal adoption of the

SPD on the same day that the Core Strategy is adopted by Cabinet. It will be taken to Cabinet in advance of adoption, meaning that it will become a material planning consideration in the interim period, prior to the adoption of the Core Strategy.

The SPD will include the recommended tenure mix for affordable housing, a commuted sum policy, and recommendations and guidelines on affordable housing unit sizes, space standards and funding arrangements. There will also be additional supporting information justifying the Council's chosen position. An officer working group will be established to ascertain a policy position working closely with Portfolio holders.

Appendix A: Proposed New Policy Timeline

Date	Strategic Tenancy Policy (STP)	Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)	Allocations Policy
January 2011	<p>Work starts on Illustrative STP & Consultation Document. To be discussed with Portfolio Holder.</p> <p>Dates set for STP Working Group</p>	Officer Working Groups Start	
February 2011	<p>Illustrative STP taken to Portfolio Holder for Sign-Off.</p> <p>Illustrative STP taken to cabinet with Consultation Document</p>	First Draft Completed	Dates set for Allocations Policy Working Groups (Members and Officers)
March 2011	<p>Full STP drafting begins, based on outcomes of cabinet and portfolio holder decisions</p> <p>Report taken to Overview and Scrutiny</p>	<p>Draft taken to members and to officers for discussion.</p> <p>Report taken to Overview and Scrutiny Panel</p> <p>Revisions made.</p>	<p>First working groups take place</p> <p>Officer brainstorming on new allocations policy</p>
April 2011	Draft STP is taken to cabinet for authorisation for consultation period to begin	CONSULTATION	<p>Work begins on draft allocations policy</p> <p>Report taken to Overview and Scrutiny</p>
May 2011	CONSULTATION	CONSULTATION	Draft allocations policy taken to portfolio holder for authorisation for consultation period to begin

Date	Strategic Tenancy Policy (STP)	Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)	Allocations Policy
June 2011	CONSULTATION	Consultation analysis & revision	CONSULTATION
July 2011	Consultation analysis & revision	Analysis	CONSULTATION
August 2011	Final STP and consultation responses discussed with portfolio holder for final comments	Final Revisions	Consultation analysis & revision
September 2011	STP taken to cabinet for authorisation to adopt as Council Policy	SPD taken to cabinet for authorisation to adopt as Council Policy	Final Allocations Policy and consultation responses discussed with portfolio holder for final comments Allocations Policy taken to cabinet for authorisation to adopt as Council Policy
October 2011			
November 2011			
December 2011			