

KENT FORUM HOUSING STRATEGY REFRESH - CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

1. Introduction

1.1. The Kent Forum Housing Strategy was endorsed by the Kent Forum in January 2011 and launched in May 2011 by Sir Bob Kerslake, who described Kent as being “ahead of the game”. It remains the only County-wide Housing Strategy in the country.

1.2. Since the launch of the Strategy, the Government has announced a raft of new housing-related measures, including the English Housing Strategy, which contains a number of new initiatives picked up by the refresh. These include: the Mortgage Indemnity Scheme, releasing public sector land for housing development, reducing the burden of housing regulation, institutional investment in the private rented sector, Build to Rent and fiscal incentives to stimulate development.

1.3. A number of other key Government policy and legislative changes have either occurred since the launch or are due to come into place shortly such as the Localism Act, introduction of the New Homes Bonus, changes to Community Infrastructure Levy, welfare reform, the new Affordable Rent Framework and the *Get Britain Building Fund*.

1.4. To ensure that Kent and Medway remain ahead of the game, the Kent Forum Housing Strategy has been updated to reflect the new changes and has sought to develop a coherent Kent position on these new strategic housing issues and influence Government’s thinking as they further develop these initiatives.

1.5. The over-arching themes and ambitions of the Strategy have remained the same in the draft refresh, however the detailed content within these has been updated to reflect the position both nationally and locally.

1.6. We welcome your comments on the new draft and will seek to reflect them in the final version of the Strategy, which is intended to be published in October 2012.

1.7. Please complete the attached consultation questionnaire and return by email to: joanne.purvis@kent.gov.uk . You can also email general comments on the draft if you do not wish to use the questionnaire format. The **closing date** for responses is **23rd May 2012**.

1.8. We are also looking for best practice case studies to populate the refresh. If you think you have a case study that supports the themes of the strategy, please complete the template found within the consultation questionnaire document and return by email to joanne.purvis@kent.gov.uk.

2. Asks of Government

2.1. The previous Kent Forum Housing Strategy achieved great success in shaping government's thinking on housing, with 7 out of the 8 "asks of government", including simplifying the regulatory framework, supporting people into home ownership and supporting retrofit, having made their way at least partially into new government policy.

2.2. The draft refresh of the Housing Strategy has developed new "**asks of government**", setting out the Forum's key strategic housing priorities where government action or changes to policy are required. These are:

- (i) Ensure that Kent and Medway do not suffer a disproportionate rise in new housing benefit claimants as an unintended consequence of welfare reform
- (ii) Recognise the importance of Kent and Medway to the UK economy and ensure that it is able to access limited government funding to stimulate new housing delivery across the County
- (iii) Enable Kent to build on the success of its award-winning No Use Empty campaign by ensuring that Kent is able to take advantage of the additional £50m available to tackle the worst concentration of empty homes
- (iv) Work with local authorities and private registered providers across Kent and Medway to develop future funding models for affordable and social housing after the Affordable Homes Programme ends in 2015
- (v) Ensure that the independent review into institutional investment in the private rented sector considers models being developed in Kent which utilise public land and institutional funding to deliver new homes
- (vi) Support and help to enable the delivery of key strategic infrastructure to help support economic growth across Kent and Medway
- (vii) Support the New Homes Bonus scheme beyond the current commitment of 6 years to continue to stimulate new housing delivery across the County
- (viii) Continue to support people's aspirations for home ownership by raising stamp duty thresholds, maintaining support for first time buyers and exploring options for increasing affordable mortgage finance
- (ix) Recognise the importance of housing the ageing population and provide support to enable innovative approaches to older people's accommodation

QUESTION 1: WE WOULD WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS ON THE ASKS OF GOVERNMENT. ARE THESE APPROPRIATE? ARE THERE OTHERS YOU FEEL SHOULD BE INCLUDED?

3. Key Priorities

3.1. The draft refreshed Strategy identifies a number of new issues as **key priorities** for Kent and Medway and seeks to take a position on this. These are:

- (i) Funding housing growth and infrastructure
- (ii) Welfare reform
- (iii) Affordable rent
- (iv) Access to home ownership
- (v) Investment in the private rented sector
- (vi) Homelessness
- (vii) Access to housing for ex-service personnel

QUESTION 2: DO YOU AGREE THAT THESE ISSUES ARE KEY PRIORITIES FOR KENT AND MEDWAY? ARE THERE OTHERS YOU FEEL SHOULD BE INCLUDED?

4. Recommendations

4.1. The existing Strategy contains recommendations around key priorities which have been taken forward by the Kent Housing Group and Kent Planning Officers Group. The majority of these have either been delivered or are nearing completion.

4.2. The draft refresh of the Strategy contains **new recommendations** to reflect the new priorities set out above. These are not binding on any authority or housing organisation and no organisation will be bound to implement them if it is no appropriate for them to do so.

4.3. The recommendations are:

THEME 1 - MANAGED GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE

NO.	RECOMMENDATION
1	Kent Planning Officers Group, Kent Housing Group and Kent Developers Group to develop a Kent and Medway Neighbourhood Planning Protocol, to assist in the production of, and provide a framework for, Neighbourhood Plans.
2	Local authorities across Kent and Medway to explore the potential for the pooling of CIL to fund strategic infrastructure within the County where there is genuine shared benefit.
3	Promote and engage with government proposals for the introduction of Tax Increment Financing and other innovative forms of infrastructure funding and support pilot projects in Kent and Medway.
4	Kent Housing Group to work with the Homes and Communities Agency to develop new models for the delivery of social and affordable housing in Kent and Medway after 2015.
5	Public sector organisations create development strategies and enter into agreements with the private sector that exploit the opportunity to share risk and reward to stimulate delivery, such as the Kent and Medway Investment Fund.
6	Kent Developers Group, Kent Planning Officers Group, Kent Housing Group & Homes and Communities Agency to develop a Kent-wide understanding on viability for local authorities and developers to enable more effective delivery of new homes across Kent and Medway.
7	Local authorities to consider the potential for renegotiating s.106 agreements on non-viable sites to enable quick delivery of new homes within a specified timeframe.
8	Kent County Council and Kent Developers Group to engage with Government through mechanisms such as the <i>Red Tape Challenge</i> to reduce the unnecessary burden of regulation in the housebuilding industry.

THEME 2 – PLACE-MAKING AND REGENERATION

NO.	RECOMMENDATION
9	Kent Housing Group to develop a County-wide common framework for tenancy strategies to be used to inform development of local housing strategies across Kent and Medway.
10	The Kent Design Initiative to develop and set up an active Kent-centric website, cross-sector discussion forums and good-practice notes, to continue to promote design quality across Kent and Medway.
11	Kent Fire and Rescue Service, Kent Housing Group and Joint Policy and Planning Board to work in partnership to develop and implement the most cost effective way of protecting vulnerable households, and those who are at the greatest risk from fire and promoting higher standards in properties in the rented sector.
12	Kent Fire and Rescue Service and Kent Developers Group to jointly identify ways of reducing fire risks during construction

THEME 3 – AFFORDABILITY AND CHOICE

NO.	RECOMMENDATION
13	Kent local authorities to develop a county-wide Local Authority Mortgage Scheme to assist First Time Buyers in Kent and Medway to access home ownership.
14	Kent Forum, through Ambition Board 2, to monitor and respond to the potential impacts on Kent and Medway from the unintended consequences of welfare reform.
15	Kent Forum, through Ambition Board 2, to monitor the use of affordable rent across Kent and Medway and the extent to which it responds to local housing need.
16	Kent Housing Group and the Kent Rural Board to monitor the impact of the Rural Housing Protocol on the delivery of housing in rural areas across Kent and Medway.
17	Promote the establishment of a sizeable institutional or private equity funded private rented sector and identify sites across the County where such an approach could be piloted.

THEME 4 – HOUSING RENEWAL

NO.	RECOMMENDATION
18	Joint Policy and Planning Board to promote with the Health and Wellbeing Board the importance of housing condition to quality of life and health outcomes and establish stronger links and closer working relationships with health agencies.
19	Radically simplify the energy efficiency funding and support landscape for Kent and Medway residents and ensure partners, businesses and residents are prepared for the transition to the Green Deal.
20	Encourage closer joint working between No Use Empty, Districts and Boroughs and Medway, and continue to seek to attract new government funding to bring further empty properties back into use across Kent and Medway.

THEME 5 – HOUSING NEED

NO.	RECOMMENDATION
21	Kent Housing Options Group should to continue to monitor the use of homelessness and temporary accommodation across Kent and Medway and feedback to Government any impacts arising from welfare reform.
22	The JPPB to identify multi-agency resources dedicated to the prevention of youth homelessness and strengthening relationships with family and social networks and the settlement of young offenders in order to prevent re-offending.
23	The JPPB, Kent Housing Group, Kent Planning Officers Group and Kent Developers Group to work together to develop a Physical Disability Protocol to enable a consistent and strategic approach to delivering affordable housing for people with a physical disability.
24	The JPPB to continue to promote the use of the Kent Housing Action Plan for People with a Learning Disability and the development of a toolkit to support people with learning disabilities understand their housing choices.
25	The JPPB, including Supporting People, to work with supported housing providers, care managers and landlords to ensure that service users are equipped with the skills and knowledge and support to live independently and be socially included.
26	Kent Housing Group and JPPB to work with developers, private registered providers, Kent County Council, the Elderly Accommodation Council and Retirement Housing Group to develop an Older People's Housing Protocol, older people's housing advice service and an Extra Care Housing Strategy.
27	The JPPB to identify a pathway for the resettlement of ex-service personnel who have offended.
28	KCC and Medway Council to continue to prioritise investment to ensure the delivery of Supporting People priorities.
29	Kent Housing Group and the JPPB to work together with service personnel representative organisations, developers, lenders and Kent Homechoice to explore how to increase knowledge of housing options amongst members of the armed forces and their families.
30	Kent Housing Group and the JPPB to work together with service personnel representative organisations to explore options to assist vulnerable ex-service personnel who have become or are at risk of becoming homeless.

QUESTION 3: WE WOULD WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS.

5. Monitoring

5.1. To track the impact the refreshed Strategy and new government measures is having on Kent and Medway, it is proposed that a housing dashboard of key housing indicators will be developed. This will be monitored by Kent Housing Group and reported back to the Kent Forum.

5.2. It is proposed that the dashboard will include:

- Number of completions and type of housing built (private sector, rural housing, rental, specialist accommodation etc)
- Number of completions under the Affordable Rent Framework (ARF)
- Number of completions on public sector land
- Funding method for all completions
- House sales transactions
- Right to Buy sales
- House prices
- Rental prices (across all sectors)
- Number of long-term empty properties
- Tenancies granted under the ARF (tenancy type/cost/type of tenant)
- Mortgages granted under the Kent Local Authority Mortgage Scheme
- Number of homelessness applications
- Number of people placed in temporary accommodation
- Number of people on Housing Registers in priority need
- Information to track the impacts of welfare reform (to be developed by Kent Housing Group)

QUESTION 4: WE WOULD WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS ON THE INDICATORS. ARE THERE OTHERS THAT YOU THINK SHOULD BE INCLUDED?

6. Equalities

6.1. A draft initial equalities impact assessment has been carried out on the draft refresh of the Housing Strategy. A copy is attached at Annex A.

QUESTION 5: WE WOULD WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS ON THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT. ARE THE ASSUMPTIONS IN THE ASSESSMENT CORRECT?

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL
DRAFT EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Directorate: Enterprise and Environment

Name of policy, procedure, project or service: Kent Forum Housing Strategy
(Refresh)

Type: Policy

Responsible Owner/ Senior Officer: Brian Horton

Date of Initial Screening: 10th March 2012

Screening Grid

Characteristic	Could this policy, procedure, project or service affect this group differently from others in Kent? YES/NO	Could this policy, procedure, project or service promote equal opportunities for this group? YES/NO	Assessment of potential impact HIGH/MEDIUM/LOW/ NONE/UNKNOWN		Provide details: a) Is internal action required? If yes, why? b) Is further assessment required? If yes, why? c) Explain how good practice can promote equal opportunities
			Positive	Negative	
Age	Yes	No	MEDIUM	NONE	No further action required
Disability	Yes	No	MEDIUM	NONE	No further action required
Gender	No	No	NONE	NONE	No further action required
Gender identity	No	No	NONE	NONE	No further action required
Race	Yes	No	LOW	NONE	No further action required
Religion or belief	No	No	NONE	NONE	No further action required
Sexual orientation	No	No	NONE	NONE	No further action required
Pregnancy and maternity	No	No	NONE	NONE	No further action required

Part 1: INITIAL SCREENING

Context

The Kent Forum Housing Strategy is a daughter document of KCC's Regeneration Framework – Unlocking Kent's Potential. However, it is a cross-Kent document that is owned collectively by KCC, all Kent District and Borough Councils and Medway Council through the Kent Forum.

Aims and Objectives

The Kent Forum Housing Strategy describes the strategic direction for housing across the county of Kent, based on the local ambitions and aims of the Districts, Boroughs and Medway Council. It is unique in that it looks across a whole county area and brings District, Borough, Unitary and County Council ambitions together in a bottom-up approach.

It provides clarity on the major strategic housing challenges facing Kent and Medway; acknowledges that past ways of working may not be fit for the future and offers recommendations that stakeholders across Kent and Medway can collectively embrace to tackle these challenges as appropriate.

The Strategy was developed collaboratively between Kent and Medway local authorities, Kent Partnership, Kent Economic Board and other public, private and third sector organisations with an interest in housing. It is the outcome of nearly 2 years of analysis, discussion and consultation on the major housing challenges facing Kent and Medway now and in the future.

Following launch of the original Strategy in May 2011, the Strategy is now being refreshed to take account of the key legislative and regulatory changes which have been introduced by the Government since the Strategy's launch.

The Strategy is both an inward-facing and an outward-facing document. It seeks to encourage organisations across Kent and Medway to realise the benefits of a shared approach to common problems where collectively it will add value.

The refreshed Strategy has identified 5 key housing challenges that need to be tackled, each with a related ambition:

1. The need to secure the **delivery** of new homes
2. The imperative to achieve **regeneration** of key sites across the County and support **economic growth**
3. The need for **renewal** of existing homes and the return to use of **empty homes**
4. The challenge and opportunity of improving the **energy efficiency** of existing homes
5. The need to consider the impact of **welfare reform** and the needs of **vulnerable groups** and the support services they require

In response to these challenges, we have identified a number of key strategic ambitions that we want to deliver across Kent and Medway. These are:

1. The continued **delivery** of key **infrastructure** to support **managed growth** and **housing delivery** across the County.
2. The continued **regeneration** of our **disadvantaged neighbourhoods** to bring them in line with more affluent parts of the County.
3. The provision of **choice** and **affordability** in housing for the citizens of Kent and Medway, including **rural communities**, which meets their needs and aspirations.
4. The managed improvement and **retrofit** of existing homes to make them fit for now and the future.
5. 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.

Underpinning of these ambitions is the need to ensure that vulnerable people and disadvantaged communities are supported and that housing delivery responds to diverse housing needs.

Recommendations

Within each theme 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.

The Strategy does not take a 'one size fits all' approach. Instead, we expect local authorities to seek to implement only those recommendations which are appropriate for them.

Beneficiaries

Districts and Boroughs, Medway Council, Housing Associations, landowners, developers, residents of Kent

Consultation and data

Two consultations on drafts of the original Strategy were held in June 2010 and October 2010. No responses specifically about equality and diversity issues or impact on any particular group were received. A further consultation will be carried out on the refresh of the Strategy, which will invite comments on the draft initial impact assessment for the refresh.

To support the original Strategy a Strategic Housing Market Assessment was undertaken in 2010. As part of this, data was prepared on demographic drivers of the housing market, the existing Kent and Medway population and potential future population changes; affordability and changing types of tenure; and housing need, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups including young people, the elderly, the disabled and Gypsies and Travellers.

This data was updated at the end of 2011 and used as the evidence base for the refresh of the Strategy and to inform this initial Equality Impact Assessment.

Potential Impact

Adverse Impact: There are no potential adverse impacts from this Strategy.

Positive Impact:

Age

The Strategy proposes recommendations specifically around reducing homelessness amongst vulnerable young people and providing better housing support and more accommodation to help meet their needs and prevent homelessness.

The Strategy also contains recommendations around improving affordability and choice, particularly in rural areas of Kent and accessing the housing market. This is aimed at helping First Time Buyers, which is proportionately likely to be beneficial to those under 40.

The Strategy also has a strong focus on the needs of older people, and how to link housing with health and well-being objectives. The needs of older people are considered within recommendations around design standards to help older people remain in their own home. There is also a recommendation to develop a Protocol around the delivery of Older People's Accommodation and an older people's specific housing advice service, to help older people to understand the housing choices.

Disability

The Strategy highlights the housing needs of people with a learning disability and mental health problems and advocates ways of working which provide them with greater housing support.

The Strategy also highlights the housing needs of people with a physical disability and the need to ensure people have access to funding to adapt their homes to meet their physical disability needs and also the need to ensure future provision of wheelchair accessible homes.

Race

The Strategy highlights the need for better collaboration between partners to enable the correct provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites across Kent and reduce some of the potential cultural implications of people being unsuccessfully accommodated in static housing.

General

The Strategy highlights the need to improve the condition of housing found within the private sector, which is often poor quality and has knock-on consequences for people's health. Private sector tenants in particular who are living in such poor quality accommodation are more likely to come from a range of vulnerable groups, including people with drug or alcohol problems, people with learning disabilities, people with mental or physical health problems, recent migrants and those living on or around the poverty line.

The Strategy also highlights the potential impacts that may arise as a result of the changes to welfare benefits being introduced by the government.

JUDGEMENT

Option 1 – Screening Sufficient

YES

Following this initial screening our judgement is that no further action is required.

Justification:

The Strategy has the potential for a positive impact on particular groups but no adverse impacts. The Strategy is a strategic-level document that sets out aims and ambitions for housing in Kent and Medway and proposes recommendations to tackle key housing challenges. It does not set out specific methods of delivery.

The Strategy is not a KCC document but is owned collectively by KCC, Medway and all the Kent District and Borough Councils. There is no onus on any authority to carry-out any of the recommendations within the Strategy.

Local authorities will choose which recommendations they wish to implement and these will be delivered as part of their individual Local Housing Strategies, which undergo their own impact assessment. Any specific local impacts will be picked up and dealt with by these assessments. A copy of such an impact assessment is attached for information. Where the Strategy recommends the county-wide use of existing policies or services, these have also undergone their own impact assessments, i.e. Kent Homechoice, a copy of which can be found here:

<http://www.kenthomechoice.org.uk/uploads/EIAER2011.pdf> .

Overall implementation of the refresh of the Housing Strategy will be co-ordinated and monitored by the Kent Housing Group, the collective voice for social housing in Kent, who will ensure that fairness and equality are accounted for in delivering the recommendations.