

# BMSDC Housing Strategy Communications and Stakeholder Involvement Plan 2018 - 2023

## **BMSDC Housing Strategy Communications and Stakeholder Involvement Plan**

### **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils (BMSDC) have identified a Joint Housing Strategy Development project as a strategic priority and this has been implemented to run from January to December 2018.
- 1.2 The JHS development project group comprises:
  - Project Sponsors – Strategic Directors
  - Accountable Officer – Corporate Manager – Strategic Planning
  - Housing Strategy Officer
  - Assistant Directors: Planning for Growth  
Housing
  - Cabinet Members for Housing
  - Business Improvement Partner
  - Communications Business Partner
  - Housing Challenge Theme Leads: see Section 1.11.
- 1.3 The JHS Project will develop and implement a new **BMSDC Joint Housing Strategy 2018-2036**. This end date is co-terminus with the emerging new BMSDC Joint Local Plan period.
- 1.4 The first phase of the Joint Housing Strategy will cover the period 2018 – 2023, although the Councils' medium term and long-term housing strategy ambitions through to 2036 will be articulated at first adoption (anticipated Dec 2018). The Housing Strategy will also have a consideration of what housing might be like in 2050.
- 1.5 There is no legal requirement placed on Local Planning Authorities or Local Housing Authorities to have in place a comprehensive Housing Strategy. However, due to the significant issues within the national, regional, and local housing markets it is appropriate to have in place a comprehensive Housing Strategy to support achieving both councils' ambitions articulated in the 'Strategic Priorities Refresh'.
- 1.6 BMSDC is also required under Section 1 (1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 to carry out a homelessness review and formulate a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review. Under Section 1 (4) of the 2002 Act, BMSDC are required to publish a homelessness strategy and carry out a further review within five years.
- 1.7 BMSDC's current Homeless Strategy 2013-2018 requires review and significant changes to be made because of the new duties contained within the [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#) which came in to force from April 2018.

1.8 The purpose of an overarching / comprehensive Housing Strategy is to review housing related issues in the area, set out housing objectives, establish priorities for action and create SMART action plans in collaboration with Members, key stakeholders, and partners. In other words, create a publicly available housing related 'golden thread' narrative about our housing market ambition, showing strong political leadership to get things done.

1.9 BMSDC 'Housing Vision' 2018 – 2036 states:

Residents of BMSDC can live in places where households have access to affordable, high-quality homes enabling them to build settled, safe and healthy lives, within sustainable and thriving communities.

We will focus effort to create the best conditions to ensure:

- The housing market functions effectively, providing homes which are as affordable as possible, to meet the housing needs of residents and support the local economy
- There is a wide and varied choice of good quality, \*sustainable homes of different sizes, types, and tenures to meet the aspirations (needs) of a wide range of differing households
- Homelessness is prevented, and the needs of vulnerable people are met
- BMSDC is an effective social landlord known for delivering quality services to tenants
- Homes are in high quality, connected (\*\*sustainable) places (environments) served by a buoyant jobs market and neighbourhood facilities, appropriate green space, effective transport links and other essential infrastructure
- Best use is made of private and public-sector land and accommodation assets across the districts
- People from all walks of life can live together in harmony, within mixed and balanced communities; and homes and communities continue to meet the needs of residents in to the future
- Everyone has access to a suitable home and residents can live as healthily, safely, and independently as possible within resilient communities
- Both Councils have strong relationships with residents, developers and partners enabling us to deliver new homes and associated services effectively.

\*Sustainable homes: When we use the word “**sustainable**” we mean **homes** that are designed to reduce the overall environmental impact during and after construction in such a way that we can meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

\*\***Sustainable communities** are places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life.

## **Identification of four key Housing Challenges**

1.10 Four 'housing challenges' or 'themes' have been identified to respond to the 'more of the right type of homes, of the right tenure in the right place' strategic ambition. These are:

- a) Increase delivery of new homes
- b) Supporting the most vulnerable households to find and sustain a home of their choice
- c) Ensuring the existing housing stock is good quality, fuel efficient and fit for 21<sup>st</sup> century living
- d) Providing more choice in the housing market for older households and those requiring accessible homes.

1.11 Responsible leads for each of the themes / underpinning evidence / SMART action plans are from the following areas:

- a) Infrastructure / Strategic Housing
- b) Housing Solutions
- c) Property Services / Tenant Services
- d) Communities & Growth /Health & Well-being

1.12 It is considered vital to have a Communications and Stakeholder Involvement Plan underpinning the Joint Housing Strategy Development Project to show how both Councils will work in a transparent and effective manner to inform residents, parish and town councils, public sector and private sector partners, technical and non-technical stakeholders to create positive working relationships and open information from the start.

## **2.0 Aims of the JHS Development Project Communications Strategy**

2.1 These are:

- To identify the key messages and ensure these remain consistent throughout all communications associated with the Housing Strategy
- Establish the key stakeholders and determine the communication channels and tools needed to convey the key messages
- Set out the framework for communication in terms of where and when and how to deliver key messages
- Identify opportunities for proactive communication and create the capacity to make these happen in good time
- Identify any potential risks (e.g. reputational, misinformation, financial) and put in place communication countermeasures to mitigate against these.

### **3.0 Key Messages and the Framework for Communication**

#### **General**

- 3.1 These will relate to four identified housing challenges / themes articulated in the Part 1.10 of this Communications Strategy:
- a) Increase delivery of new homes
  - b) Supporting the most vulnerable households to find and sustain a home of their choice
  - c) Ensuring the existing housing stock is good quality, fuel efficient and fit for 21<sup>st</sup> century living
  - d) Providing more choice in the housing market for older households and those requiring accessible homes.
- 3.2 Key messages will also include a selection of housing related case studies and projects which are the outcome of successful plans to deliver new homes, estate regeneration, new growth areas, or homes for the ageing population.
- 3.3 An overarching Housing Strategy message is 'developing new housing and housing regeneration takes a long time' and doesn't happen over the short term.
- 3.4 There will be regular briefings and workshops undertaken throughout each year in the following way for the following key organisations, and people: -
- Twice yearly briefings on JHS SMART action plan progress for all District Members
  - Twice yearly messages on JHS SMART action plan progress direct to all Parish and Town Councils within the two Districts
  - Yearly event for all housing developer providers (to be held on a Suffolk-wide basis if other authorities are willing and timescales allow). Otherwise Babergh and Mid Suffolk will engage once a year (on an event basis) and hold regular meetings with housing developer providers as required throughout the remainder of the year to an agreed and audited plan.

#### **Regular Communication - Frequency and type**

- 3.5 The Homelessness Reduction Strategy action plans will require reporting as per that project plan. (TBC)
- 3.6 A 'Housing Strategy' newsletter featuring positive news stories / innovative ideas / collation of housing research will be created on a quarterly (TBC) basis by the Housing Strategy Officer and the virtual 'Housing Innovations Team' (TBC)
- 3.7 Articles will be placed in 'Working Together' to inform all Officers and Members on a quarterly or more frequent basis, linking to the above.

- 3.8 The Housing Strategy Communications Business Partner will monitor social and other media sources and release communications or answer questions about housing related social media posts.

#### **4.0 Key Audience**

- 4.1 These are:

- Housing Developers – Private Sector, local Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs), national specialist developers
- Housing Developers – Registered Providers
- All relevant statutory officers
- All District Members
- County Council Members, as relevant to addressing Suffolk System solutions to the key housing challenges all District Councils and Borough Councils are facing
- All Parish and Town Councils
- Community Groups e.g. Neighbourhood Plan Groups, Community Land Trust groups
- Residents in both Districts
- Leaders and Cabinet Members of both Babergh and Mid Suffolk
- Joint Chief Executive and Strategic Leadership Team (SLT)
- All Staff (including all Strategic Directors, Assistant Directors, Corporate Managers and Professional Leads)
- Media.

#### **5.0 Communication Channels**

- 5.1 These are:

- District Councils website
- E-mails to key audiences
- Town and Parish Council Meetings
- Leader and Portfolio Holder briefings
- District Council Member Briefings
- Parish and Town Council briefings and workshops
- Media releases
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter)
- Town and Parish Council newsletter
- Internal communications
- One-off, tailor-made community events.

#### **6.0 Communication Tools**

- 6.1 Many of our audience already receive numerous communications from us across a range of subjects and projects. To help ensure our communication on the Housing Strategy is easily recognisable and read, it will be necessary to clearly identify the purpose of the communication at the top of the key message.

- 6.2 Templates for emails, and updates will also be developed to ensure clarity of message, if required.
- 6.3 Social media will also be a key channel for communicating with our audiences and to help ensure these messages are recognised. Use hashtags # for each Twitter and Facebook update where appropriate.

## **7.0 Spokespeople**

- 7.1 Housing Strategy updates and news stories will be communicated through the Councils' website and this will be regularly updated subject to the other requirements in this document.
- 7.2 For Housing Strategy matters relating to Housing:
- Cabinet Member for Housing BDC
  - Cabinet Member for Housing MSDC and,
- For Housing Strategy matters relating to Planning:
- Cabinet member for Planning BDC and
  - Cabinet member for Planning MSDC.
- 7.3 There may be instances when it will be relevant for both Housing and Planning Cabinet Members to issue messages together, which will be decided on a case by case basis by the Housing Strategy - Communications Business Partner.

## **8.0 Risks**

- 8.1 The successful delivery of the actions plans associated with the Housing Strategy Infrastructure projects across both District Councils are important for reasons outlined in the housing strategy. Mainly it is about creating new homes to meet the housing needs of households within the district. This in turn supports the shaping of places and resilient communities where all current residents and residents of the future can thrive.
- 8.2 As such progress against published actions, values, and leadership will be the focus of a great deal of interest from our key audience and may generate media interest and engagement on a wider level.
- 8.3 This audience is invested in the outcome of these projects for a variety of reasons - financial, social, and economic. This will bring these projects under very close scrutiny and we need to acknowledge that failure to effectively communicate with our audience could have a significant impact on its success and the reputation of both Councils.
- 8.4 It is also important to recognise that communication needs to be accurate and clear and both Councils will correct any factual inaccuracies should they occur.

## 9.0 Indicative Timetable

Task	Date	Notes
SLT Briefing for steer/ scope	Jan 2018	Complete
Housing market stakeholder event enabling joint approach	April 2018	Complete
Member workshop – ideas and joint approach	June 2018	Complete
Joint Overview & Scrutiny; process endorsement	July 2018	Ongoing
Theme leads continue plans including stakeholder reviews	June - Aug	Ongoing
Cabinets 1; First draft comments	Sept 2018	
Open consultation – 6 weeks	Sept / Oct	
Member briefing; review consultation, final comments	Nov 2018	
Cabinets 2: request adoption of final draft	Dec 2018	

### Housing Strategy Officer

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