

7. DRAFT COUNCIL HOUSING STRATEGY

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To recommend a Draft Social Housing Strategy (Appendix One) in preparation for consultation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. Work has been underway during 2006 to develop a Social Housing Strategy for the Council. Staff gained councillor input to the brief for this work in December 2005.
3. Staff have subsequently been through a process of analysing reports and research, engaging with stakeholder groups and developing a Draft Social Housing Strategy.
4. The general contents and direction of the Draft Social Housing Strategy were discussed with councillors at a seminar on 26 September 2006.
5. This reports presents a Draft Social Housing Strategy for approval by the Council. The strategy has endorsed the Council's Housing Policy vision: "to contribute to the community's social well-being by ensuring safe, accessible and affordable housing is available to people on low incomes, including elderly persons and people with disabilities". The Social Housing Strategy recognises that the Council has a leadership role in the provision and facilitation of social housing in Christchurch. Partnerships and collaboration are central to the strategy, which emphasises that addressing social housing needs is something that cannot be done by one agency or sector alone.
6. The Social Housing Strategy will build on this vision through the following principles that will guide the strategy:
 - The Council has a leadership role in the provision and facilitation of social housing in Christchurch.
 - The city's Community Outcomes and the Council's Strategic Directions inform the Social Housing Strategy.
 - The Council's Social Housing Strategy leads to collaborative approaches with the community.
 - Partnerships contribute to effective social housing outcomes.
 - The Council's provision for social housing continues to be self-funding.
7. To complete the Social Housing Strategy now requires a period of consultation, consideration of the feedback received through this process and subsequent redrafting before the Council adopts the final strategy. The final strategy is due to be completed by the end of March 2007.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

8. The Draft Social Housing Strategy has been developed in accordance with the decision making and other provisions of the Local Government Act 2002. A period of broad consultation should now be undertaken. The decision making and other provisions of the Local Government Act 2002 impose significant obligations for public participation, openness and accountability in local authority decision-making. The obligation to consult may be implied in legislation or an obligation may arise out of a "legitimate expectation" on the part of the public, which is the case for the Draft Social Housing Strategy. There is a strong community interest and involvement in the Council's social housing provision. Government agencies and community organisations will expect to have a say in the future operation and function of the Council's social housing portfolio.
9. The Council's social housing provision is currently a self-funding operation, and does not draw upon rates for either capital or operational expenses. The Draft Social Housing Strategy recommends that this course of action be continued.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Council approve the Draft Social Housing Strategy (Appendix One) for consultation.

BACKGROUND ON DRAFT SOCIAL HOUSING STRATEGY

10. Housing is a key area through which social and economic well-being are influenced. Successful housing outcomes are just as important to community well-being as the availability of employment and access to services and facilities.
11. The Council's social housing role has evolved over time with increasing demands on its housing resources from a wider range of groups in the community. It was recognised in the strategy mapping exercise in 2005 that a Council social housing strategy is needed to provide a clear focus for its involvement in this area, and an appreciation of the necessary services and priorities that might be anticipated. This strategy aims to provide direction for the future role and involvement of the Council in social housing provision in Christchurch. It has been written with a twenty year time frame in mind.
12. In line with the New Zealand Housing Strategy (2005), social housing in this strategy is defined as:

Not for profit housing programmes that are supported but not necessarily delivered by government to help low and modest income households and other disadvantaged groups to access appropriate, secure and affordable housing.

13. A brief for the Social Housing Strategy was discussed with the Strong Communities Portfolio Group in December 2005. In general terms the process used since then has been as follows:
 - Relevant research and information documents were identified and analysed, in particular a 'Directions for City Housing' paper prepared in 2005. Demographic and socioeconomic trends likely to impact on housing were also examined.
 - A number of one on one meetings have been held with stakeholder groups including:
 - Housing New Zealand
 - Work and Income New Zealand (Christchurch)
 - Canterbury District Health Board
 - Corrections Department
 - Tenants Protection Association
 - City Mission
 - Methodist Mission
 - Salvation Army
 - Richmond Fellowship
 - Comcare
 - Age Concern
 - Letters were sent to other key community organisations asking them for comment on social housing issues. Responses were received from:
 - YWCA
 - Housing for Women Trust
 - Home and Family Society
 - Beckenham Community Housing Trust
 - Holly House
 - Solo women as Parents
 - Inner City Interagency Trust
 - Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand
 - Te Whare Roimata
 - Habitat for Humanity
 - Christchurch Budget Service
 - CDHB Community Therapy Service
 - Ka Wahine ki Otautahi Trust
 - Shakti Ethnic Women's Support Group

- Information was also obtained on other Housing Forum members, including Women's Refuge and Stepping Stone Trust.
 - The issues identified through research and stakeholder engagement were identified and analysed.
 - Options for the general direction for the Social Housing Strategy were developed by staff and shared with the Strong Communities Portfolio Group in August 2006, and with Councillors on 8 August 2006.
 - The general direction of the Draft Social Housing Strategy was further developed and discussed with Councillors at a seminar on 26 September 2006. Key comments from Councillors at this seminar included: the need for Council to act as a facilitator for social housing development, having stock available for short term tenancies, creating opportunities for private sector investment in social housing, linking in with the New Zealand Housing Strategy, having warm energy efficient housing stock, and the challenge of maintaining affordable rent levels whilst allowing for maintaining and reinvesting in the Council's social housing stock.
14. The Draft Social Housing Strategy sets out the strategic direction for both the Council's support and provision of social housing and the types of roles it can play in doing so. Through this strategy the Council is clearly signalling an ongoing proactive role in social housing in Christchurch. It remains committed to the provision of social housing, with a focus on the Social Housing Strategy has identified that it is appropriate to reaffirm the Council's social housing policy which is:
- "To contribute to the community's social well-being by ensuring safe, accessible, and affordable housing is available to people on low incomes including older people, and people with disabilities."*
15. Partnerships and collaboration underpin this strategy. The Council's strategy recognises that the continued development of partnerships with government agencies and community organisations for both housing provision and tenant support are vital for successful and sustainable social housing outcomes.
16. Following approval of the Draft Social Housing Strategy by the Council a process of general consultation on it needs to be undertaken. The consultation and communication plan for the Draft Social Housing Strategy has been developed. The consultation process will encompass government agencies, community organisations, Council's City Housing tenants, and individuals with an interest in social housing.
17. It is proposed that consultation on the Draft Social Housing Strategy run for a seven week period from 6 November 2006 until 22 December 2006. There will be several key meetings with forums such as the Housing Forum and Healthy Christchurch. The public will be able to provide comment on feedback forms that will be made available at all Council service centres, libraries, and online. It is intended that the Social Housing Strategy will be completed by the end of March 2007.