

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 17th January 2022

Wards: all

Subject: Adoption of Merton's housing delivery strategy

Lead officer: Director of Environment and Regeneration, Chris Lee

Lead member: Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency, Councillor Martin Whelton

Contact officer: Deputy FutureMerton Manager, Tara Butler

Recommendations:

A. That Cabinet adopt Merton's Housing Delivery Strategy and action plan.

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. In July 2021 Merton's Cabinet approved six weeks of public consultation on Merton's draft housing delivery strategy and action plan. Public consultation took place between August and October 2021, alerting a wide range of organisations and people and targeting responses from those involved in delivering housing in Merton.
- 1.2. This report summarises the public consultation results in Appendix A and recommends the adoption of Merton's Housing Delivery Strategy and action plan.
- 1.3. The final housing strategy document will not be reformatted in time for Leaders Strategy Group but will be available for Cabinet on 17th January 2022.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. Increasing the supply of high quality homes is a priority for the council. The Cabinet report in July 2021 set out the rationale for drafting a housing delivery strategy and action plan for Merton and how it was drafted in dialogue with housing providers.
- 2.2. It also referred to the links with other council strategies (Merton's Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan, Merton's Climate Strategy and Action Plan, Merton's draft Local Plan and associated housing delivery research and guidance).and referenced the 2015 investigations from the council's Scrutiny Task Group on housing supply and the July 2021 work at full council on housing supply.
- 2.3. The council is undertaking a number of projects towards increasing the delivery of high quality new homes. This draft housing delivery strategy should be read in conjunction with other council strategies, such as Merton's Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan, Merton's Climate Strategy and

Action Plan, Merton's draft Local Plan and associated housing delivery research and guidance.

2.4. In 2020 / 2021, consultancy Campbell Tickell undertook consultancy work for Merton Council to develop a draft housing delivery strategy as one of a range of actions Merton is undertaking to increase the supply and the quality of new homes.

2.5. The work included research on Merton's housing supply and interviews with Registered Housing Providers and others involved in housing supply in Merton.

How we consulted

2.6. Following Cabinet approval in July 2021 to consult on the draft strategy public consultation took place between Thursday 26th August and Thursday 7th October 2021. Initially consultation was advertised borough-wide and was then consultation was targeted at people and organisations who directly delivered housing (e.g. Registered Housing Providers) or are involved in supporting housing delivery (

2.7. Just over 1,000 emails were sent out combined with correspondence on Merton's Local Plan 2021 to maximise reach.

2.8. Discussions were held with individual housing providers including Wandle and Clarion.

2.9. A presentation was given to Merton Partnership's Sustainable Communities and Transport Partnership group at their meeting in September 2021, which included representatives from the voluntary sector and from Registered Housing Providers

2.10. Responses were received via an online questionnaire and via email.

Consultation feedback

2.11. Responses were received from four residents and from the following nine organisations:

- Bioregional
- Clarion Housing Group
- Merton Centre for Independent Living
- Merton Citizens
- Merton's Climate Action Group – buildings and energy subgroup
- Merton's Liberal Democrats
- The Destination Developers
- Transport for London Commercial Development
- Wandle Housing

2.12. Responses were all qualitative rather than quantitative. Most respondents structured their responses around the chapters in the housing delivery.

- Introduction

- Vision
- Background and context
- What does Merton need?
- Barriers and constraints
- Delivering the right new homes (and actions)
- Partnership (and actions)
- Direct intervention (and actions)
- Density and intensification (and actions)
- Housing for particular needs (and actions)
- Using and improving the existing stock (and actions)
- Governance and decision making (and actions)

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. None for the purposes of this report. The alternative option of not adopting the housing delivery strategy and action plan is not considered realistic as most respondents were supportive of the strategy in general, with feedback on specific elements.
- 3.2. There are alternatives for updating individual chapters within this study from public consultation feedback.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. As set out in the body of this report. Appendix A contains a summary of the comments received at public consultation.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. None for the purposes of this report.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. Funding for the preparation of this housing delivery strategy and action plan has come from existing resources. Funding for the delivery over time will come from a range of resources including Merton's existing resources, Registered Housing Providers and funding bids.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. There are no legal implications at this stage.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. An equalities impact assessment will inform the final housing delivery strategy.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. None for the purposes of this report.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. None for the purposes of this report.

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- Appendix A summary of comments received at public consultation
- Appendix B Housing Delivery Strategy and Action Plan – final version

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. London Plan 2021 and London Housing Strategy

<https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/housing-and-land>

12.2. Merton’s Strategic Housing Needs Assessment

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/assets/Documents/SHMA%20Report%20July%202019.pdf>

12.3. Merton’s Local Plan <https://www.merton.gov.uk/planning-and-buildings/planning/local-plan>

12.4. Merton’s housing delivery evidence

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/Documents/Merton%20Housing%20Delivery%20Research%20Final%20Report%20March%202021.pdf>

12.5. Merton’s affordable housing viability study 2020

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/assets/Documents/Merton%20Local%20Plan%20Housing%20Viability%20Study%202020.pdf>

APPENDIX A – SUMMARY OF COMMENTS RECEIVED AT CONSULTATION

Please note that one representor may make several comments on the same chapter.

1 General comments

The comments received were generally supportive that Merton Council has drafted a housing delivery strategy and action plan and people appreciated the opportunity to comment. Other general comments recommended presenting the strategy and action plan in a Merton Council format; being clear at the front and throughout that this is a five-year strategy and carrying the timescales through to the actions.

General actions:

- Reformat the strategy in Merton Council's format
- Add clarity in introduction and throughout, including action plan, on 5 year strategy and other relevant timescales

2 Vision

Seven comments were received on the vision. The responses either supported the vision or asked for it to be improved as it was not Merton specific, did not refer to other council strategies, the standards of existing housing stock or the need for accessible housing

Vision - actions – update the vision to make it more Merton-specific, refer to the climate emergency and accessible housing.

3 Background and context

Eight comments were received on the background and context. The comments were glad that the chapter is transparent about the levels of deprivation in parts of the borough and the lower proportion of housing development. Responses cited specific paragraphs for amendments, sought additional information on housing occupancy levels (which the council does not hold for general housing but Registered Providers hold for social housing) and the availability of socially rented housing that is accessible to deaf and disabled people.

Background and context - actions: - Incorporate key data from later chapters for context (e.g. housing needs, particularly for specific groups)

4 What does Merton need?

12 comments were received on the chapter “what does Merton need?” Comments focussed on specific issues that related to the respondent: ranging from the need for affordable housing, accessible housing, net zero carbon housing, robust planning

policies, reference to housing enforcement and licensing, the definition of affordable housing, affordable rent, social rent etc. some comments queried specific data within the chapter.

What does Merton need – actions:

- Improve the links within this chapter to other council policies and functions where relevant without unnecessary duplication; consider proportionate reference to planning policies, housing enforcement function, the climate strategy and action plan.
- Review the data within this chapter, particularly in the light of specific comments

5 Barriers and constraints

Eight comments were received on the “barriers and constraints” chapter. Most comments related to the availability of sites of different sizes, which is a feature of this chapter. Other queries were raised about the use of the council’s own sites to deliver affordable housing and whether Merton will restart the Housing Revenue Account.

Barriers and constraints - actions: - update chapter to refer to December 2021 Cabinet report which recommended actions on the first tranche of Merton Council owned sites to deliver housing, particularly affordable housing. The same report also refers to selective licensing and planning system actions.

6 Delivering the right new homes (and actions in the Action Plan)

13 comments were received on this chapter. Housing providers spoke of affordability concerns, the need for subsidy, overcrowding in existing homes and the need for quality in new affordable housing. Other comments referred to government’s new policy on discounted market sales, and the need for genuinely affordable homes. Two comments emphasised the need to be robust in challenging any developers’ assertions that providing affordable housing is not viable. There was broad support for a Registered Provider forum or at least links between RPs and the council as long as any new structure was focussed and relevant and did not duplicate the many existing forums.

Delivering the right new homes (and actions in the Action Plan) - actions

- as above, refer where relevant to Merton’s planning policies and functions
- review the action on developing a RP forum to see if it would function best as a large group, or as part of existing structures, or with 1-1 dialogue with the council and existing larger meetings

7 Partnerships and actions in the Action Plan

13 comments were received on the “Partnerships” chapter and the actions in the Action Plan; the chapter and actions were largely strongly supported, particularly the actions for housing providers to work together (either as part of a Registered Provider forum or otherwise) on matters such as net zero development and modular build.

Partnerships and actions in the Action Plan – actions: - as in the “delivering the right new homes” chapter, review the action on developing an effective forum for sharing knowledge across registered providers and the council

8 Direct intervention (and actions in the action plan)

15 comments were received on this chapter with many of these comments supportive. Several cited specific Mayor of London funding, housing investment funding, self-build and community build and re-establishing a Housing Revenue Fund. Different views were expressed on modular build, with some respondents supportive and others warning against it.

Direct intervention (and actions in the action plan) – review this chapter to update with relevant December 2021 Cabinet report resolutions on direct interventions, including the HRF and HIF.

9 Density and intensification (and actions in the action plan)

9 comments were received on this chapter, ranging from support for densities where quality development was achieved, housing needs and targets were met and to avoid building on open space, to some hesitation, to concerns relating to accessibility. Several comments sought additional planning guidance, which would be delivered through the Local Plan and not the housing delivery strategy.

Density and intensification (and actions in the action plan)- actions: review chapter to ensure proportionate reference to planning system actions while avoiding unnecessary duplication.

10 Housing for particular needs (and actions in the action plan)

There were 12 comments made to this chapter and its actions. Merton Centre for Independent Living sought greater reference to the delivery of accessible housing through Building Regulations and planning policy. Other respondents referred to the use of modular buildings for people who become homeless (i.e. similar to Y-cube in Mitcham); support for particular modular housing developments, schemes such as Homeshare or specific support for care leavers.

Housing for particular needs (and actions in the action plan) – actions: update this strategy and the actions particularly with reference to matters that have occurred since the draft strategy was published and also with proportionate reference to other council strategies (e.g. planning policy) and where Registered Providers or the housing regulator leads.

11 Using and improving the existing stock (and actions in the action plan)

11 comments were received on this chapter. Registered Providers sought information sharing on retrofit and refurbishment. Some respondents cited Houses in Multiple Occupation and other management and enforcement issues including landlord licensing.

Using and improving the existing stock (and actions in the action plan) – actions – review the chapter relating to the specific points raised in the representations to

clarify which are the purpose of the housing delivery strategy (e.g. joint working via RP forum or similar), which are delivered through other council approaches (e.g. update from December 2021 Cabinet report on landlord licensing) and which are delivered by other bodies (e.g. housing regulator).

12 Governance and decision making (and actions in the action plan) -

12 comments were received to this chapter and these were mostly supportive of both the chapter and its proposed actions. Some comments sought greater cross reference to other council functions and sought more commentary on the reasons behind some of the proposed actions

Governance and decision-making (and actions in the action plan) – actions: review the chapter to ensure all actions have a commentary to explain their origin within the body of the chapter. Explore whether greater cross reference to other chapters.