

Committee: Community and Housing Committee

Agenda Item

Date: 15th March 2011

8

Title: West Essex District Councils Local Investment Plan

Author: Martin Ling, Interim Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager, Ext 543

Item for decision

Summary

1. This report advises the Committee on the development of a Local Investment Plan for West Essex which has been produced in conjunction with Epping Forest and Harlow District Councils. The LIP addresses a number of cross cutting issues. A similar report is being considered by the Environment Committee as is a related report by the Finance and Administration Committee to consider boundary review and new homes bonus issues raised by Epping Forest District Council as a pre-condition of its approval of the LIP. This report is mainly concerned with the priorities attached to proposed investments from this committee's perspective, given its responsibilities for affordable housing programmes.

Recommendations

2. That the Committee recommends adoption of the Local Investment Plan to full Council.

Financial Implications

3. There are currently no specific financial implications for the Council arising from the adoption of the document but it is a key document in enabling partnership working with the Home and Communities Agency (HCA) including any financial support from the HCA for housing delivery either by the councils or registered providers operating in Uttlesford and its two partner districts or other local investment by the HCA.

Background Papers

4. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report

Draft West Essex Local Investment Plan
Epping Forest District Council – Report to Cabinet – 7/3/2011

Impact

1.

Communication/Consultation	Close engagement has taken place between the three local authorities, the HCA, Harlow Renaissance and Essex County Council.
Community Safety	N/A
Equalities	N/A
Health and Safety	N/A
Human Rights/Legal Implications	The LIP is a non statutory document.
Sustainability	N/A
Ward-specific impacts	The Investment Plan indicates locations where there are commitments to development.
Workforce/Workplace	N/A

Situation

6 The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) has requested that all local authorities produce a Local Investment Plan (LIP), agreed by the HCA in a form agreed by the HCA, setting out its approach to development in its District over a three year period. Although the requirement is not mandatory upon Local Authorities the HCA describes LIPs as the process by which it will work with Local Authorities and Communities to ‘support, enable and facilitate delivery of improvements for places and people’.

7 The intention for LIPs is to provide a framework for future partnership working with the HCA and to set out the investment required for an area to deliver the agreed vision and economic purpose of the place. LIPs, which originated from the HCA’s “Single Conversation”, will be used as the basis to set out the funding and resources that the HCA will invest in an area over time, as resources become available.

8 The LIP identifies the needs to be addressed, based on robust evidence from local strategies, including the Housing Strategy, the Strategic Housing Market Assessment and the Local Economic Assessment, and includes outputs that are expected from each partner’s interventions.

9 At the suggestion of the HCA, in view of the proposed growth of Harlow - which could potentially involve and affect neighbouring districts to Harlow – the three West Essex local

authorities (Uttlesford, Epping Forest and Harlow), together with Harlow Renaissance, Essex County Council and others have been working together to produce a **Joint** Local Investment Plan for West Essex. This has involved this Council's Director of Public Services and staff in his Directorate. Such joint working has been encouraged by the HCA nationally, but very few areas have been able to deliver joint LIPs.

10 This approach is also in keeping with the recent Memorandum of Understanding between the West Essex Councils.

11 The latest, advanced, draft of the LIP will be circulated at the meeting, and, subject to further minor amendments, now needs to be adopted by the three local authorities involved. One of the difficulties has been to set out a vision for West Essex, at a time when there is currently a hiatus in each local authority's thinking on its own development objectives, following the revocation of the East of England Plan (even though this was subsequently re-instated following a legal challenge). There is currently a need for each local authority to now determine, locally, the amount of growth that it considers appropriate for its district, and in which location(s). This view is being progressed through each council's Local Development Framework (LDF). Therefore, there is currently no clear view from any of the three local authorities on future development in each of the districts, let alone West Essex as a whole.

12 It will be seen that one of the key aims of the LIP is to support the growth of Harlow, as a "sub-regional" centre. However, for the reasons given above, there are no statements or commitments given as to the way such support would be provided by Uttlesford District, or to the extent of such support.

13 Priorities for investment across West Essex have emerged from the evidence that is set out in the LIP, and these have been prioritised in terms of both strategic importance and timescale deliverability. The prioritisation has been made, taking into account the following criteria:

- Existing prioritisation as agreed by individual councils
- Deliverability and viability
- Funding availability
- Potential contribution to the overall LIP vision.

14 The Priorities have been categorised into short, medium and longer term delivery. Affordable housing in Uttlesford is a category 1* programme extending across all three time frames. Maintaining the decent homes standard of all housing in Uttlesford is identified as a priority 1 programme in the longer term, and Uttlesford Gypsy and Traveller site provision a priority 2 project for the medium term.

15 As part of its quality assurance process, the draft West Essex LIP underwent a peer review by the HCA. Feedback following this process was positive and the LIP has been commended by the HCA for its quality, content and as an example of good partnership working across local authority boundaries. There were very few negative comments, which were all of a minor nature, and have been addressed.

16. If the Council agrees to adopt the LIP, Officers will continue to work with the Epping Forest District, Harlow District and the HCA to take forward the priorities identified in the LIP and aim to secure funding to develop those priorities. Decision on any specific projects or schemes will be channelled through the Cabinet and regulatory committee processes being introduced for the new council, as appropriate.

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
It proves not to be possible to achieve joint endorsement by the three participating councils	2, Epping Forest DC has particular sensitivities about the location of growth, whether it should accommodate growth by southern and western extension of Harlow into its district, the possibility of a subsequent boundary review and the implications for new homes bonus receipts and nomination rights.	2, Presently it is likely that inclusion of a housing site in the LIP is important to its success in securing HCA grant support. However, in the future HCA does not expect to provide grant support to affordable housing delivery on s.106 sites and will expect delivery to be funded through the introduction of affordable rents.	Exchange of letters with Harlow and Epping Forest DC to address the concerns of the latter authority.

- 1 = Little or no risk or impact
- 2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.
- 3 = Significant risk or impact – action required
- 4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.