

**EXETER CITY COUNCIL**  
**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – COMMUNITY**  
**6 SEPTEMBER 2011**

**HOUSING STRATEGY 2007–2012**

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

To update Members on progress in meeting the targets set out in the revised Housing Strategy 2007–12.

**2. BACKGROUND**

2.1 The Housing Strategy 2007–12 was approved by Executive in September 2007 following a thorough review of the previous Housing Strategy; including extensive public and stakeholder consultation and an Equalities Impact Assessment. It was agreed as “fit for purpose” by the Government Office South West (GOSW).

2.2 The Strategy sets out the actions the Council will take in order to ensure that everyone in the city has the opportunity to live in a suitable home that they can afford. It is organised around the key themes of the Mission Statement: **everyone, home and opportunity**.

Key areas of the Strategy include:

- ensuring that private sector housing in the City is of a decent standard;
- managing and improving the Council’s housing stock;
- providing housing advice and preventing homelessness;
- maintaining a register of housing need;
- overseeing the allocation of affordable housing in the city;
- making efficient use of all housing stock;
- enabling the development of new affordable housing, and
- bringing empty property back into use

2.3 The Housing Strategy was informed by the results of the Exeter and Torbay Housing Market Assessment. This examined housing markets across the sub-region and illustrated the problems of affordability and undersupply of both market and affordable housing throughout the area.

2.4 Since the approval of the Strategy, the downturn in the housing market has had an impact on the housing challenges and how they are tackled. Whilst improved affordability of the owner occupied stock may be a long term benefit of the downturn, in the short-term, prices remain unaffordable for many, whilst access to mortgage finance has become increasingly difficult, particularly for low cost home ownership products and those households without deposits.

2.5 The economy still continues to affect the level of new house building in the city. This reflects the national picture where the housing industry has experienced the lowest annual completions since 1924; fewest first-time buyers since records began and ever-increasing housing waiting lists. In Exeter the number of house completions remains short of the number of homes with planning consent which remain.

- 2.6 The outlook for 2011/2012 is less promising than previous years despite the inclusion of new Council houses with a total of 126 affordable homes expected to be completed. This is a direct result of the dramatic reduction in Government grant funding to levels which have resulted in some developments no longer being viable and the change in funding parameters with a move away from social rent to a new “Affordable Rent” product. The prospects for future delivery remains challenging and will be tested against the Council’s aspirations to deliver as much social rent affordable housing as possible and the potential viability pressure this causes developers. It is likely that individual sites will need to accommodate a greater spectrum of affordable housing tenures in order to maintain delivery or alternative models of delivery adopted to ensure an adequate future supply of social rent homes.

### **3. PROGRESS AGAINST TARGETS**

- 3.1 The Housing Strategy includes a plan setting out actions with specific target dates for completion. The Action Plan is attached as Appendix I and indicates where progress has been made. Some of the highlights include:

- 21 new Council homes completed on time and within budget, built to high environmental standards
- Seconded member of staff working with Devon Learning Disability Service and supporting people to identify need and types of accommodation and support required
- 391 new affordable homes provided over the past three years
- National homelessness targets met
- Devon Home Choice implemented

- 3.2 There are also some challenges in the future that may affect our ability to meet housing need in the city and the actions in the strategy. These include:

- The level of finance available through the reduction in grant funding available in the City from the Homes and Community Agency.
- The introduction of the new “Affordable Rent” product.
- Cuts in Supporting People funding for homelessness prevention
- Outcome of the Housing Revenue Account subsidy review
- Reduction in Local Housing Allowance levels that could result in a rise in housing applications

### **4. RECOMMENDED**

That Scrutiny Committee Community notes the progress being made towards achieving targets set out in the Housing Strategy 2007–12 Action Plan.

ACTING HEAD OF HOUSING

S:PA/LP/ Committee/911SCC9  
2.8.11

COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**  
**Background papers used in compiling this report:**