Housing Strategy " Fit for Purpose Criteria"

The list below sets out minimum requirements that must be met if a Housing Strategy is to be 'fit for purpose'. The material is organised around the 10 questions that need to be addressed in an effective, forward-looking Strategy.

Current position and context

1. Corporate context. *How well does the Strategy support and feed into the development of the council's wider community objectives?*

- The Strategy should be a corporate document that feeds into and is influenced by other corporate/local strategies (e.g. the Community Strategy, the Development Plan, Supporting People, Crime and Disorder, HiMP, Homelessness).

- There should be clear evidence of interaction between the Council and the Local Strategic Partnership, particularly on Neighbourhood Renewal issues (where relevant).

- If a stockholding authority, the information in the Housing Strategy should incorporate the key points from the HRA Business Plan and be consistent with the Asset Management Plan and the Capital Strategy

2. Wider priorities. *To what extent have national, regional and sub-regional housing priorities been taken into account in the Strategy?*

- The Strategy should show how national housing priorities have been taken into account. If a national housing priority is not a significant issue locally, the Strategy need only, briefly, explain why this is.

- Evidence should be given of involvement in consideration of regional and sub-regional housing problems and priorities (e.g. as set out in the Regional Housing Statement or agreed with neighbouring authorities) and how these have been taken into account in the Strategy.

- Contribution made by LAs in setting/identifying sub-regions/regional priorities.

3. Partnership working. *How well does the Strategy demonstrate effective consultation and joint working with key stakeholders, including members, and meaningful engagement with residents?*

- There should a clear description of the arrangements for involving stakeholders, including members, in development and implementation of the Strategy and a list of the organisations involved.

- Evidence should be given of how the Strategy has been changed as a result of input from stakeholders/residents.

- Examples should be given of the authority's enabling role and of other partnership working

- Examples of cross boundary working should be given.

4. Needs analysis. *Is there a sound analysis of the current and likely future position on all significant aspects of housing need in all tenures and on service performance?*

- The Strategy must be based on a robust up to date housing needs assessment, which is likely to use information from a range of sources, e.g. a needs survey, planning and health, demographic data.

- A clear picture should be presented of the housing market(s) in the area covering current and likely future supply and demand, house prices, household incomes, household projections.

- There should be an up to date summary of the condition of the housing stock in all tenures based on a recent stock condition survey.

- Information should be presented on special needs client groups (eg Black and Minority Ethnic, elderly, disabled, lone teenage parents) and on homelessness.

- Performance on key areas of service performance should be shown.

5. Resources. *Is there a realistic view of future resources including from the Approved Development Programme, regeneration schemes and contributions from partners? [Detailed data on council housing should be in the HRA Business Plan not the Strategy.]*

- There should be a summary of recent revenue and capital spending, with details of the various sources of funding (eg the ADP, capital receipts and area-based initiatives) and affordable housing delivered through the planning system (eg through Section106).

- An explanation should be given of how decisions are taken on the proportion of available resources to be used for housing (and within this council housing) and how this links to the authority's Capital Strategy.

- Estimates should be given of expected future funding, with details of the assumptions on which figures are based. Explanations should be given of any significant changes in funding.

Priorities for action

6. Priorities. *How well is the statement of priority areas for action justified and linked to the analysis of current and likely future needs?*

- There should be a clear statement of priorities for action identified with an explanation of their relative importance.

- Reasons for choosing priorities should be given, including evidence that they have been informed by the analysis of need and consultation with key stakeholders. In particular, it should be clear how priorities relate to corporate priorities; wider sub-regional/regional strategies and national housing priorities.

Analysis of options

7. Options. *To what extent does the Strategy demonstrate proactive consideration of alternative ways of addressing priority areas for action, which takes full account of the contributions, which local partners could make?*

- Brief explanation/justification of why certain options were chosen to meet priorities. This should include choice of partners, VFM, sources of funding, and the criteria used in decisions.

- Details should be given of how to access more detailed supporting information.

Action Plan

8. Action Plan. *Is there a clear action plan with SMART objectives and milestones covering both capital works and service delivery?*

- The Strategy must include a clear and robust Action Plan with SMART (specific, measurable, agreed, realistic and time-bound) objectives and milestones focussing on key priorities.

- There should be a clear indication of how actions will contribute to meeting other service and wider corporate objectives.

- The Action Plan should be explicitly linked with the expected revenue and capital resources.

- The Strategy should include a timetable of work to be undertaken to update and develop the Housing Strategy further.

Delivery

9. Progress to date. *To what extent does the Strategy report on progress against previous targets and objectives?*

- The monitoring procedures in place to track progress on the Action Plan, including how members and service users are involved, should be described.

- The arrangements for monitoring the quality of services and user satisfaction, and how this feeds back into service planning processes, needs to be explained including examples of post scheme evaluation.

- Information should be given on what feedback mechanisms are in place

- Information should be presented on spend, outputs and outcomes achieved in recent years against objectives and targets with a clear explanation of any significant under-spends or over-spends.

Presentation

10. Accessibility. *Could a non-specialist reader quickly understand the key messages in the Housing Strategy?*

To ensure that it meets the needs of a range of audiences the Housing Strategy needs to:

- be concise - around a maximum length of 30 pages (with references to how to access more detailed information, e.g. on stock condition surveys).

- include a clear summary of the main points on the analysis of needs, current performance, priorities for action and the Action Plan and a contents page at the front of the document

- be well-structured and written in clear, simple language (versions in languages other than English and other formats such as Braille or via the Internet may be needed).

- provide contact details and references to other relevant documents.

Commentary from the Government Office on the 2002 Housing Strategy Submission

Corporate Context

- The authority has demonstrated a collaborative approach, both internally between individual service departments and with its external partners. We note the housing links made within other key strategies and look forward to seeing how housing priorities are approached by the emerging Local Strategic Partnership and Community Strategy. A summary of the links between the Housing Strategy and Business Plan objectives and priorities would be useful. We note that some linkages have been achieved a indicated on page 6 of the Strategy.

Wider Priorities

- Links to national, regional and sub-regional housing priorities are outlined by the authority's referral to its involvement, for example as a member of the 3 Cities Group for the Regional Housing Statement/Strategy (RHS). It is considered that more could be said about the impact of the authority's work on this Group both in terms of development of the RHS and the Housing Strategy.
- There are good examples of links with neighbouring authorities, for example with East Staffs BC and NW Leices DC, on Housing Strategy development. Future strategies should continue to develop these and other cross boundary linkages. It is considered that the Strategy could place greater emphasis on meeting the Decent Homes Standard.

Partnership Working

- More evidence of structured consultation with partners is required linked to evidence of outcomes. The Strategy suggests on page 6 that consultation is undertaken at strategic level i.e. covering the overall objectives, but not at a lower operational/monitoring level throughout the year. It would therefore be advantageous to refer in more detail to consultation and monitoring system(s) and list the composition, cope and regularity of meetings within and between partners and stakeholders. For example, tenants groups, citizen panel, and forthcoming HA liaison group. It should be clearly demonstrated that consultation is a means to an end in itself.
- The authority has worked successfully with partnerships (e.g. SRB projects) and we recognise the priority the authority will place henceforth on enhancing its enabling role, for example, following the e June 2002 Housing & Strategy Group meeting and in future consultants with housing associations, developers etc.
- The Housing Market and Needs study (May 2002) indicates that the authority faces a formidable challenge in securing an adequate affordable element in new housing despite a number of recent Section 106 successes.

Needs Analysis

- We note that the authority has produced with consultants a detailed market and needs analysis, which has highlighted disparities in house prices between the north and south of the district and the general issues of affordability and supply. Coupled with this is information on public sector stock condition gathered in a report published in July 2002. The result is that the authority should now have a clear and up-to-date understanding of where much of its financial and other resources need to be deployed.
- However, there is a clear need to strengthen the authority's enabling role and update the private sector stock condition data from 1999 together with the private sector renewal strategy. Also, whilst the needs report provides a reasonably clear picture for many aspects of need (e.g. homelessness) it is less clear that the other special needs categories (elderly, disabled, BMEs and young people for example) have been or are being adequately addressed. This should feature within the further work on housing need earmarked for the next year in the Action Plan.

Resources

- The Strategy sets out a clear picture of recent, current and future capital and revenue expenditure and it is encouraging to see the that Housing features in the authority's Capital Strategy – as its key "capital focus". The protocol for "responsible bidding" for capital expenditure is also outlined, suggesting that other council services heads and external stakeholders are involved in the debate on housing expenditure.
- Option appraisal is directly linked to identify housing priorities. Each of the priorities under option appraisal (p.35) appears to correspond to a priority area in the action plan (p29) but it would be advantageous to use precisely the same layout to maintain a clear and logical sense of continuity.
- In terms of the assumptions made on future spending, the lack of estimated for credit approvals should be urgently addressed (p27). An indication of where funds are likely to be delayed across the action plan is necessary to complete the picture.

Priorities

- Given Ax 1 (p33) lists 15 priorities between the 5 strategic housing objectives, it might be advantageous to rank the priorities in order to give an indication of where the resources need to be targeted most urgently. The Strategy needs to make it clear how key prioirities are ranked and extricable linked to resource availability. The tabling system nonetheless demonstrates that the authority has made considerable progress towards rationalising its overall programme of activity in

Options

- Ax2 (p35) gives a clear overview of the range of options, which the authority has considered towards tackling its strategic housing objectives. It is not clear, however, how the options were identified, why certain stakeholders were or will be involved and what decisions/conclusion were made in light of the options tabled, that is which options the authority and its partners are running with and why.

Action Plan

- The Action Plan (p29) contains the key elements required such as links to the original objectives, specific activities, timescales, outputs and key partners. This is a significant development in terms of the authority demonstrating its clarity of thought as well as its commitment to improvement. Corporate links can be assumed by comparing the Action Plan against the annexes although a number-based cross-referencing system would be helpful.
- Many of the actions are costed, however, it is not possible to gauge overall how much of the action plan with be delivered against anticipated resources.

Progress to Date

- The Action Plan could usefully identify which service head is to be responsible for delivering and monitoring of each action, as would normally be set out in the individual service plans and presumably development under the auspices of the Housing Strategy & Planning Group.
- The process of meaningful monitoring is not full covered – although it is stated (p31) that the council uses a ranges of tools to monitor service quality and user satisfaction, also that progress is reported to appropriate committees. Ax 3 could usefully develop examples under "Progress" to illustrate the impact of these monitoring procedures on future activity.
- The Spend, Output and Outcomes table on page 32 for the Strategy appears to omit outcomes, i.e. what has been the effect of the stated levels of investment. Although the table should actual versus planned spend, this does not in itself measure the success (or otherwise) of the spend. Some baseline data comparing the years spend against the overall requirement to meet backlog, for example would give some illustration of the extent of impact.
- There should also be links to specific objectives set at the start of the year in order that the outputs can be evaluated in terms of outcomes. It can otherwise appear to be action without necessarily tackling or solving the root problem.

Accessibility

- The Strategy essentially meets the Fit for Purpose criteria in this respect, although it is not clear how much of the Strategy, if any, is accessible through the Internet.