

HOUSING STRATEGY 2006/07

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Cllr George Clements

LEAD OFFICER: Mike Tichford

REPORT AUTHOR: Debbie Cochrane

Summary: In 2004 the Audit Commission and Government Office North West met with Officers and Housing Portfolio holders from across the County to discuss “fit for purpose” housing strategies and partnership working, they believed that only by working together in a structured way could Cumbria’s Housing Authorities address the issues of lack of capacity and resources. The six Local Authorities in Cumbria, the County Council and Lake District National Park Authority have produced this Housing Strategy. A copy is available in the Members Room,

Recommendation:	Members support continued participation in the Countywide arrangements to develop the Cumbria Housing Strategy.
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Impact on delivering the Corporate Plan: Contributes towards the corporate objective of ensuring that all people in Copeland have a decent home.

Impact on other statutory objectives (e.g. crime & disorder, LA21): Improve energy efficiency within homes via affordable warmth schemes.

Financial and human resource implications: While developing the action plan we will be reviewing the financial resource implications, at the same time we will be assessing human resources required to implement the action plan. Implications will be fully discussed when a final report is made to Executive.

Project & Risk Management: None

Key Decision Status

- Financial:	N/A
- Ward:	N/A

Other Ward Implications: None

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Each Local Authority has to provide for the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) a Housing Strategy Statement detailing how the Authority will make sure that housing provision in its area meets the needs of local communities. By Autumn 2006 each Local Authority has to have fulfilled the “Fit the Purpose” criteria laid down by the Government. At the meeting outlined above it was decided that the eight Authorities would work in partnership to produce one “fit the purpose” Housing Strategy which would concentrate on current issues and contain a template of policies for each Local Authority area. The Authorities had already worked

together to produce a Countywide Homelessness Strategy and a five-year Supporting People Strategy; these would link in with the Countrywide Housing Strategy. The following list sets out the minimum requirements that must be met if a Housing Strategy is to be “fit for purpose”.

- **Corporate Context** – How well does the strategy support and feed into the development of the Council’s wider community objectives?
- **Wider Priorities** – To what extent have national, regional and sub regional housing priorities been taken into account in the Strategy?
- **Partnership working** – How well does the strategy demonstrate effective consultation and joint working with key stakeholders?
- **Needs Analysis** – Is there a sound analysis of the current and likely future position on all significant aspects of housing needs in all tenures and on service performance?
- **Resources** – Is there a realistic view of future resources including from the Approved Development Programme, Regeneration Schemes and contributions from partners?
- **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 that local partners could make?
- **Action Plan** – Is there a clear action plan with SMART objectives and milestones covering both capital works and service delivery.
- **Delivery** – To what extent does the strategy report on progress against previous targets and objectives?
- **Accessibility** – Could a non-specialist reader quickly understand the key messages in the Housing Strategy?

- 1.2 The Strategy is expected to set out in detail our plans for the next five years, those five years being the foundation for a long-term Strategy covering a period of up to 20 years. The overall objective although not spelled out clearly by the Government is to balance local housing markets (i.e. where people can afford to find a home and where people want to stay) and improve housing conditions. Please refer to Appendix 1 for more detail on balanced housing markets.
- 1.3 The Cumbria Strategy has been produced as a consequence of comments made by the Audit Commission following CPA assessments to strengthen the sub regional housing function. Officers from the Audit Commission met with Officers and Housing Portfolio Holders some time ago to discuss partnership working across the County. The Audit Commission and Government Office North West had taken the view that only by working together in a structured way could Cumbria’s Housing Authorities address the issues of lack of capacity and resources. The Cumbria Sub Regional Housing Group which brings together all of Cumbria’s housing bodies (Copeland is represented by Cllr G Clements), County Council and Lake District National Park Authority took on board the role of overseeing the production of the Strategy.

2. PROGRESS TO DATE

- 2.1 This Housing Strategy is a working document, the second and final phase of the Strategy will consist of 20 Housing Market Studies which will form inserts into the Strategy and will provide information on demographics, the economy, housing needs and affordability. Housing Market Assessments will be completed for Millom, Whitehaven (which includes Cleator Moor) and West Lakes (Ennerdale, Gosforth, Seascale, Millom Without and Bootle). These assessments, which

will be completed by the end of August 2006, will provide the detailed evidence to back our strategic priorities and will be reported to Executive.

- 2.2 The results of the first Countywide Housing Needs Survey are currently being analysed and priorities for each Housing Market Area will be identified. The approach strengthens the argument for Cumbria to receive more funding from the Housing Corporation for affordable housing that would be allocated according to need and pressures on Housing Markets. The result will inform planning policy and the future development of the Local Development Framework, to be able to identify property tenure and type requirements in specific areas.
- 2.3 Much of the work for the Housing Needs Survey has been carried out in-house and through the development of joint working across the County. Working in this way has produced a methodology that will be replicated in the future and can be used to examine our Housing Market Area in more detail.
- 2.4 Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have been consulted and made comment on the draft Strategy. The Strategy has been widely circulated by the Cumbria Sub Regional Housing Group and has been available on the Council's web site, Barrow Borough Council has collated comments on the Strategy and Members of the Sub Regional Housing Group have taken into account all consultation responses.
- 2.5 There are several themes contained in the Strategy:
 - **Affordable Housing**

Aim – To tackle the shortages of affordable housing in areas of Cumbria where need and demand for additional housing is high, where this impacts adversely on social inclusion and balanced communities
 - **Creating Decent Homes**

Aim – To work towards ensuring that all residents (both in the private and public sector) have a home that meets the statutory minimum standard for housing. For example, in Copeland we want to see more empty properties brought back into use, this will increase the supply of decent properties and enhance the local environment.
 - **Housing and Homeless**

Aim – To deliver the actions outlined in the Homelessness Strategy 2003 – 2008 (already agreed by Members). In Copeland we would like to see more provision of floating support to help people sustain their tenancies thereby reducing homelessness.
 - **Regeneration**

Aim – To stabilise fragile housing markets, promote economic growth, support community development and enhance the built environment. For example, in Copeland we would like to improve local neighbourhoods through environmental enhancement.
 - **Home with support or additional facilities**

Aim – To provide homes and housing services for people who most need help and support to be able to live as independently as possible within the community. This includes delivering the action in the Supporting People strategy approved by Members in 2005.
- 2.6 Some of these issues have a special dimension, for example, affordable housing is more of an issue in rural areas, regeneration in the West Coast, Furness and Carlisle areas. Housing the homeless, creating decent homes and environments and homes with support or additional facilities are relevant throughout the County. The thematic chapters and the Housing Market

Action plans detail how and where we will invest and use the resources we have available to us to balance our housing markets.

- 2.7 The Strategy provides the basis for a robust action plan that sets out policies and how they are going to be implemented, who the lead agency is and clear targets for meeting objectives. The action plan includes a column detailing progress against targets that will enable Members and Stakeholders to closely monitor achievement.

3.0 CONCLUSION

- 3.1 If approved, this Countywide Strategy will be the first in the Country to be assessed by the Government Offices as “Fit for Purpose” and it will be held up as an example of good practice in true partnership working once all the Local Authorities in Cumbria have signed up to it. The Council will receive recognition from the Audit Commission, the Housing Corporation and Government Office North West.
- 3.2 The Strategy with completed Housing Market Assessments will be brought to Executive in Autumn for approval.

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Detail on Balanced Housing Markets

List of Background Documents:

List of Consultees: Corporate Team, Cllr G Clement