



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Housing Strategy Consultation Report December 2023



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Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to update Cllr Phil Dilks -the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning and the Cabinet on the results of the consultation undertaken to inform the content and direction of South Kesteven District Council's Housing Strategy.

Scope

2. Because the purpose of this consultation was to obtain feedback on the building blocks and guide the direction of travel of SKDC's Housing Strategy, its scope was focused. Specific stakeholders were identified, contacted directly and asked for their views on potential housing strategy themes, objectives and outcomes. No steps were taken to publicise the consultation more widely at this formative stage.
3. Two sets of stakeholders were identified. One consisted of housing specialists including housing professionals, registered providers, and housebuilders and the second was made up of statutory agencies including the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Lincolnshire County Council, Town and Parish Councils and Neighbourhood Plan Groups.

Objectives

4. The objectives of the consultation were identified as follows. To:
 - Inform the decision that will be taken by the Council in respect of the introduction of a new Housing Strategy
 - Assess the potential impact on other sections within the Council
 - To ascertain support for the proposed themes, objectives and outcomes of the strategy
 - Understand and be aware of the impact the contents of the Housing Strategy may have on specific groups of stakeholders

Timescales

5. Preparatory work was undertaken during the summer. The consultation ran for 4 weeks, from 1 to 31 October – with a 7 day extension following a request from a couple of parish councils. Analysis of results took place during November, with the results being used to inform the drafting of the priorities, objectives and outcomes of the Housing Strategy.

Stakeholders

6. The stakeholders were identified as follows:
 - South Kesteven DC staff – particularly Housing and Planning
 - Ward, Town and Parish Councillors

- Neighbourhood Plan Groups
- Affordable housing registered providers
- Developers/housebuilders
- Planning and land agents
- Lincolnshire County Council
- Homes England
- Department for Levelling Up, Communities and Housing

Methodology

7. The table below identifies the method(s) that were used to contact each of the stakeholder types:

Stakeholders	Method(s)	Details
SKDC - staff	Face to face workshop attended by 21 members of staff.	Included housing, planning, corporate projects and climate change staff
Ward and parish councillors and neighbourhood plan groups	Parish Clerks emailed with the link to the survey	55 district councillors were contacted. 78 town and parish clerks were contacted. Also sent to 13 Neighbourhood Plan Groups.
Affordable Housing Register Providers	Affordable Housing Register Providers emailed directly with the survey link	15 Affordable Housing Registered Providers were contacted.
Developers/ Housebuilders	Developers, Housebuilders and Planning and Land Agents contacted by email with the survey link	Sent to 33 developers, land agents and housebuilders.
Lincolnshire County Council	Contacted by email with the survey link	5 individuals from different sections within the County Council were contacted.
Homes England	Contacted by email with the survey link	Sent to the Area Manager for Affordable Housing Growth at Homes England
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities	Contacted by email with the survey link	Sent to 2 individuals working at the DLUHC
Other organisations	Contacted by email with the survey link	5 people from Lincolnshire Police were contacted. 1 person from the NHS and 1 from Lincolnshire Fire & Rescue were emailed. 3 individuals representing charitable organisations were contacted along with 3 people from other organisations.

Details

8. A number of actions were identified. These included:

- The preparation and approval of content for the surveys - one for housing specialists and one for statutory agencies
- Setting up the surveys
- Drafting an email to stakeholders

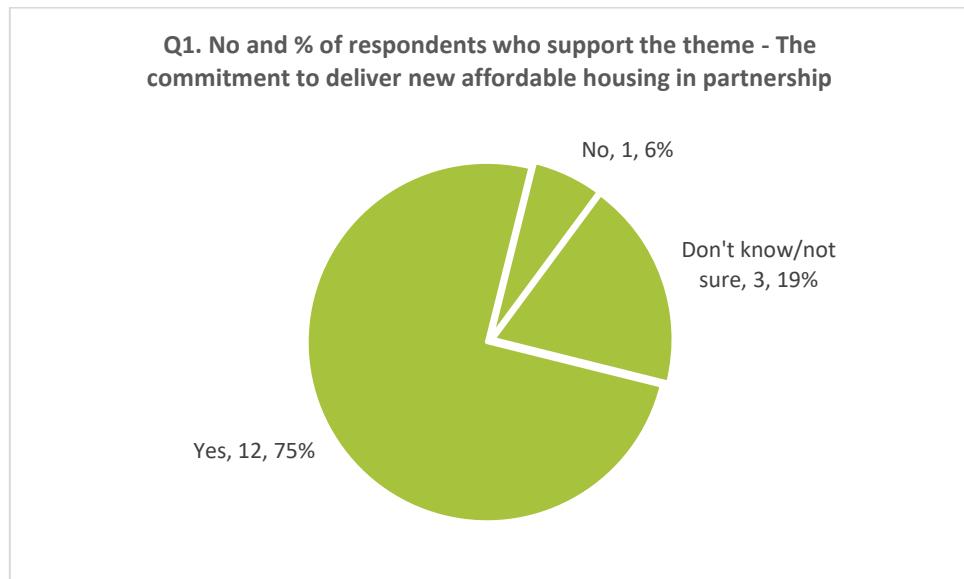
9. Both surveys followed the same format- although each survey had a slightly different emphasis and content. Both sets of respondents were asked for their opinions on the themes and objectives highlighted in the strategy, and about challenges in their industry and how their organisation was dealing with those challenges.

10. The consultation closed a week later than originally scheduled- following a request received from a couple of the parish councils (as they needed more time) on 2 November 2023. 92 responses were received – an overall response rate of 42.6%. 16 were from housing specialists (30.2%) and 76 were from other statutory agencies (46.6%).

The results

Housing – Specialist providers

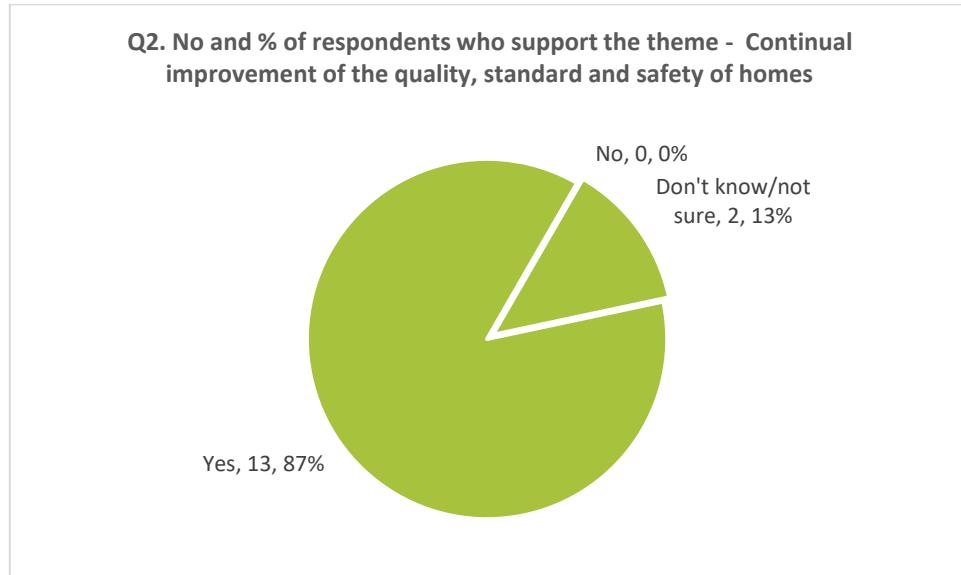
11. The first question asked respondents if they agreed with one of the themes of the Housing Strategy being “The commitment to deliver new affordable housing in partnership”. The majority supported this theme- as shown in the pie chart below:



12. When asked why they had answered in this way, most stressed it was because of the need for affordable housing, as illustrated in a quote from one of the respondents:

“Affordable housing is essential in any modern community”

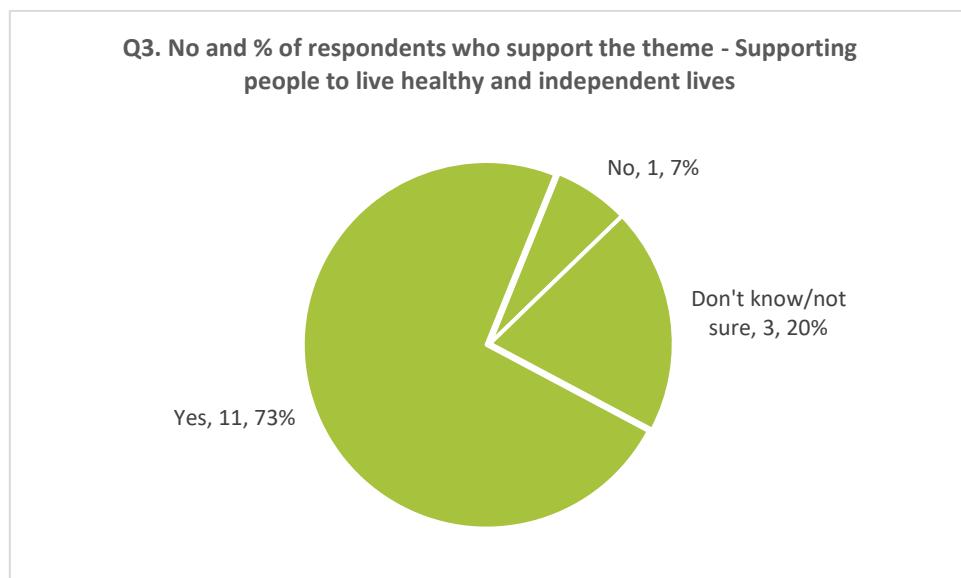
13. There was strong support from respondents for the second theme identified in the draft housing strategy. 13 respondents (86.7%) thought that “Continual improvement of the quality, standard and safety of homes” should be one of the themes of the strategy.



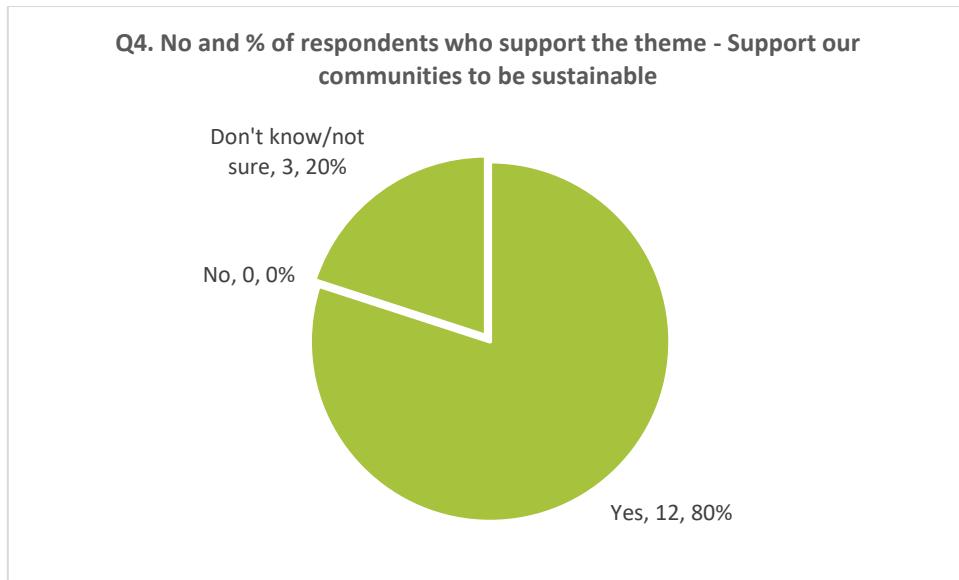
14. A couple of the respondents to this question, whilst supporting the theme, said that there will always be a balance between quality and viability, and this should be recognised. This is illustrated in the quote below:

“A balance between viability and quality will always need to be made.”

15. The third theme of the draft housing strategy has been identified as “Supporting people to live healthy and independent lives.” Just under three quarters of those responding (11 or 73.3%) supported this theme, as shown here:



16. "Supporting our communities to be sustainable" proved to be a popular theme. Eight out of ten respondents (12 or 80%) supported this theme, as shown in the chart below:



17. The comments received in relation to this theme varied. They included specific actions being undertaken by respondents to help achieve this goal, as illustrated below:

"Accent Housing is working on a Local Lettings Plan to achieve a blended community that helps to meet the Council's objectives and more sustained tenancies for us."

18. When asked to identify if there were any amendments or additions they would like to see to the themes of the strategy, three of the respondents asked specific questions centred around improving the energy efficiency of the existing stock, increasing planning fees to improve timescales for determination and how SK might enable the delivery of more affordable housing. Their questions will be responded to by the working group, as soon as is practicable.

19. Increasing the quantity of affordable housing is viewed by respondents as being the most important objective of the housing strategy. The second most important objective, according to respondents, is to improve the affordability of housing across the district. This is illustrated in the graph below:

Q6. No of respondents choosing each of the strategy objectives

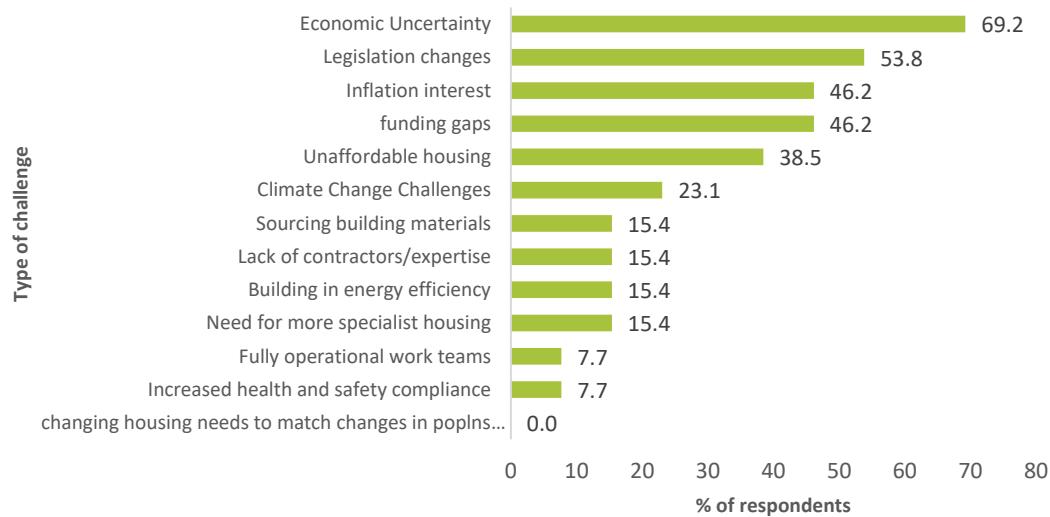


20. When asked for additional comments, one respondent suggested that it may be beneficial to treat the objective of generating additional affordable housing stock as a separate and independent workstream, to the objective of improving the energy efficiency and "quality" of existing stock. Most comments were in favour of the provision of additional affordable housing as illustrated here:

“There is a clear need to improve affordability, providing additional affordable homes, which are actually affordable, is extremely important.”

21. Economic uncertainty, changes in legislation and funding gaps were all identified as challenges by those working in the housing sector, along with inflation interest and unaffordable housing. The percentage of respondents choosing each of these is detailed in the chart overleaf:

Q7. % of respondents who think this is a challenge for the industry they work in



22. Other challenges identified by respondents included planning challenges, a national shortage of Environmental Health Officers and a lack of political motivation (at a national level) to provide sufficient homes.

23. When asked how their organisation was responding to these challenges, partnership working and sharing knowledge and resources were the two most popular choices as shown in the table below:

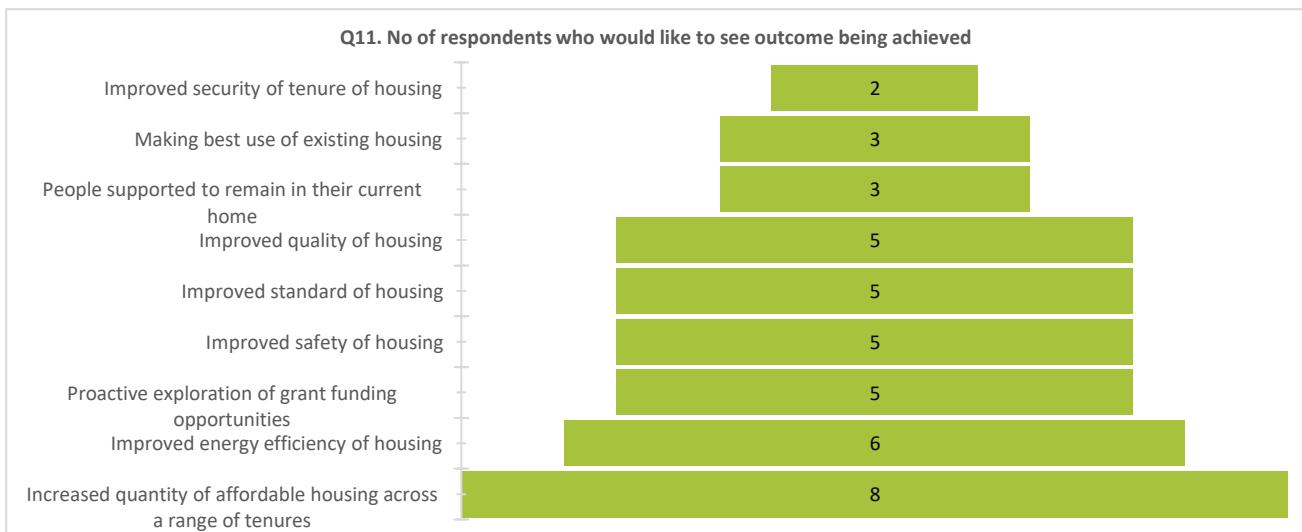
	No	%
Partnership working	8	72.7
Sharing knowledge and resources	4	36.4
Effective consultation	3	27.3
Applying for grant funding	3	27.3
Upskilling and training the existing workforce	3	27.3
Sourcing contractors	2	18.2
In house shadowing and training	2	18.2
Stopping work activity including new development	1	9.1

24. Looking forward, respondents thought uncertainty about legislative changes, meeting affordable housing delivery targets, sourcing contractors and managing customer expectations were the biggest challenges in the next five years. One respondent said that a lack of certainty now will lead to problems in the future:

“Lack of certainty now is impacting decision making now, which will impact delivery over this time period.”

25. Respondents thought these challenges could be overcome through improved customer and business insight, partnership working and lobbying central government.

26. The graph below shows the outcomes respondents would like to see the housing strategy achieve, across all tenures of housing. An increase in the quantity of affordable housing across a range of tenures, attracted the most support. The next most popular was a desire to improve the energy efficiency of housing stock.

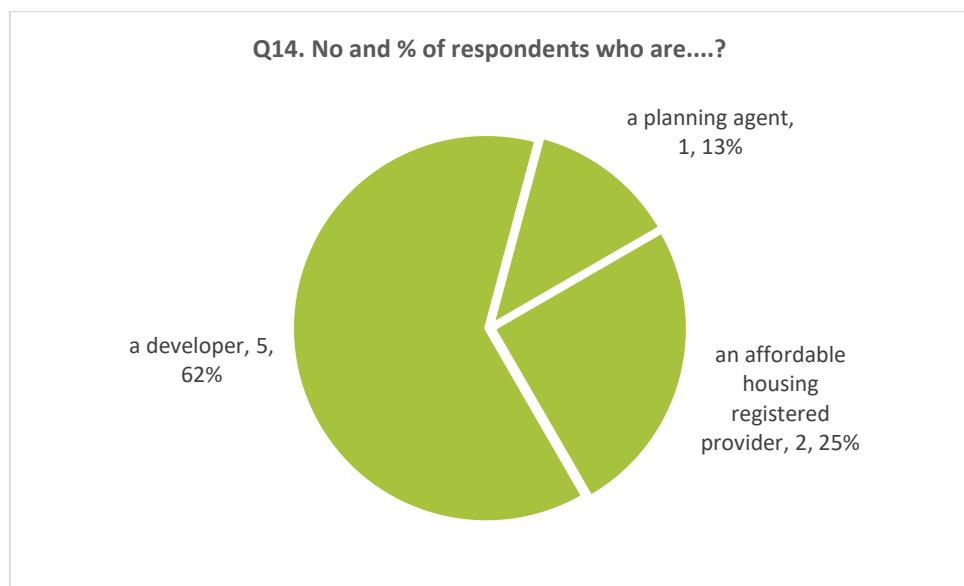


27. When asked to give more detail one housing specialist said:

"We are supportive of an increased quantity of affordable housing, but this needs to be balanced with viability. Improving quality of housing is positive, but how this is defined and measured opens a door to inefficient policy making and I would suggest building regulations are used as the standard of requirement".

28. Respondents were then asked if they would be interested in attending a regular forum with the Council to identify and explore joint grant funding opportunities and /or attending a Council-organised forum for landlords. Around two-thirds said that they would – either online or in person.

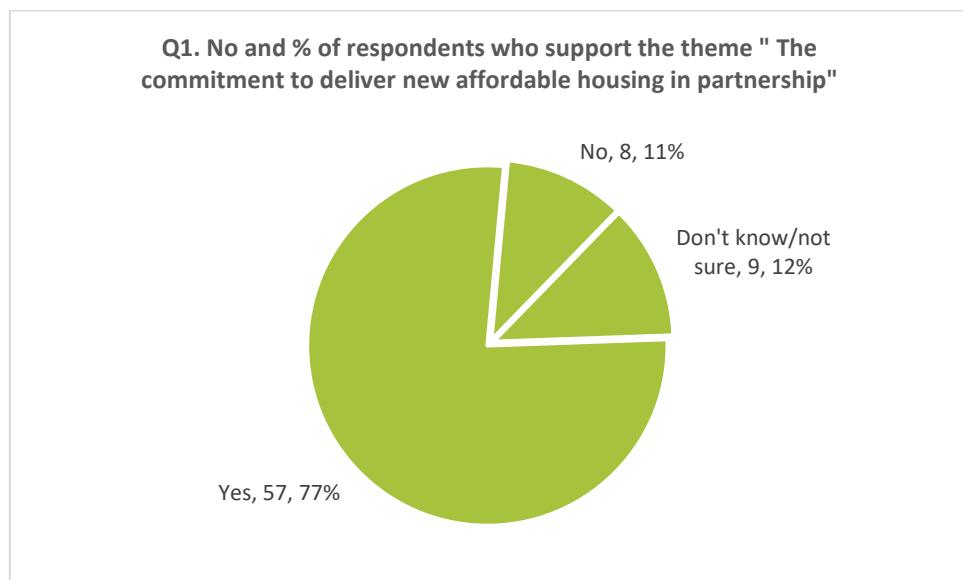
29. Of those who specified the organisation they represented; most represented housing developers as illustrated below:



30. Responses were also received from a builder, Framework Housing Association and DASH (an organisation centred on improving housing conditions in the private sector).

Housing – Statutory Organisations

31. The first question respondents from various organisations were asked was if they supported one of the themes of the draft Housing Strategy which was “The commitment to deliver new affordable housing in partnership”. Over three quarters of those taking part agreed with this theme as illustrated below:



32. When asked why they had chosen to answer in this way, an analysis of the responses revealed it was because how important providing affordable housing is, both at a local and national level.

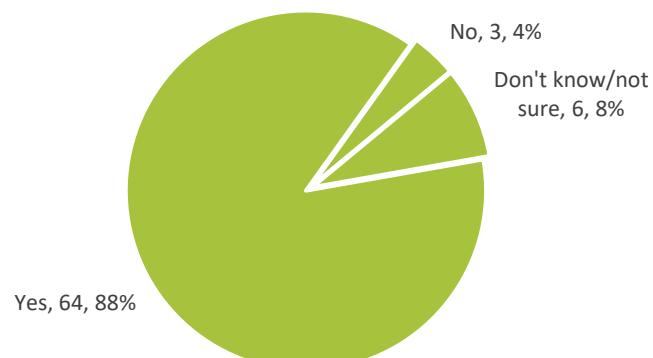
“To provide affordable housing choices in rural Lincolnshire”

“There is a desperate need across the nation for more council and social housing. SK is no exception.”

33. There was strong support for the second theme identified in the draft Housing Strategy. Nine out of ten respondents thought that “Continual improvement of the quality, standard and safety of homes” was important - recognising the impact poor quality housing can have on other areas of a person’s life as illustrated in this quote

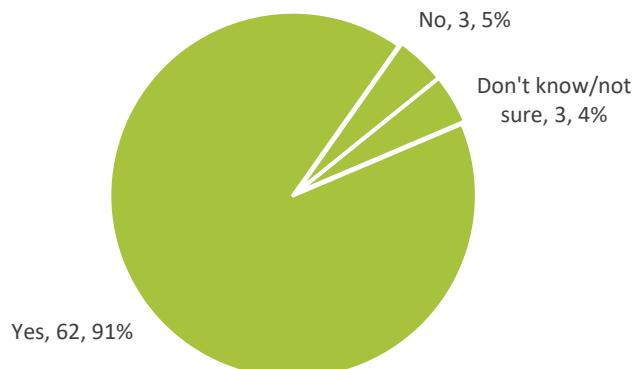
“Poor quality housing brings multiple social, health and environmental problems which increase costs and reduce the quality of life for all.”

Q2. No and % of respondents who support the theme "Continual improvement of the quality, standard and safety of homes"



34. The third theme identified in the draft strategy "Supporting people to live healthy and independent lives" was supported by most survey participants. 62 (91.2%) agreed with this area of focus, as shown here:

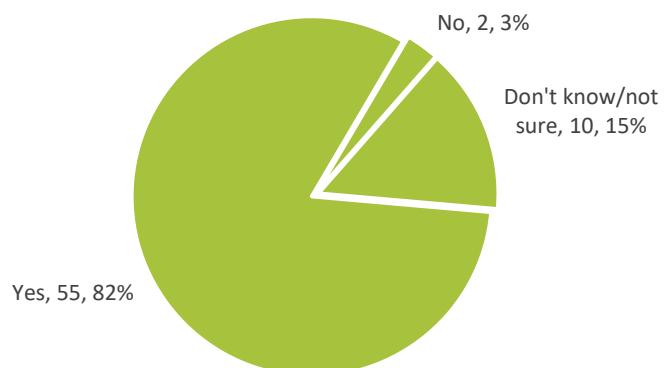
Q3. No and % of respondents who support the theme "Supporting people to live healthy and independent lives"



35. When asked if they thought "Supporting our communities to be sustainable" should be one of the themes of SKDC's Housing Strategy, four fifths of respondents said that they thought it should. An examination of some of the comments made in relation to this theme tend to suggest, that whilst broadly in favour, some respondents would have welcomed more information on what this means in practical terms. This is illustrated in the quote below:

"Need to understand more of the thinking behind it. If it is delivered fairly for all, then probably yes."

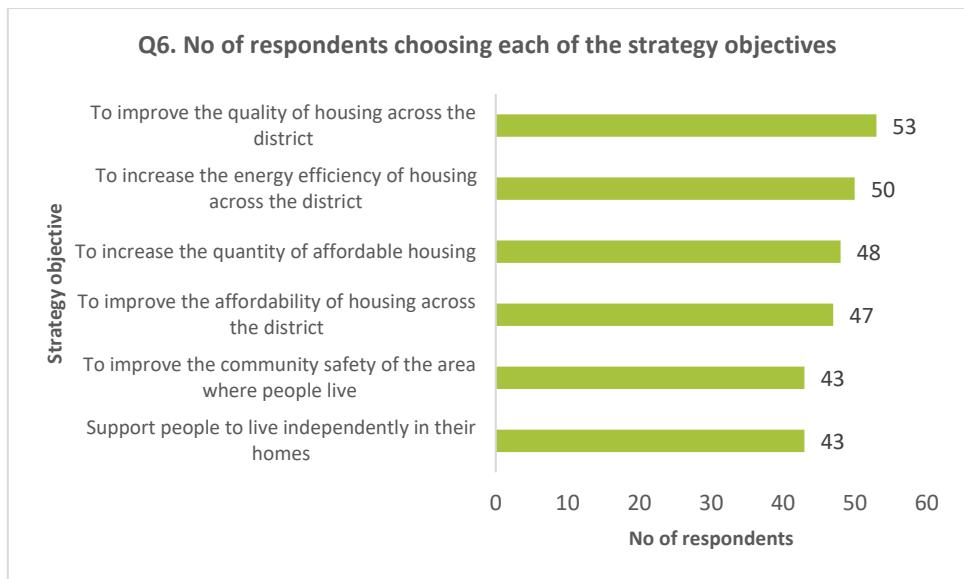
Q4. No and % of respondents who agree with the theme "Support our communities to be sustainable"



36. When asked to identify if there were any amendments or additions they would like to see to the themes of the strategy, one respondent suggested an alternative theme centred around local communities decision making powers. Others thought the importance of having the appropriate infrastructure in place, prior to building additional homes, should be reflected in the themes of the strategy. This is illustrated in the quote below:

“Regarding any housing developments there needs to be sufficient and appropriate infrastructure in place.”

37. There was broad support for all of the objectives identified in SKDC's draft strategy, with the percentages of respondents supporting each of them ranging from 68.3% to 84.1%. Improving the quality of housing across the district was thought to be the most important, with increasing the energy efficiency of housing across the district being the second most important. The graph below shows the number of respondents choosing each of the objectives:



38. Whilst most who commented used the opportunity to state which objective they thought was the most important, and why, a handful suggested alternative objectives. These included the importance of infrastructure, as illustrated in the quote below:

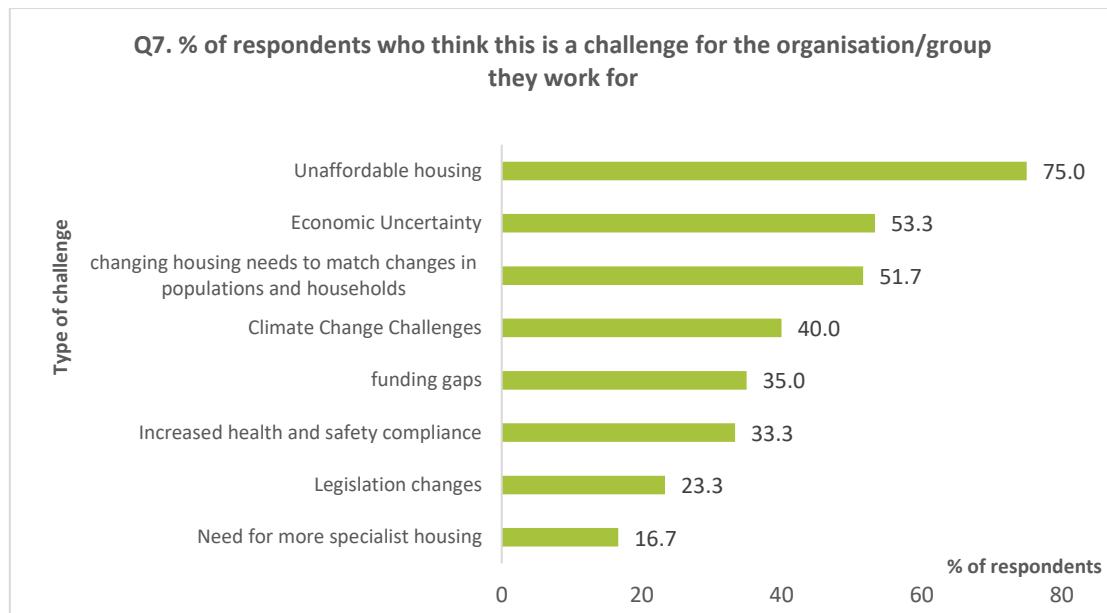
“To ensure new housing is well provided with appropriate services, including public transport, education, retail, leisure, access to green spaces.”

39. Unaffordable housing, economic uncertainty and changing housing needs to match changes in populations and households were thought to be the top challenges for the groups and organisations respondents represented. When asked to comment, examples of feedback included:

“Increase in homelessness and rough sleeping”

“We need a moratorium on rents and a renters/landlords conference to look at setting rent bands for properties within the sector.”

“Size of families needing 4+ bedrooms”



40. When asked how their organisation was responding to these challenges, sharing knowledge and resources along with effective consultation were the two most popular choices. Also popular were partnership working and applying for grant funding as shown in the table below:

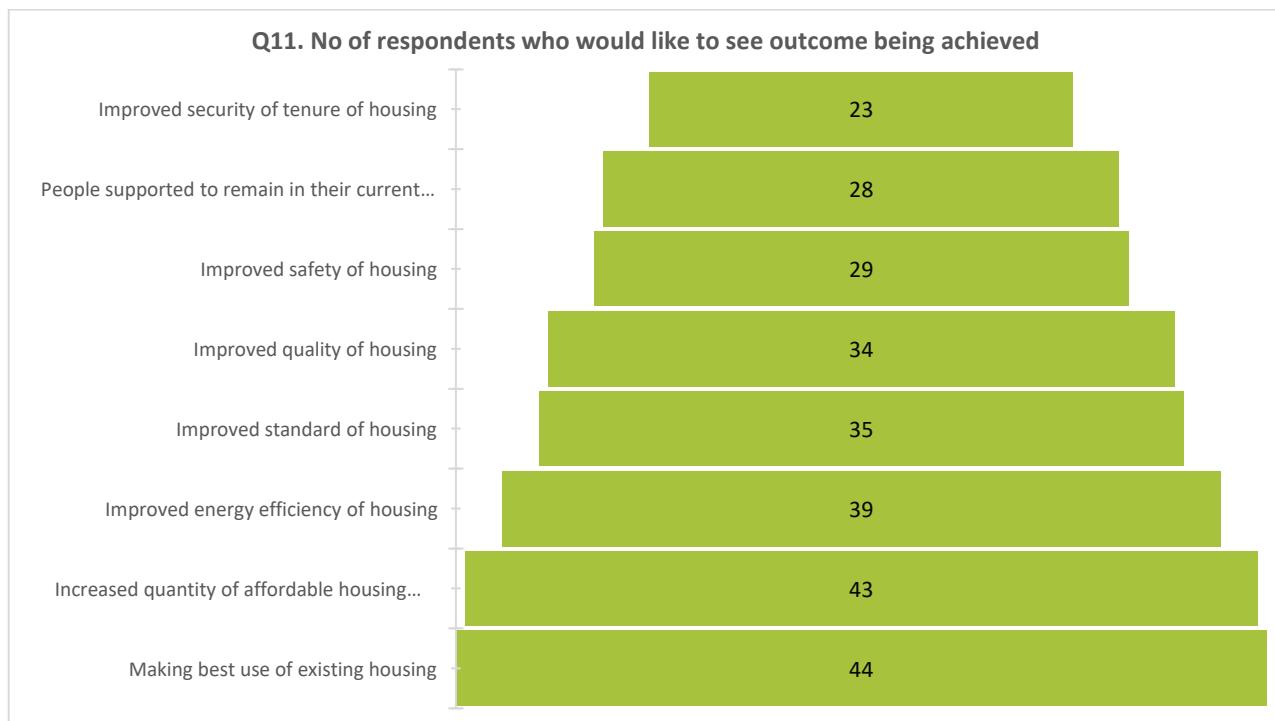
	No	%
Sharing knowledge and resources	20	54.1
Effective consultation	19	51.4
Partnership working	16	43.2
Applying for grant funding	15	40.5
In house shadowing and training	8	21.6
Upskilling and training the existing workforce	7	18.9

41. Looking forward, meeting the needs of the local community, uncertainty about funding and effective consultation were thought to be the biggest challenges for groups or organisations responding to this survey. When asked to comment on this, or provide details of the challenges they expect to face, a wide variety of feedback was received. This included challenges caused by external factors like the high cost of living as referred to below:

“Increased impact of cost of living creating more debt.”

42. Respondents thought these challenges could be overcome though partnership working, improved surveying and assessment of housing needs and adopting best practice through effective benchmarking. These were chosen by 60.6%, 48.5% and 30.3% of respondents respectively.

43. The graph below shows the outcomes respondents would like to see the housing strategy achieve, across all tenures of housing. Making best use of existing housing and increasing the quantity of affordable housing across a range of tenures attracted the most support. The next most popular was a desire to improve the energy efficiency of housing stock.



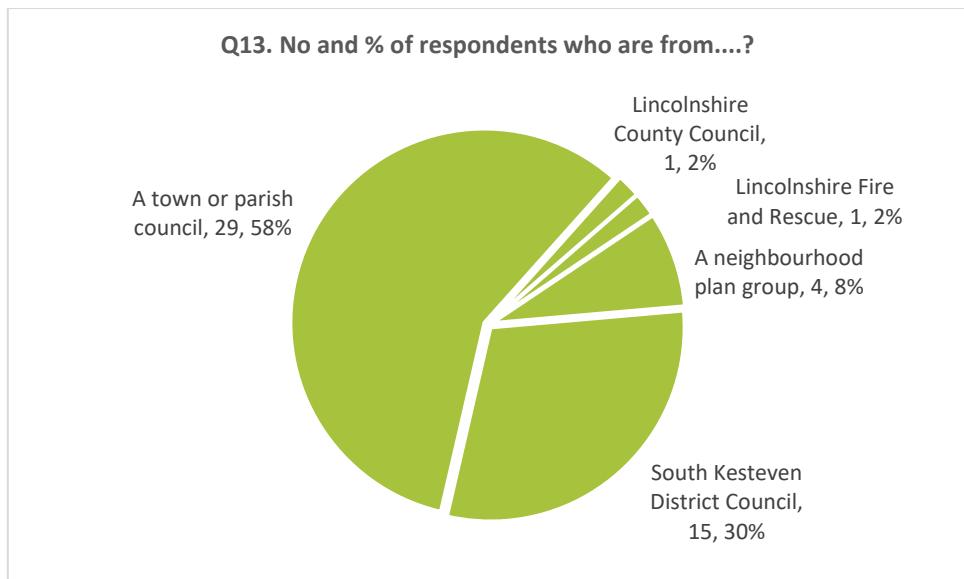
44. When asked to give more detail or identify additional outcomes one respondent mentioned the importance of flexibility – specifically in relation to household size and composition. Another referred to the limitations imposed by budgetary constraints. These are illustrated in the two quotes below:

“Increased flexibility to meet changing needs of households e.g., managing upsizing and downsizing.”

“All these are admirable intentions, but budgetary constraints are bound to limit what realistically can be achieved.”

45. Twenty-four respondents said that they would be interested in attending a regular forum with the Council to identify and explore joint grant funding opportunities – either online or in person.

46. Responses were received from a number of different organisations including town and parish councils, district council staff and members, Lincolnshire County Council and Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue, and Neighbourhood Plan Groups. The distribution of responses is shown in the chart below:



Conclusion

47. The Cabinet member for Housing and Planning Cllr Phil Dilks and other members are asked to note the results of this consultation. Just under 100 responses were received from individuals representing organisations across the public and private sector – an overall response rate of 42.6%. Whilst the number of responses received is small it should be noted that the consultation was targeted towards a finite number of people, groups and organisations, as its aim was to gather feedback about the building blocks of the strategy - its themes, objectives and outcomes – from specific stakeholders at a formative stage in its development. The feedback gathered will then be used to inform the content and direction of SKDC's Housing Strategy for the next 5 years.

48. Positive feedback was received for each of the themes identified in the draft strategy. The percentage of respondents supporting each of the themes ranged from 73.3% of those representing housing specialists to 91.2% of those representing statutory organisations who agreed with the theme “Supporting people to live healthy and independent lives”.

49. There was broad support for all the objectives that have been identified in SKDC's draft strategy. However, it is interesting that the “top two” were different for each set of stakeholders. Improving the quality of housing across the district and increasing the energy efficiency of housing across the district were chosen more frequently by those representing statutory organisations. Increasing the quantity of affordable housing and improving the affordability of housing across the district were chosen more often by housing specialists.

50. The outcomes identified as being most important by both sets of stakeholders were similar. Both sets of stakeholders thought it was important to improve the energy efficiency of housing stock and increase the

quantity of affordable housing across the district. There was one notable exception though - "Making best use of existing housing". This was the most popular choice for respondents representing statutory organisations, but was much less popular with those representing specialist housing providers.

51. The feedback from the consultation should now be considered in depth with a view to incorporating suggestions where appropriate and feasible into the first draft of South Kesteven District Council's Housing Strategy for 2024- 2029.

Prepared by Deb Wyles
Communications and Consultation
22 November 2023