

Finalised Local Housing Strategy 2013 – 2017 and Action Plan**Report by Eibhlin McHugh, Acting Director, Communities and Wellbeing****1 Purpose of Report**

This Report outlines how Midlothian's Local Housing Strategy 2013 – 2017 will address key housing challenges over the next five years in Midlothian and seeks formal approval of the Strategy.

2 Background

2.1 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires all local authorities to prepare a Local Housing Strategy (LHS) in accordance with criterion set out by the Scottish Government. The Strategy must assess housing provision and services as well as set out how the Council will exercise its functions across all housing tenures and engage with partners to address housing problems. The first LHS was developed in 2004 in Midlothian, covering the period 2004 to 2012. In line with new guidance and streamlining the strategic process, the new LHS incorporates the homelessness, housing support and fuel poverty strategy elements. It also addresses the private sector strategic requirements of the LHS contained within the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006.

2.2 The key outcomes of the LHS are:

- Households have improved housing options across all tenures.
- Homeless households and those threatened with homelessness are able to access support and advice services and all unintentionally homeless households will be able to access settled accommodation.
- The condition of housing across all tenures is improved.
- The needs of households with particular needs will be addressed and all households will have equal access to housing and housing services.
- Housing in all tenures will be more energy efficient and fewer households will live in, or be at risk of, fuel poverty.

Each of the outcomes has a Chapter in the LHS which considers the key trends and challenges to be addressed, and details identified actions to address these issues. Many of the proposed actions are already being undertaken, such as the development of new council housing and the provision of additional temporary accommodation for homeless households.

2.3 It is a requirement that the Council consults with key stakeholders, including local housing associations, housing developers, private landlords, Shelter, and the general public. In doing so this will foster closer joint working and shared objectives to ensure that the Outcomes

of the LHS are realistic and achievable, and are representative of the views of key stakeholders. Midlothian Council approved a Draft LHS for Consultation in March 2012.

- 2.4** Key stakeholders were invited to provide their comments on the Draft Strategy and attend a Consultation Event held in Loanhead Miners Club in June. Members of the public were also invited to provide their views and an LHS “Drop in Event” was held in June. A positive response was received to the proposed outcomes for the Strategy and a number of amendments have been made to the Strategy in order that it better reflects the involvement from key stakeholders. In addition, some amendments have been made as a result of recent announcements or new initiatives. Amendments include:

- Proposed introduction of a loan fund to assist owners of empty homes to help bring their property back into use as affordable housing.
- Improved focus on mitigating the effects of Welfare Reform.
- Housing supply target for all new building revised to a lower, more realistic level of development.
- Noting the potential for co-production in some strategic activities.

3 Report Implications

3.1 Resource

There are no additional direct resource implications arising from this Report. Any future activity related to the implementation of the Local Housing Strategy which does have resource implications would only be granted following appropriate governance.

3.2 Risk

If the Council does not develop and submit a “robust and credible” LHS for Midlothian it risks losing out on potential investment from the Scottish Government and would not meet its statutory obligations as a strategic housing authority.

3.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☐ Community safety
- ☒ Adult health, care and housing
- ☐ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☐ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☐ Sustainable growth
- ☐ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

This Strategy aligns with Midlothian’s Single Outcome Agreement and with corporate and divisional priorities within Midlothian’s Communities and Wellbeing Division.

3.4 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The LHS is an outcome focused document, with 5 outcomes as noted in Section 2.2 of this Report. The LHS has an accompanying action plan in order that these outcomes are realised. Key areas of performance in Midlothian being monitored on an annual basis in the Strategy include:

- Number of new affordable homes built.
- Number of new private homes built
- Number of council house and RSL housing allocations
- Number of homeless presentations
- Number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation
- Number and % of Council and RSL housing meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard
- Number of Registered Private Landlords
- Number of Empty Homes brought back into use
- Number of extra care houses provided
- Number of households living in fuel poverty

3.5 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Prevention is a key tenet of the Strategy in a number of areas, including the prevention of homelessness and fuel poverty. The Strategy notes areas of homelessness prevention work, including provision of a youth homeless prevention service, and partnership working with other Scottish Local Authorities in South East Scotland to develop increased housing options for households at risk of homelessness. In terms of the prevention of fuel poverty, the Strategy sets targets on improving the energy efficiency of housing and approaches to accessing cheaper energy.

3.6 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

This Report notes that the LHS has been extensively consulted on prior to submission to the Scottish Government. The implementation of the Local Housing Strategy relies on the input of key stakeholders, including local organisations such as housing associations and private landlords as well as the wider community in order that the outcomes are realised. The Strategy will be published and promoted to ensure key stakeholders have the opportunity to provide their input.

3.7 Ensuring Equalities

An equalities impact assessment has been completed for the LHS. No negative consequences were identified and specific actions within the LHS are related to addressing the needs of equality groups, such as those with a disability and the elderly.

3.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

Key strategic activities set out in the LHS will contribute to the sustainability of communities within Midlothian, whilst responding to the

need to address climate change through a range of measures. An SEA Pre Screening was undertaken in respect of the Strategy, which established that a full screening was not required.

3.9 IT Issues

None

4 Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) Note the contents of the Report and its Appendices
- b) Agree for the Local Housing Strategy 2013 - 2017 to be submitted to the Scottish Government.

Date 12 February 2013

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Background Papers:

Appendix 1: Action Plan Local Housing Strategy 2013 - 2017

Appendix 2: Consultation Report on the Midlothian Local Housing Strategy