

# East Surrey

## *Housing Strategy*

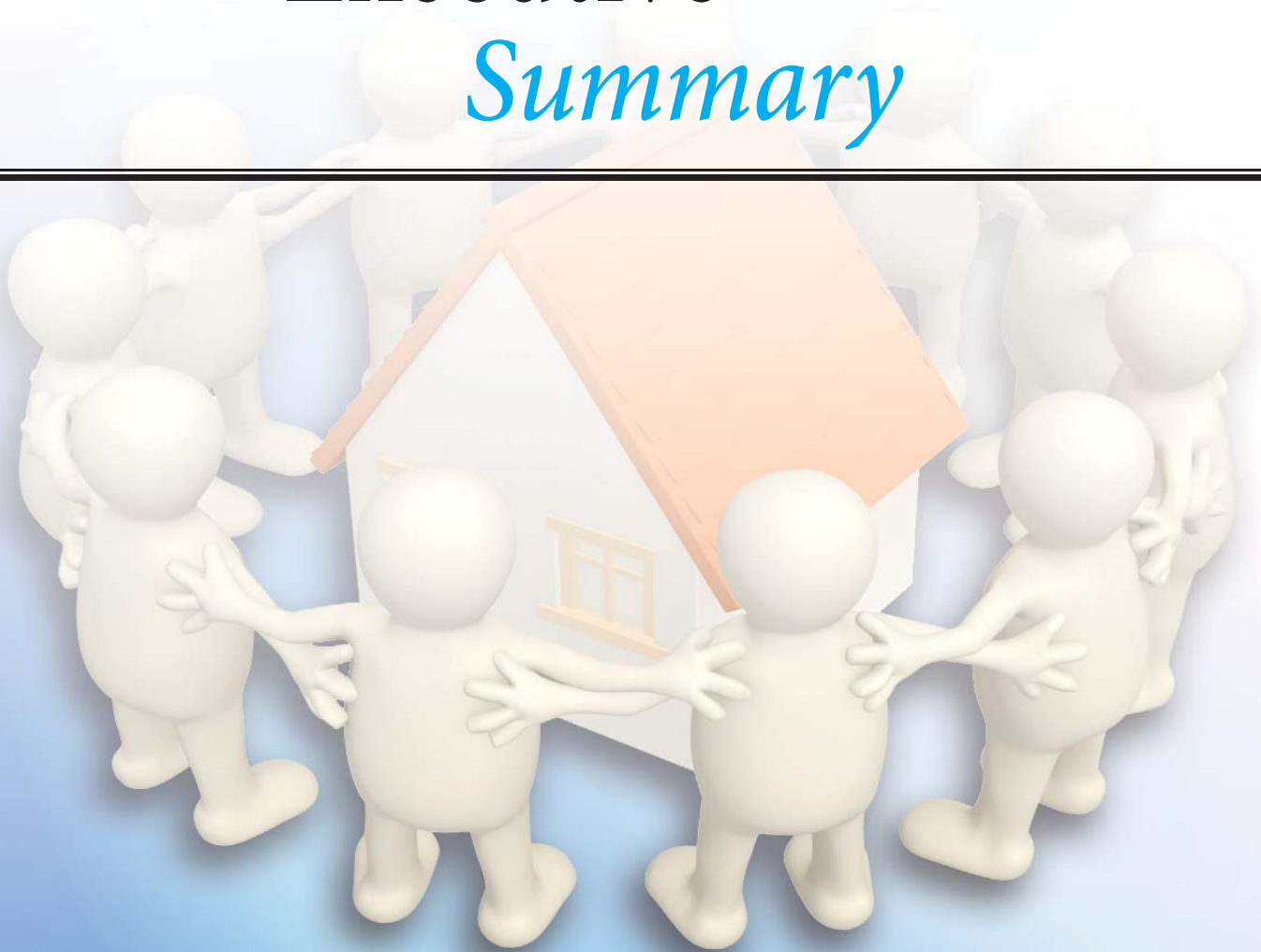
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## Executive

### *Summary*

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# Executive *Summary*

The purpose of Housing Strategies is to set out how housing authorities will deliver Housing Services to their residents. The priorities and objectives contained in this document have been developed following an analysis of housing need, sub regional, regional and national housing and planning trends and policies, and consultation with partners, businesses and residents. The decision to develop a joint East Surrey Housing Strategy rather than four individual strategies stems from the recognition that the four Councils, namely Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead, and Tandridge, share many housing issues and already have a track record of delivering joint housing projects and policy documents.

There are many benefits to joint working. These include offering more choice to our customers and providing clarity and consistency to external organisations through the development of consistent standards and approaches. We can also express a stronger collective voice to national and regional consultation, improve delivery as a result of greater flexibility, and, where appropriate, pool resources.

Whilst we have many things in common as East Surrey authorities, we have taken care to ensure that the differences between us are not ignored. For example, Tandridge is the only authority that has retained its own social housing stock as the others

have all completed transfers of their housing stock to housing associations. Mole Valley and Tandridge Councils also have particular concerns over the levels of affordable housing in the rural areas of their districts, which is not relevant in Reigate & Banstead or Epsom & Ewell. Each of the East Surrey authorities has developed a local housing picture and set of priorities, which can be found in Part Three of the Strategy.

The Strategy was developed following a range of consultation events held in late 2008 and early 2009. Groups that have been consulted included housing associations, developers, social care staff, carers groups, older persons groups, local councillors and

resident organisations. Information on the Strategy and a standard template for comments was placed on each of the authority's web-sites. Articles were also placed in local newspapers encouraging people to send in comments either electronically or via post.

East Surrey has agreed three priority policy areas:

- Creating Housing Opportunities
- Improving Housing Standards
- Improving Housing & Support for Vulnerable People.

We will work towards delivering these priorities across East Surrey, sharing or pooling resources as appropriate, reducing duplication and streamlining processes.

In addition, the Strategy is prepared in alignment with the key priorities and objectives of each authority's Sustainable Communities Plan, Corporate Plan and Local Development Framework.

## An Overview of East Surrey

East Surrey has a total population of approximately 360,900. This represents some 148,000 households. East Surrey is in some ways a victim of its own success as it is an attractive place to live for a number of reasons. The Government forecasts that the number of households is set to rise by 19.2% between 2004 and 2026.

The close proximity to London, strong transport links, low crime and good schooling are amongst the factors that have contributed to house prices rising by over 36% in the last five years to an average of £355,431 at September 2008. This is £84,860 higher than the South East average. As house prices have increased so has the affordability gap for many households. In the current climate, first time buyers must be able to borrow a significant loan in relation to their income and raise a deposit of around 20%.

## Creating Housing Opportunities

Creating Housing Opportunities encompasses providing a supply of affordable housing, which has an important role in maintaining mixed and sustainable communities. There are a limited number of affordable rented homes available in East Surrey. The pool of housing stock is not being increased at a rapid rate. Approximately 1,000 new affordable homes will be built in East Surrey between 2008 and 2011. This must be seen in the context of an affordable housing shortfall of 2,410 per year. The East Surrey authorities will continue to work with housing associations to seek innovative ways to maximise opportunities for new affordable housing and to learn from the experiences of one another in this field.

Developing new affordable housing is only one way that we can improve the supply of decent affordable homes, as our largest housing resource is existing housing and we need to ensure that this is used as efficiently as possible. This includes the best use of empty homes and private sector leasing schemes.

The number of empty homes in East Surrey is relatively low, especially those that are derelict or in a state of poor repair. However, in the context of an area with an extreme shortage of affordable homes and mounting pressures placed on existing development sites, it is clear that any empty homes are a wasted resource that needs to be addressed. We will develop an East Surrey Empty Homes Policy to help reduce the number of vacant properties.

The authorities continue to concentrate on homelessness advice and prevention, so whilst the number of homelessness acceptances has fallen, the current recession means a likely increase in the number of applicants approaching Councils for housing advice, debt advice and to make homelessness applications. In preparation, the Councils are providing additional funding, received from Government to Citizen's Advice Bureaux. This will enable them to increase the capacity of their debt

counselling service and focus on helping households reduce housing and consumer debt, which may in turn reduce incidences of eviction or repossession. This is in addition to the Government-led Mortgage Rescue Scheme, which aims to assist owner occupiers in financial difficulty avoid repossession.

Under this heading, the authorities commit to the provision of high quality and well managed sites for Gypsy and Traveller communities. The East Surrey Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Assessment 2006-2016 demonstrated the need for sites that is being reflected in each authority's Local Development Framework. The South East England Partnership Board will be undertaking further consultation in 2009 on the distribution of pitches across the South East.

The level of demand on the Council's housing registers for larger family accommodation appears relatively small but the impact of over-crowding on the family is pressing, particularly as the supply and turnover of large family homes is very small. Addressing under occupation in three and four bedroom homes increases the flow of family-sized accommodation. The newly created Housing Options for Older People Service (HOOPS) will assist a number of older people through the process of downsizing their home. This will improve their quality of life and create movement in the housing market.

## Improving Housing Standards

The local authorities in East Surrey are committed to improving conditions across all tenures, including privately rented and owner occupied homes. Whilst it is primarily the owner's responsibility to maintain their own home, it is acknowledged that some homeowners, particularly the elderly and vulnerable, do not have access to resources to keep their homes in good repair.

The small numbers of homes requiring attention tend to be occupied by older and vulnerable residents. Often these residents have limited funds to pay for repairs or works to their homes. Each of the East Surrey authorities has a system of grants available to carry out essential works and, in some cases, homeowners can be assisted to release the equity that they have tied up in their property. The Home Improvement Agencies in East Surrey play a crucial part in helping the local authorities to carry out improvements, adaptations and repairs to the homes of older, disabled and other vulnerable people, to enable them to remain independent in their own homes.

All the authorities promote energy efficient measures, as poor energy efficiency does not only have the well publicised effects on the environment, but can also have a direct impact upon the health of the occupants and their quality of life. This is especially true of cold, inadequately heated and damp homes which may aggravate some medical conditions. The promotion of home insulation is considered to be the most effective measure for

improving domestic energy efficiency. The East Surrey Private Sector Renewal Partnership has programmes in place to supply grants for older and vulnerable householders to improve the energy efficiency of their own homes through measures such as loft and cavity wall insulation, as well as new boilers and heating systems.

The final aspect of this priority is the enforcement role by which the local authorities also have powers and duties to target properties in the worst conditions in the private sector. Particular emphasis is placed on conditions in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). A house is in multiple occupation when three or more unrelated people live in a property sharing basic amenities. HMOs often house some of the most vulnerable people. The Councils promote grants to owner occupiers and landlords to improve the conditions of sub-standard properties.

## Improving Housing & Support for Vulnerable People

Housing support aims to help vulnerable people to live independently in the community and it plays a role in preventing homelessness. A wide range of groups are assisted through housing support schemes and projects. There are almost 4,000 households in East Surrey receiving housing related support through the Surrey Supporting People programme.

The number of older people living in East Surrey is increasing, particularly the numbers of very frail people. From 2004 to 2026 the number of people living in East Surrey that are over 80 years old is forecast to increase by 50%. This will place increased pressure on health, social services, housing and support services. The East Surrey authorities and Surrey County Council are working together to develop specialist services such as Extra Care housing and Telecare Services that help to meet these needs.

In common with many areas, the East Surrey authorities have experienced an increase in the number of people with challenging behaviour and complex needs such as mental health, drug and alcohol problems and a history of aggression or offending. Finding suitable accommodation and support can prove difficult; therefore, the authorities are committed to working with other agencies to develop additional services for these clients.

## Working Together

The delivery of the East Surrey Housing Strategy relies on effective partnership working. The investment of time, energy and resources by all is crucial to the delivery of our priorities. In the current economic climate this may become more challenging but, by working together, we are likely to be in a better position to respond and assist our residents.

