HOUSING MARKET ACTION PLANS FOR 2007/08

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Councillor G Clements
LEAD OFFICER: Mike Tichford
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Summary:
To present to Members the Housing Market Action Plans for Copeland (HMaps) - The Regeneration Department has now produced draft reports covering the demographic, social and economic influences on housing trends in the District three "Housing Market Areas" these are Millom, West Lakes and Whitehaven, collating the findings used to inform the Cumbria Housing Strategy. These Assessments are now the subject of consultation.
We need to ensure that we have included all the factors relevant to the Assessments and we are seeking comments from elected Members and Council Departments. All comments would be extremely welcome.

Recommendation:
That Members:
1.   Agree the Housing Market Action Plans as the basis for informing the Council's future housing and planning policies.
2.   Comment on the assessments – are there, any other factors Members would like incorporated into the HMaps.

1.   **INTRODUCTION**

1.1   The Government has recognised the importance of the housing market in influencing the wider economy. This has led to a far greater responsibility being placed upon local housing and planning authorities to make their local housing markets more responsive to the needs of local communities. The most recent example of this is the publication of Planning Policy Statement (PPS 3) which sets out the Government's national policies on those aspects of planning in England which relate to the provision of housing.

1.2   While the Government has issued guidance on what it feels a local authority should be doing to balance local housing markets, no definitive description of what exactly defines a balanced housing market has yet been published. This makes it difficult to measure whether or not the actions of a local authority are having an impact on the local housing market. Copeland Regeneration Department, working with the Cumbria

Housing Group, has attempted to define a balanced housing market to provide a yard stick against which to measure out progress and to help us better determine housing, planning and economic policy.

1.3   The result does not pretend to be a perfect model. It does, however, provide a foundation upon which a local authority can develop policy and practice towards achieving balance in local housing markets.

2.   IDENTIFYING A BALANCED HOUSING MARKET

2.1   Housing Market Assessments (HMA)

To measure a housing market to see if it is balanced, it is necessary to consider a number of quantitative factors – the cost of housing, available incomes of the majority, the accessibility of rented housing, the prevalence of homelessness and the proportion of homes which are empty for long periods of time. This information has been collated from reliable, official sources.

2.2   Housing providers, developers and estate agents have also been interviewed. This type of research helps us to find out why people choose to live where they do and why they avoid certain locations, which includes factors that are disconnected entirely from the housing itself – for example schools, neighbourhood management, policing, employment, social considerations.

2.3   In 2006, a Cumbria-wide Housing Needs Survey was also undertaken. This involved sending questionnaires on housing needs to households across the county, in smaller communities 100% of households down to, in the largest towns, 10% of household.

2.4   Bringing this data into one outcome was difficult as there is not template upon which the Council could draw. Government guidance on Housing Needs Surveys, (Local Housing Assessment – a Best Practice Guide: ODPM, March 2005) focuses very much on the survey methodology and while the definition of a Strategic Housing Market Assessment, contained in PPS 3 sets out detailed guidance on the kinds of things that should be considered, it offers no definitive steer on how the results of that consideration should be quantified. However, to be able to make informed choices on the allocation between different markets of scarce resources, including land allocations and finance, the Council needs to be able to quantify in some way its research. The detail of the approach adopted is included within each HMap.

2.5   The approach adopted for the Hmaps is our first attempt at this and is based upon a number of assumptions based upon the accumulated

experience of Council Officers in managing housing and planning services. It is not a perfect approach but that can be said to apply to any methodology that attempts to predict something as unpredictable as housing demand. Members may recall that three years ago our biggest problem was low and in some cases collapsing demand for social housing; now the Council is having serious difficulty housing its homeless clients, those most in need of a home, in social housing due to demand outstripping housing supply of all types.

2.6   The Hmaps will be updated annually. This means that we will not only maintain up to date knowledge of what is happening in our housing market but also allows us the opportunity to regularly review and update our methodologies in the light of practical experience.

2.7   A County wide Housing Needs Survey is scheduled for 2011. This will tie in with the next scheduled census. A County wide House Condition Survey is provisionally scheduled for 2009, although as you are aware we are currently undertaking a Stock Condition Survey, results of which will feed into the HMaps next year.

3.   HOUSING MARKET ACTION PLANS 2006-07

3.1   The objective of the HMap exercise was to see which of our housing markets is balanced and then to identify what needs to be done to correct those imbalances including the allocation of land in the forthcoming Local Development Framework, use of the Council's own Housing Investment Programme, our direction of the National Affordable Housing Programme, priorities for the Housing Options Service and housing standards enforcement and investment.

3.2   Each HMap has within it the definition of the methodology used to calculate the final housing and land needs for each of our communities. This includes an estimate of the amount of affordable and open market housing needed, using a combination of the data received from the HNS and the HMAs undertaken during 2006.

4.   CONCLUSIONS

4.1   The HMaps help us to measure our progress in helping people in Copeland have a better home by developing housing and land use policies that help people from across the social and economic spectrum have the chance to find a good home.

4.2   The information gained from the study informs the recommendations that will be made to Councillors and funding agencies, such as the Housing Corporation, on which new housing projects to support, which existing

housing should be cleared and where reinvestment should be made in existing housing stock via initiatives such as the Housing Renewal Area Programme. It will also inform the land use allocations to be made as part of the Local Development Framework for planning policy.

4.3   Copies of the three HMaps is available in the Members Room. They include summaries the key findings on market by market basis but Councillors are asked to note that the figures hide variations within local markets themselves.

5.   FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOURCES OF FINANCE)

5.1   Officer time to complete the assessments

6.   PROJECT AND RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1   The work underpins the Council's "fit for purpose" status in terms of its Housing Strategy.

7.   IMPACT ON CORPORATE PLAN

7.1   The Housing Market Actions Plans will be used together with housing needs and stock condition data to inform the Council's policy on housing. This will assist the Council in its support of the Cumbria Housing Strategy specifically in regard to achieving the 70% target of Decent Homes Standard for vulnerable people in our communities by 2010 through investment in the Private Sector Housing Stock.

A copy of the HMaps is available in the Members' Room

List of Background Documents: HMaps;
List of Consultees: Cllr M Woodburn, Cllr C Giel, Corporate Team
Steven Tickner

CHECKLIST FOR DEALING WITH KEY ISSUES

Please confirm against the issue if the key issues below have been addressed .
This can be by either a short narrative or quoting the paragraph number in the
report in which it has been covered.

Impact on Crime and Disorder	Issues highlighted by residents referred to CDRP
Impact on Sustainability	Work assists the Housing Strategy in achieving sustainable communities objectives
Impact on Rural Proofing	Fully proofed and applies to all rural areas
Health and Safety Implications	N/A
Project and Risk Management	See 6.1
Impact on Equality and Diversity Issues	The Strategy is all about inclusion
Children and Young Persons Implications	The Strategy is all about inclusion
Human Rights Act Implications	The Strategy is all about inclusion

Please say if this report will require the making of a Key Decision   YES