

**By:** Kevin Lynes, Cabinet Member for Regeneration  
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**To:** Regeneration and Economic Development Policy Overview  
and Scrutiny Committee 18 January 2011

**Subject:** Draft Kent Forum Housing Strategy

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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**Summary:** This report provides an update for Members on the development of the draft Kent Forum Housing Strategy.

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 An initial consultation draft of the Kent and Medway Housing Strategy was circulated to over 300 stakeholders in May this year. That draft was written prior to the General Election and further work was undertaken to reflect the changes in the external environment, the comments received during that consultation and the direction given by Kent & Medway Leaders.
- 1.2 A second consultation draft of the Strategy was taken to the Kent and Medway Leaders' Group on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2010, where Leaders' agreed to the document being issued for a further 2-month consultation.
- 1.3 That consultation period ended on 24<sup>th</sup> November. Positive responses were received from amongst others, Districts and Boroughs, Housing Associations, the Homes and Communities Agency, the Environment Agency, Southern Water, private sector developers, PCTs and the Kent Rural Board. Some concerns on points of detail which were raised have been addressed in the latest draft.
- 1.4 The draft has been revised to reflect consultees' comments including strengthening the sections on supporting people and mental health and the inclusion of a new section on standards in the private sector, and to highlight recent government proposals, which came forward as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review and the Decentralisation and Localism Bill.
- 1.5 This latest draft is due to be considered by the Kent Forum on 28<sup>th</sup> January.

## 2. Context

- 2.1 In developing the Strategy we commissioned a Kent and Medway Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). Through this, we identified 5 key housing challenges for Kent and Medway that must be tackled. These are:
  - The need to secure the **delivery** of new homes.
  - The imperative to achieve **regeneration** of key brownfield sites across the County.
  - The need for **renewal** of existing homes and the return to use of **empty homes**.

- The challenge and opportunity of improving the **energy efficiency** of existing homes.
- The need to consider the needs of **vulnerable groups** and the support services they require.

## 2.2 **Themes and ambitions**

The Strategy is designed around 5 themes, which set out to meet these challenges. Each theme has an ambition we are seeking to deliver through the Strategy. These are:

### **Theme 1 – Managed Growth and Infrastructure**

**Our Ambition:** The continued delivery of key infrastructure to support managed growth and housing delivery across the County.

### **Theme 2 – Place-making and Regeneration**

**Our Ambition:** The continued regeneration of our disadvantaged neighbourhoods to bring them in line with more affluent parts of the County.

### **Theme 3 - Affordability and Choice**

**Our Ambition:** The provision of choice and affordability in housing for the citizens of Kent and Medway, including rural communities, which meets their needs and aspirations.

### **Theme 4 - Housing Renewal**

**Our Ambition:** The managed improvement and retrofit of existing homes to make them fit for now and the future.

### **Theme 5 - Housing Need**

**Our Ambition:** To support vulnerable people in housing need to fulfil their potential and live a high quality life through the provision of excellent housing and support services.

## 2.3 **Proposed actions to be taken forward**

Underpinning each challenge is a series of more specific recommendations. These recommendations are not binding on any organisation that signs up to the Strategy, as not every recommendation will have relevance to every area. Instead, we expect local authorities to seek to implement only those recommendations which are appropriate for them.

### **3. External Environment**

- 3.1 The external environment that impacts upon this Strategy, particularly around housing and planning, has recently been the subject of many proposed changes by the Coalition Government.
- 3.2 The majority of these proposals are still in the initial development phase. It is expected, particularly as the Decentralisation and Localism Bill is debated in Parliament that these proposals will be subject to further revision and clarification. Their potential impacts are currently unknown and it would be unwise for the Strategy to attempt to take a position on these or second guess government's intentions before the details are finalised.
- 3.3 Despite this, there has been a lot of goodwill and momentum building up across the County around the Housing Strategy and there would be merit in taking the opportunity to capitalise on that by publishing the Strategy, rather than waiting for the details to emerge as there could be a considerable time lag before the positions are clear.
- 3.4 There is also a window of opportunity to use the Strategy to influence government thinking and ensure that the changes put in place are of benefit to the County.
- 3.5 However, given the significant changes to the environment expected over the next 12 months, it is proposed that the Strategy is refreshed to ensure it remains contemporary and fit for purpose and is able to provide a strong Kent narrative on the new housing and planning landscape

### **4. Implementation**

- 4.1 It is the intention that implementation of the Strategy will be delivered by Kent Housing Group (KHG) on behalf of the Kent Forum and its subsidiary bodies, working together with other cross-Kent networks such as Kent Planning Officers Group, the Joint Policy and Planning Board for Housing, Supporting People Commissioning Body and Kent Developers Group
- 4.2 KHG will develop an implementation plan for the Strategy, working with those organisations and Local Authorities which have already shown an interest in taking forward some of the recommendations.
- 4.3 As the Strategy is not a "one size fits all" approach, there will no obligation on any organisation or Local Authority to deliver any aspect of implementation they feel would not be appropriate for their local area. It is hoped that organisations and Authorities will embrace those recommendations that they feel will help to deliver their overall housing or business objectives or will be of benefit to their local communities.
- 4.4 Kent Housing Group will monitor and regularly report back on progress against the Strategy to the Kent Forum. Updates on progress against the Strategy will be reported to REDPOSC.

### **5. Next steps**

- 5.1 Subject to the endorsement of the Kent Forum, this version of the Housing Strategy will be launched in March 2011, with a refreshed version of the Strategy developed over the next 12 months and launched by March 2012.

## **6. Recommendation:**

6.1 Members are asked to note progress update in the report.

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### **Background Documents:**

None