

## REPORT TO CABINET

Title: **HOUSING STRATEGY 2008 - 2011**

Date: 18 December 2008

Member Reporting: Councillor Dudley

Contact Officer(s): Chris Thomas, Head of Housing & Residential Development  
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Wards affected: All Wards

### 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1.1 Strategically, housing is at the heart of place shaping and local authorities are encouraged to take full and proper account of housing as part of the strategic vision for the area. The Council's previous Housing Strategy ran from 2004-7 so an updated Strategy is now due. The updated Strategy will be available for incorporation in the Sustainable Community Strategy.
- 1.1.2 The strategic housing role encompasses all aspects of housing work undertaken by the Royal Borough since stock transfer. It has a key role to play in addressing some of the challenges arising from the current economic crisis.
- 1.1.3 The draft Housing Strategy 2008-11 is a concise document, as encouraged by the government for ease of incorporation in the Sustainable Community Strategy. It seeks to place the housing issues and challenges faced by the Royal Borough in the context of national, regional and sub-regional approaches; and to make the appropriate links with other corporate work. Separate sub-strategies are under review for the Private Sector, Homelessness and Supporting People, and these areas are covered in detail along with the provision of new affordable housing. A key part of the document is the Action Plan which details the key challenges and the work planned to tackle them. RBWM Housing Facts and Figures (Appendix 1) and the Draft Strategy (Appendix 2) are available in Group Rooms, Members' Rooms and from Democratic Services.
- 1.1.4 **RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Housing Strategy 2008 – 2011 be endorsed.**

What will be different for residents as a result of this decision?
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The Council will have an up-to-date strategy in place for tackling the wide range of housing related issues which can affect residents. It also identifies gaps in service areas, and has an action plan for addressing those gaps. In addition the Council will be better placed to address the challenges that local residents will face as a consequence of the downturn in the economy, and to support those most affected.
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## **2. SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **2.1 Background**

- 2.1.1 It is expected that local authorities will regularly review their Housing Strategy. The statutory guidance “Creating Strong, Safe, and Prosperous Communities” published by Communities and Local Government in July 2008, reaffirms that the government considers that housing is at the heart of place shaping and encourages local authorities to take full and proper account of housing as part of the strategic vision for the area. It also confirms that the Housing Strategy (along with the Homelessness Strategy), should be incorporated within the Sustainable Community Strategy.
- 2.1.2 The Royal Borough’s previous Housing Strategy ran from 2004-7, and achieved the old “fit for purpose” criteria against which it was assessed by the Government Office for the South East. This proved quite prescriptive and the Government has now moved away from this, and local authorities are now given more freedom to decide how they will deliver on their strategic housing role.
- 2.1.3 The strategic housing role encompasses all aspects of housing work undertaken by the Royal Borough since stock transfer, including the work on homelessness and housing need undertaken by the Housing Options team, the work to provide housing related support for vulnerable people undertaken by the Supporting People team, and the wide variety of initiatives undertaken in relation to the private sector by the Environmental Health team. It also covers the work of the Housing Enabling Manager on the provision of new affordable housing (one of the Council’s Local Area Agreement targets), and an overview of the housing market as whole: both these areas involve close liaison with the Planning function of the Council.
- 2.1.4 The new Housing Strategy is being produced at a time of huge economic turmoil and uncertainty. Severe problems in the operation of the housing market have been apparent for some months and the effects of this will undoubtedly place additional strain on various areas of the Council’s strategic housing work over the period of the Strategy. In particular we are likely to see a rise in the number of repossessions, increased difficulty for first time buyers and others without a significant amount of equity, and subsequent increased pressure on the Housing Register. At the same time the ability of the Council to provide new affordable housing in partnership with the private sector is being compromised as housing development has slowed dramatically. Housing Associations too are finding it increasingly difficult to finance new development activity.

## **3. OPTIONS AVAILABLE AND RISK ASSESSMENT**

### **3.1 Options**

	<b>Option</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Financial Implications</b>
1.	Not endorse the draft Housing Strategy.	This would leave the Council without an up-to-date strategy for incorporation within the Sustainable Community Strategy in line with	Revenue: None  Capital: None

	<b>Option</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Financial Implications</b>
		Government recommendation.	
2.	Amend the draft Housing Strategy before endorsement.	This is possible, but further consultation may be required depending on the amendments.	Revenue: None Capital: None
3.	Endorse the draft Strategy.	If endorsed the Strategy would become a policy document for the Council, and can be incorporated within the Sustainable Community Strategy in line with Government recommendation	Revenue: None Capital: None

### **3.2 Risk assessment**

3.2.1 The risk of not endorsing the strategy is that the Council will not have an up-to-date Strategy in place for approaching the complex housing challenges in the Royal Borough in line with Government guidance.

3.2.2 Endorsing the strategy will ensure that the Council has a up-to-date Strategy and an action plan to direct its work in tackling housing issues in the Royal Borough over the next few years. It will also ensure that the Council is better placed to meet the challenges posed by the current economic crisis.

### **4. CONSULTATIONS CARRIED OUT**

4.1.1 The development of the Housing Strategy has been consulted on at the Royal Borough's Housing Forum meetings held in December 2007 and July 2008. A wide range of interested parties are invited to the Housing Forum. The draft Strategy is also being placed on the Council's website.

### **5. COMMENTS FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

5.1.1 That the report be recommended to Cabinet.

### **6. IMPLICATIONS**

6.1.1 The following implications have been addressed where indicated below.

<b>Financial</b>	<b>Legal</b>	<b>Human Rights Act</b>	<b>Planning</b>	<b>Sustainable Development</b>	<b>Diversity &amp; Equality</b>
✓ or N/A	✓ or N/A	✓ or N/A	✓ or N/A	✓ or N/A	✓ or N/A

Background Papers: Draft Housing Strategy 2008-11  
Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities (Communities and Local Government July 2008)