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| **B O R O U G H O F K E T T E R I N G** | | | |
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| **Report**  **Originator** | John Conway  Head of Housing | *Fwd Plan Ref No:*  A14/028 | |
| **Wards Affected** | All | 10th December 2014 | |
| **Title** | **HOUSING STRATEGY 2015/16 – 2019/20:**  **HELPING PEOPLE TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY** | | |

**Portfolio Holder: Councillor Steve Bellamy**

# 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This is the last of three reports which focus on the strategic aims of the new Housing Strategy. Specifically, this report looks at our work to ensure that we help people in the Borough to live independently in a home of their own. It will cover:

1. the changing housing market and why there is a need more than ever to support people to live independently;
2. the continuing work and specific projects that have been undertaken over the last few years in this area; and
3. how the Council can work with partners to ensure we are helping people to live independently.

# 2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 Ideally, everyone in the Borough ought to be able to buy or rent a decent home at a price they can afford, in a community where they want to live and work. Some residents will need support in order to achieve this and this will require a range of housing solutions to meet the diverse needs of the Borough’s residents particularly as a result of the changing housing market.

2.2 Ensuring that vulnerable people can live independently within the community with appropriate support is an increasingly challenging agenda in the current economic climate and at a time of diminishing resources for the provision of public services.

2.3 The final key strategic aim of our draft Housing Strategy for 2015-20 is helping people to live independently.

2.4 Within this our objectives are to:

* Prevent homelessness whenever possible through high quality advice and assistance
* Work with those most affected by welfare reform to mitigate the negative impact it has had on their lives
* Ensure that accommodation and services provided for elderly people remain relevant and responsive to their needs
* Improve the range of housing options and support for vulnerable people.

# 3. PROGRESS TO DATE

3.1 The Council has taken a pro-active approach in improving the range and quality of services available to vulnerable people in our community. In particular, we have developed a variety of specialist accommodation projects with support for people with special needs and have worked hard to enhance services for elderly and disabled people.

3.2 **Working with private landlords**

We have developed a suite of services for private landlords including a tenant finder and housing management service to enable us to source good quality private sector homes for our housing applicants.

3.3 **Silver Service**

In order to provide a more tailored service for older tenants in our sheltered stock we launched Silver Service to provide a more professional and responsive service. Alongside this, the Silver Service Forum was established comprising tenants from each of our sheltered housing schemes who have been involved amongst other things in contributing to a strategic review of the service, contributing to a new sheltered housing tenants’ handbook and the recruitment and selection of a new Support Worker.

3.4 **Bed blocking in hospitals**

We joined the Stepping Stones Project which seeks to address bed blocking in local hospitals and in specialist care centres by providing temporary accommodation for those who are unable to return home. Since its launch in July 2012 this project has saved the NHS over £145,000 in hospital bed days.

3.5 **Disabled adaptations**

In response to the rising demand for home adaptations we provide housing options advice to owner occupiers and private tenants seeking disabled adaptations to their homes, enabling them to move to more suitable alternative accommodation when desired. For our Council tenants we also launched a HomeMove Grant for those willing to move to alternative accommodation to cover adaptations and removal expenses and free up accommodation. The review of our Keyways Allocations Scheme also ensures that adapted properties owned and let by the Council and housing associations are more readily released when no longer needed, and better matching of those needing adaptations to properties better suiting their needs occurs.

3.6 **Alcohol and substance misuse**

Kettering has a very mixed community and we have responded to various needs for more specialist accommodation. We have worked with the County Council Drug and Alcohol Team, the Department of Health and Orbit Housing Association to develop 5 PHaSE units for people recovering from alcohol and/or drug misuse.

3.7 **Gypsies and Travellers**

We have also developed a new permanent site with seven pitches for Gypsies and Travellers at the Laurels in Desborough, increasing the provision available to meet this need.

3.8 **Tenancy Support**

Our Tenancy Support service provides tailored one to one support to identify and meet the needs of our tenants. Working alongside colleagues within other services as well as partnership working with local organisations e.g. CAB, Community Law Service and Step Change we are supporting customers to take control of their financial issues to improve health and wellbeing. During 2013/14 139 tenants have been supported through Tenancy Support. Since April 2014 there have been 100 referrals to Tenancy Support

3.9 **LifePlan**

Through our LifePlan service we have delivered 18 tenancy training courses to our customers with 146 young people having completed the course. Our tenancy training includes a Dementia Friends information session, first aid, fire safety in the home, back to work, money and budgeting, Princes Trust budgeting and Practical Housing Units. Practical Housing Units (PHU’s) are training workbooks which focus on the basic skills, knowledge and understanding of sustaining a tenancy. There have been 116 PHUs delivered to date through LifePlan.

3.10 **Rough Sleeping**

From 2012 to 2014 we ran a tenancy training flat and rough sleeper house pilot project, using four empty flats owned by one of our housing association partners and one privately rented property leased to us. Customers were engaged with the Tenancy Support Team, LifePlan and Tenancy Training. Nine people were helped to successfully move on to independent accommodation through the project

**4 IMPACT OF THE CHANGING HOUSING MARKET**

4.1 As well as providing services for people who are threatened with homelessness, we need to help vulnerable people to live independently within the community with appropriate support.

4.2 **Reductions in the County Council’s supported housing budgets mean that more vulnerable people with complex needs are at risk of homelessness.** The closure of hostels at Carrington Street and Broadway, following funding cuts by Northamptonshire County Council, have resulted in a loss of accommodation and support for 28 vulnerable people.

4.3 **The Welfare Reform Act 2012 has brought about the biggest overhaul of the benefits system since the 1940s, impacting on local people on low incomes as well as housing providers**. With the Government committing to austerity measures until 2018 at least, further reforms to welfare benefit are expected. As around 70% of social housing tenants rely on some form of welfare benefit, social housing providers are already feeling the impact, as rising rent arrears result in reduced income streams. As a result rent arrears for the Council increased from £133,605 at 1st April 2013 to £196,496 at 1st April 2014.

4.4 **Homelessness is on the increase in the Borough in line with national trends**. More people are approaching us for help. 55 homeless applications were taken in the first 4 months of 2014/15 compared to 47 for the same period last year, representing a 17% increase. The Housing Options team recorded 1,164 contacts in July 2014 compared to 906 in July 2013, representing a 28% increase.

4.5 **Increasing numbers of vulnerable households, particularly single people with mental illness, are becoming homeless** as a result of their inability to maintain their home following the loss of supported housing or housing related support. While some fall within the safety net of the Council’s statutory homelessness duties, this is not the case for the majority of single person households. 60% of households in temporary accommodation are single people with a support need.

4.6 **People are generally living longer but they are increasingly likely to spend a greater proportion of their life living with disability and long term illness.** 25% of households in the Borough have at least one person in the household with a long term health problem or disability. This has significant implications for housing providers, as well as those providing support services.

4.7 **Older people form a greater proportion of our population.** Between 2001-2011 the number of people over 65 in our community increased by 24%. The proportion of households in this age category is expected to increase significantly. By 2031 households in the age cohort where head of household is over 65, are expected to increase by 59% (16,244 projected in 2031 compared to 10,238 in 2011). In 2012 over 65’s accounted for 18% of the local population. By 2037 it is projected there will be over 28,000 over 65’s, representing 1 in 4 of the local population.

# 5. A NEW APPROACH FOR A CHANGING HOUSING MARKET

5.1 The new Housing Strategy needs to address the challenges of the changing housing market and enable us to consider a range of long terms projects and solutions so that the Council can achieve its objective of creating a more balanced housing market meeting the diverse needs of local people for an affordable and sustainable home. Some residents will need support in order to buy or rent a decent home they can afford in an area they wish to live.

5.2 New provision should be tailored to meet the needs of older people, people with physical disabilities and supported housing for vulnerable groups however new supply is not the only solution. Adapting or remodelling existing properties can allow individuals to remain in their current home or might offer a more cost effective way of facilitating a move for a household in need.

5.3 We are currently reviewing our Housing Allocation Scheme to ensure that it supports homelessness prevention and our discharging duty and minimises the time that households spend in temporary accommodation. There is some evidence that the current arrangements for homeless households, which directs them towards private lettings in the first instance, results in prolonged periods in temporary accommodation which is both costly to the Council and unsatisfactory for the households concerned.

5.4 **Prevent homelessness whenever possible through high quality advice and assistance.**

5.4.1 We are reviewing the delivery of our services to the homeless to ensure that they are both customer focused and cost effective for the Council. This involves improving our performance in processing homeless applications to reduce the time households spend in temporary accommodation alongside reducing our use of temporary accommodation through homelessness prevention work.

5.4.2 We aim to place a greater emphasis on the needs of new tenants of the Council and put in place the support they require during the first year of a tenancy in order to mitigate against tenancy failure in the long term. The long term aim is to achieve better tenancy sustainment for our tenants.

5.4.3 We will work with partners to help rough sleepers in the Borough into accommodation and reduce incidences of rough sleeping.

5.4.4 We plan to develop a multi-agency approach to youth homelessness and review our joint working protocol with Children and Young Persons Services at the County to ensure that 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless receive appropriate support and can access suitable accommodation when needed.

**5.5 Work with those most affected by welfare reform to mitigate against the negative impact it has had on their lives**

5.5.1 While we have adopted an approach of early intervention to support affected tenants, some have found themselves facing rent arrears for the first time. With an insufficient supply of smaller affordable homes for under occupying tenants to downsize to, we must continue to find ways of working with people affected to help mitigate the negative impact it has on their lives.

5.5.2 We are proposing to develop a range of advice and support services for vulnerable, low income households, investing in additional tenancy support to Council tenants to minimise the risk of tenancy breakdown. We aim to further develop the Council’s LifePlan services to help tenants into work, volunteering, education and training opportunities.

* + 1. We will continue to monitor the impacts of welfare reforms, anticipate how residents will be affected, and offer support services where necessary.

5.5.4 By offering customers more intense support and training, tenancy sustainment is more likely to be a success. Tenants are more likely to improve in confidence relating to their financial and social issues, manage their tenancies in a positive way, engage with the Council and other support services when they need to, be encouraged to engage in local services regarding health and wellbeing and feel confident in moving forward with further learning.

**5.6 Ensure that accommodation and services provided for elderly residents remain relevant and responsive to their needs**

5.6.1 Our Silver Service provides support services to elderly Council tenants living in our sheltered housing schemes. Launched in 2008, scheme managers and support workers in the Silver Service team have worked closely with residents to help them retain their independence, and through our Silver Service Forum, consulted with them on the future shape of the service and our sheltered housing stock.

5.6.2 Much of the Council’s sheltered housing stock is however more than thirty years old, and some locations are now proving difficult to let. Therefore we need to develop a ten year strategy for its future use, to ensure that it remains relevant to the changing needs and aspirations of older people in the Borough.

5.6.3 In addition, while there has been significant growth in extra care provision across the county and nationally, there are currently only 40 extra care units in our Borough. As there is an identified need for an additional 545 extra care units in Kettering by 2025, we will explore with partners ways to develop an additional extra accommodation on a mixed tenure basis, including specialist accommodation for the growing numbers suffering with dementia. This will allow older people to remain in their own homes and avoid residential care.

5.6.4 We will also look at developing attractive downsizing opportunities for older people on new developments, across all tenures, to help to free up larger properties.

**5.7 Improving the range of housing options for vulnerable people with support where necessary**

5.7.1 As many NHS services are under pressure, we will work closer with the health service to reduce the strain on their services and provide better living standards for those people in NHS care, including the vulnerable, disabled and older people. This will necessarily involve working in partnership with a range of statutory and voluntary organisations as the Council does not have the resources to make a difference on its own. In particular, we will work with Kettering General Hospital to see whether more use can be made of step-down accommodation within sheltered housing schemes in order to release acute beds within the hospital. With the support of partner organisations, we will create options for people with learning disabilities to live in the community including those currently in hospital.

5.7.2 Levels of households with a household member with a mobility issue are increasing and as such we will aim to provide more bungalows built to full mobility standards and lifetime homes standard properties on our affordable housing schemes.

5.7.3 We will continue to provide a programme of disabled adaptations to Council residents and a Home Improvement Service offering Disabled Facilities Grants to those living in the private sector to enable them to continue to live independently.

5.7.4 We will seek to work proactively with the County Council to ensure that housing options are effectively integrated to support adults with chaotic lives and troubled families. We will also work with partners in Mental Health Services and Probation to achieve better housing outcomes for those leaving institutional care.

5.7.5 We will continue to deliver services, such as tenancy support, in order that tenants can maintain their tenancies and reduce the risk of tenancy failure.

# 6. THE WAY AHEAD

6.1 The draft Housing Strategy which will be submitted to the Executive Committee at its meeting in February will include a number of action plans to address each of our key objectives including helping people to live independently

**7. CONSULTATION AND CUSTOMER IMPACT**

7.1 It is proposed to hold a consultation event for key stakeholders in January 2015 prior to submitting the draft Housing Strategy to Executive Council and Full Council in February.

# 8. FINANCIAL RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None at this stage.

# 9. HR IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None at this stage.

# 10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

* 1. None at this stage.

**11. RECOMMENDATION**

The Executive Committee is asked to endorse the final strategic priority of the draft Housing Strategy 2015-20 - Helping people to live independently

Background Papers: Previous Reports/Minutes:

Housing Strategy 15/16 -19/20

Date: N/A Date: 15th October 2014

Contact Officer: Katie Prati Ref: Fwd Plan A12/057