EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report introduces the Council’s draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2015-19 which is attached at Appendix 1. It summarises the consultation undertaken to shape the strategy and its scope and content, including the five priorities and related objectives to be taken forward over the next four years.

RECOMMENDATION: THAT

(A) THAT MEMBERS CONSIDER, APPROVE AND RECOMMEND THE DOCUMENT (SUBJECT TO ANY FINAL MINOR AMENDMENTS) SET OUT AT APPENDIX ONE TO COUNCIL FOR ADOPTION; AND

(B) THAT AUTHORITY BE DELEGATED TO THE HEAD OF HOUSING SERVICES, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING, TO MAKE ANY FINAL MINOR AMENDMENTS TO THE DOCUMENT THAT MAY BE NECESSARY PRIOR TO PUBLICATION.

REPORT:

1.0 Overview

1.1 The Housing & Homelessness Strategy sets out the borough’s housing plans for the next four years. It is an overarching position statement that sets out the Council’s strategic priorities and objectives across all housing tenures and its approach to tackling homelessness. The proposed strategy supersedes the most recent strategy which ran from 2009-12 and its completion delivers on a commitment set out in the 2014/15 Council Plan.

1.2 The document outlines the key housing challenges facing Elmbridge, and sets out the Council’s priorities for addressing these and tackling homelessness. It is a Council document and forms part of the Council’s policy framework, but has been labelled as a strategy for Elmbridge, in order to recognise the role of partner agencies, both in its formulation and its implementation. Whilst the Council will lead on the majority of the items in the action plan, meeting the strategy’s objectives is dependent on the contribution of a range of partners.
1.3 Whilst there is no longer a legal duty on the Council to either publish a housing or a homelessness strategy, a decision was made to produce a combined strategy, reflecting the linkages between the issues and the benefit that such a strategy could bring, in terms of:

- Identifying the housing challenges and priorities for Elmbridge and helping secure commitment to address them
- Allowing the Council and other parties to be held to account, in terms of delivering on agreed priorities
- Helping influence what partner agencies do with Elmbridge
- Promoting partnership working and strategic planning

1.4 The preparation and publication of a strategy also helps the local authority in achieving its aspiration of achieving the “Gold Standard” for its approach to homelessness prevention. The Gold Standard is a set of ten benchmarks set by Communities and Local Government which local housing authorities are encouraged to meet, working with partner agencies.

1.5 The overall purpose of the strategy is to increase the supply of affordable housing; make the best use of the existing housing stock; prevent homelessness and to shape the delivery of housing-related services across the Borough to support the well-being of Elmbridge and its residents.

1.6 The strategy is informed by and sits alongside an array of national, county-wide and local policies and strategies, including, but not confined to the Local Plan, the Asset Management Plan and the Council’s Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

1.7 The strategy is accompanied by an evidence base, “Housing in Elmbridge: Facts and figures (2015)”.

2.0 Consultation

2.1 The strategy has been informed by stages of consultation. The elements around homelessness prevention were developed in consultation with the Elmbridge Homelessness Network, comprising a range of organisations and individuals with an interest in tackling this issue. A separate event to inform the broader strategy was staged in December 2014 and attended by over forty representatives from housing provider, health, social care and the voluntary sector.

2.2 The Affordable Housing Member Panel considered a report outlining the proposed priorities and objectives at its meeting in November 2014 and selected Members agreed to form a sounding-board to review and comment upon a first draft of the strategy. This sounding-board convened in mid-February and the draft strategy at Appendix 1 amended in light of the feedback received.

2.3 A commitment was given at the aforementioned event in December 2014 to provide an opportunity for those attending to comment on the draft strategy.
and this was duly undertaken. The strategy has been amended slightly in the light of the small amount of feedback subsequently received.

3.0 Strategic priorities & objectives

3.1 As the assembly of the evidence-base and consultation process progressed, five priorities were identified and these are set out below together with a selection of the most significant objectives relating to each. The main body of the strategy document and the action plan are built around these priorities.

Priority 1: We will work with partners to deliver more affordable housing and make best use of the social housing stock
- To support the delivery of at least 300 affordable homes in Elmbridge between April 2015 and March 2019
- To review and update the Council’s evidence base and where necessary, planning policies relating to housing and affordable housing, to meet identified needs
- To continue to deliver on the Council’s commitment to help meet local housing need through affordable housing
- To work with partners to both facilitate the delivery of additional affordable housing and make best use of existing stock

Priority 2: We will improve housing conditions in all tenures to ensure a safe, healthy and energy efficient housing stock and develop new ways of working to make greater use of the private-rented sector to meet local need
- To reduce the number of long-term empty homes within Elmbridge
- To refresh our policies around improving housing conditions in all tenures but predominately in the private rented sector, based on an updated evidence base
- To tackle fuel poverty and oversee improvements in home energy efficiency
- To support a healthy and well-managed private-rented sector
- To explore opportunities for market-rented housing to meet housing needs

Priority 3: We will support, older disabled and vulnerable residents to live safe, healthy and independent lives
- To review and improve the initial assessment of older and disabled residents with housing needs and the provision of information, advice and support
- To meet the housing needs of older people, both now and in the future
- To better meet housing & support needs of vulnerable residents

Priority 4: We will respond and wherever possible prevent homelessness amongst single people and families
- To prevent homelessness, through the provision of effective support and advice
- Maximising supply and choice for temporary or longer-term accommodation
• Preventing and responding to single homelessness, including rough sleeping
• To strive to provide a “Gold Standard” service to tackling homelessness
• To tackle homelessness through partnership working

**Priority 5: We will prepare for Universal Credit and provide a high-quality benefit service**
• With partners, to implement Universal Credit and other welfare reforms, whilst minimising the adverse impacts on residents
• To successfully transfer the Council’s Housing Benefit fraud prevention service into the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)
• To deliver the Council’s remaining responsibilities around housing benefit to a high standard

**4.0 Implementation and review**

4.1 Whilst running to 2019, a mid-point review of the strategy will take place in 2017. This anticipates the likelihood that, like its predecessor, changes in the wider environment (for example, in relation to national housing policy or welfare reform) will mean that what is actually delivered may differ somewhat from what is in the strategy. As such, the strategy recognises the importance of flexibility and the action plan should not be regarded as fixed.

**Financial implications:**
The majority of the targets within the action plan are to be met from existing resources. Where additional resources are identified for the delivery of specific items, these will be sought through the annual bidding cycles.

**Environmental/Sustainability Implications:**
The strategy aims to improve home energy efficiency, to tackle fuel poverty and to reduce the volume of CO₂ emitted from the Borough’s housing stock. As such, progress on these issues will contribute to the Council’s wider objectives around sustainability and contribute to environmental well-being.

**Legal implications:**
None for the purposes of this report.

**Equality Implications:**
Delivery of the objectives laid down in the strategy will assist the Council in meeting its aims under the Equality Duty. The draft strategy has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment.

**Risk Implications:**
Failure to set out a clear strategic direction will inhibit the Council’s ability to best meet the housing needs of the borough and could also limit opportunities to both attract external / government fund and restrict our ability to influence the decisions of other organisations which could potentially assist in meeting the objectives laid down in the strategy.
Community Safety Implications:
None for the purposes of this report.

Principal Consultees:
Providers of affordable housing within Elmbridge, local voluntary sector organisations, Surrey County Council and providers of housing-related services within Elmbridge.

Background papers:
Housing in Elmbridge – Facts and Figures 2015 (Draft)

Enclosures/Appendices:
Appendix 1 Draft Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2015-19 (including action plan)

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