

TITLE	Housing Strategy 2020 - 24
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 25 March 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To obtain Executive approval to adopt the proposed Housing Strategy 2020-2024.

The strategy sets out the Council's vision for housing in Wokingham Borough from 2020 – 2024. It has four key strategic priorities:

- Address and understand our housing needs
- Support our vulnerable residents through a range of housing options
- Improve the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough's homes
- Enriching people's lives

These objectives reflect the Council's core role in relation to housing supply, housing need and demand, managing and influencing quality. Whilst the Council has a broad role as the strategic housing authority, we are placing special emphasis on the key priorities within the strategy.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive recommend that Council approve the adoption of the proposed Housing Strategy 2020-2024.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Housing plays a huge role in the health, environmental and economic well-being of everyone who lives in the borough. Through this strategy, we will help to ensure that we address and understand our housing need, especially given the economic and social impacts following Covid-19. We will build the right homes in the right places, improve the quality, sustainability and design of the housing stock and support our residents by developing socially inclusive communities.

The Housing Strategy 2020 – 2024 will act as a framework strategy under which other housing strategies such as the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy will sit. As such the strategy format is different to other Council strategies, with this format being more accessible and user friendly so it can be used as a framework document.

The Council has a responsibility to address and understand the housing needs of all its residents and the strategy outlines the Council's role within the wider housing agenda.

The housing strategy outlines how the Council will achieve its responsibilities. A detailed action plan accompanies the strategy and this will be updated on an annual basis. The action plan gives more details on some of the key objectives to be delivered during the strategy period. The accompanying action plan details targets for 2021/22. The strategy is aligned to the Community Vision 2020 – 2024 of which housing plays a key integral role. Some of the key challenges outlined in the Community Vision are also referenced in the housing strategy.

The Housing Strategy 2020-2024 has four key priorities:

1. Address and understand our housing needs
2. Support our vulnerable residents through a range of housing options
3. Improve the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough's homes
4. Enriching people's lives

The expected outcomes of the strategy are:

- Understand and address our housing need, especially given the economic and social impacts following Covid-19.
- Delivery of more high quality sustainable homes in the right places through the Council's 'Housing 1-4-5 Challenge' – where the Council leads on the delivery of 1000 additional homes over the 4 year strategy period providing an average 5% return.
- In addition the enabling and/or delivery of c100 additional new homes, predominantly on brownfield sites, not currently identified in the current draft Local Plan Update but required to bridge the shortfall against the total annual number prescribed by Government
- Deliver a step change in the provision of new affordable homes through the Council's housing companies and Housing Revenue Account
- Delivery of a further 800 affordable homes to be delivered through the Council's
- More opportunities for low cost home ownership including an affordable self-build programme and exploring additional housing options for key workers and essential workers
- The Council helping to deliver the right homes in the right places, with housing policies informing and complementing the new local plan and making sure that infrastructure is delivered first in new housing developments
- Delivering housing and support tailored to meet identified need, by developing more specialist housing for vulnerable people based on need including those at risk of homelessness, adult social care clients, children in care and care leavers
- Improving information and guidance, by enhancing the digital advice and guidance available to residents via the Council's website and other sources
- Developing effective policies and strategies to ensure supported housing meets need through additional supporting policies such as the use of extra care for older people and move on accommodation for care leavers and vulnerable young people
- Improving the quality and management of homes both within the social housing stock and private rented sector, by maintaining Decent Homes Standard and improving customer satisfaction across all new homes and those owned by Housing Associations
- Ensuring the quality and sustainability of design of all homes through energy efficiency and exploring modern methods of construction for housing delivery
- Regenerating old housing stock such as Gorse Ride community in Finchampstead

- Developing more socially inclusive communities and helping to provide all tenants with a stable home for example through additional employment opportunities and skills development

Members, Officers, stakeholders and the public have had the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the draft strategy. The consultation was sent out across the Council, to all Members, the Parish and Town Councils, the RP Partnership, TLIP, MHCLG, Homes England, partners and agencies and local charities. It was also publicised via a press release and our social media.

We received 37 responses in total, of which 27 were from residents. Between 77% - 80% either agreed or strongly agreed with each of the objectives set out in the strategy. 71% felt that the purpose of the Housing Strategy is clear and 61% agreed with the approach taken in the Housing Strategy.

BACKGROUND

The Council's previous Housing Strategy covers the period 2015-18. In 2015, we set out five key priorities:

1. Addressing our housing needs
2. Supporting vulnerable people
3. Tackling homelessness and housing need
4. Enhancing tenant services
5. Expanding opportunities for vulnerable residents

During the previous strategy period a number of key successes were achieved, these include:

- Completed 1182 affordable homes during 2015/16 – 2018/19
- Generated a future pipeline of over 2000 additional affordable homes
- Started work on our first affordable self-build scheme in the Borough
- Commissioned a GRT needs evidence based study to inform the new Local Plan
- Delivered housing schemes through our housing companies such as Phoenix Avenue and Fosters extra care scheme
- Delivered an affordable rented scheme for key workers in Wokingham town centre
- Completed two Extra Care schemes at Fosters and the Birches in Woodley
- Completed a supported housing scheme for young people in Reading Road, to replace supported housing at Seaford Court
- Developed temporary accommodation for vulnerable adults at Foxwood and Broadway House
- Delivered a range of support services to enable vulnerable adults to live more independently
- Maintained low levels of homeless acceptances and repeat homelessness by focusing on practical responses and prevention
- Helped people access private rented housing, through schemes such as the Rent in Advance/ Deposit Loan Scheme
- Assisted 315 young people through a joined-up housing and employment advice service at "Elevate Wokingham"
- Met and maintained the Decent Homes Standard on our own housing stock
Assisted 43 residents to set up their own business through the "Strive" enterprise programme

The Housing Strategy 2020 – 2024 will act as a framework strategy under which other housing strategies such as the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy will sit. As such the strategy format is different to other Council strategies, with this format being more accessible and user friendly so it can be used as a framework document.

The Council has a responsibility to address and understand the housing needs of all its residents and the strategy outlines the Council's role within the wider housing agenda. The draft housing strategy outlines how the Council will achieve its responsibilities. An action plan will accompany the strategy and this will be updated on an annual basis. The action plan gives more details on some of the key objectives to be delivered during the strategy period. The strategy is aligned to the Community Vision 2020 – 2024 of which housing plays a key integral role. Some of the key challenges outlined in the

Community Vision are also referenced in the housing strategy. These include protecting the quality of the environment and sustainability of existing communities with the need for new housing, ensuring the right infrastructure is in place and that we address and manage demand for those who are ageing or have long term health conditions. Tackling issues such as social isolation, pockets of deprivation and unemployment and climate change, are also referenced within the housing strategy. We also need to understand and address the immediate and longer term impact of Covid-19 on our housing needs.

The Housing Strategy 2020-2024 has four key priorities:

1. Address and understand our housing needs
2. Support our vulnerable residents through a range of housing options
3. Improve the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough's homes
4. Enriching people's lives

As part of the public consultation on the draft Housing Strategy, we received 37 responses in total, of which 27 were from residents. Between 77% - 80% either agreed or strongly agreed with each of the objectives set out in the strategy. 71% felt that the purpose of the Housing Strategy is clear and 61% agreed with the approach taken in the Housing Strategy.

There were a number of additional comments received during the strategy consultation, the majority of which have been addressed within the strategy's accompanying action plan. The main concerns have centred around wanting to know where new development is likely to be based and the importance of having an up to date Local Plan; impact of development on the environment and conservation of green spaces; ensuring the right infrastructure is in place to support new and existing communities, and addressing the economic and social impacts arising from Covid and Brexit. There were also comments around ensuring a more diverse and robust private rental sector especially for those who are unemployed or have poor credit history and ensuring there are more opportunities for young people to secure suitable and affordable housing given the high house prices and general unaffordability of the private rental sector within the Borough. There were also several comments about the mix of new housing within the Borough and a perceived over supply of flatted units, especially with the change in demand following the Covid pandemic for more outdoor space and adequate indoor space for home working.

BUSINESS CASE

The Housing Strategy 2020-2024 has four key priorities and their importance are outlined below:

1. Address and understand our housing needs

The population of our Borough is changing. More housing will need to be available to meet demand, with a diverse mix of homes to meet the changing needs of our growing population including a growing older population. There are currently 576 households (Jan 2021) on the Council's Housing Register identified as being in housing need. The Borough also needs to have a range of housing types and an environment and infrastructure that supports growth, helping to retain and attract a professional workforce and essential key workers. We also need to understand and address the housing, economic and social needs following Covid-19.

2. Support our vulnerable residents through a range of housing options

We want to support more people to live independently for longer by offering the right housing options to meet their needs, as well as high quality information and advice to help residents to make informed housing decisions. Investing in housing support for vulnerable people helps keep them healthy. Every £1 invested delivers nearly £2 of benefit through costs avoided to public services including care, health and crime costs, The Health Foundation.

3. Improve the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough's homes

Poor quality housing has a significant impact on residents' health and wellbeing. It is also linked to children's quality of life and educational attainment, due to higher rates of sickness and absence from school. A good choice of high quality and sustainable housing will help the Borough to achieve many of its ambitions, including its vision to be carbon neutral by 2030.

4. Enriching people's lives

As well as helping to provide our residents with sustainable homes, the Council, together with our partners, has a vital role to play in improving people's life chances and reducing worklessness and a reliance on benefits. By investing in programmes and initiatives to help residents and others in housing need, we can transform lives, as well as supporting the local economy and wider community.

The expected outcomes for year 1 of the strategy which are detailed in the accompanying action plan include:

- Delivery of more homes in the Borough – delivery of 140 homes as part of the Council's 1-4-5 housing delivery programme and a further 200 affordable homes to be delivered through the Council's partnership with housing associations. Work towards delivering the additional (c100) homes per annum (all tenures) not currently identified in the current draft Local Plan Update but required to bridge the shortfall against the total annual number prescribed by Government.
- More opportunities for low cost home ownership, such as the affordable self-build programme, achieving outline planning permission at Toutley East by the end of Q2 2021/22
- The Council helping to deliver the right homes in the right places, with housing policies informing and complementing the new local plan and making sure that infrastructure is delivered first in new housing developments, with a target of having a draft affordable housing policy and SPD agreed prior to Council adoption
- Delivering housing and support tailored to meet identified need, by developing more specialist housing for vulnerable people based on need including those at risk of homelessness, adult social care clients, children in care and care leavers. The target for 2021/22 is to deliver 11 units of accommodation for learning disabled clients, 10 units for mental health clients, 7 units for vulnerable young people and 5 units of accommodation for homelessness.
- Improving information and guidance, by enhancing the digital advice and guidance available to residents via the Council's website and other sources, with a user survey carried out to measure impact.

- Devising and implementing how the Council approaches the issues highlighted in the recent Housing White Paper including ensuring the quality and safety of homes, clear information on performance and a strong voice for residents and tenants
- Developing effective policies and strategies to ensure supported housing meets need through additional supporting policies such as the use of extra care for older people and move on accommodation for care leavers and vulnerable young people, developing an extra care policy ready for adoption during 2021/22.
- Improving the quality and management of homes both within the social housing stock and private rented sector, maintaining a target of 100% Decent Homes Standard on homes owned by the Council, Loddon Homes and other partner Housing Associations.
- Ensuring the quality and sustainability of design of all homes through energy efficiency and exploring modern methods of construction for housing delivery. The target for 2021/22 is to set up a programme of retrofitting the Council's housing stock to net zero standards and work with partners to help achieve net zero standards as well as developing a policy and SPD for inclusion in the new local plan.
- Regenerating old housing stock such as the Gorse Ride community in Finchampstead, delivering 46 new homes as part of phase 1 and to be onsite with 249 units as part of phase 2
- Developing more socially inclusive communities and helping to provide all tenants with a stable home for example through additional employment opportunities and skills development, identifying and planning activities around preventative measures and undertaking social value impact assessments on social and community activities

Next Steps

If the Executive approve adoption of the proposed Housing Strategy 2020 – 2024, this will then go to full Council on 20th May for approval and afterwards the strategy will be published in early Summer.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	This strategy will be resourced through existing funding within the Council's MTFP and access to wider external funding such as Homes England grants programmes.		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)			
Following Financial Year (Year 3)			

Other Financial Information
The capital approvals needed to enact this strategy will be sought and contained within the annual budget setting process. In addition to meeting Housing needs, the 1-4-5 programme will also provide valuable Revenue resources for the Council.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
Members, Officers, stakeholders and the public have had the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the draft strategy. The consultation has been made available via the Council’s website, with associated press releases, invitations to respond and social media push.

Public Sector Equality Duty
Due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken. An equality impact assessment has been carried out and is included as Enclosure 2.

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
The Housing Strategy will help towards achieving carbon neutrality by 2030 as one of the key priorities is around improving the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough’s housing stock, ensuring that the Council helps to improve carbon efficiency, reduce carbon emissions and fuel poverty.

List of Background Papers
Housing Strategy 2020 – 2024 – Enclosure 1 Year 1 Action Plan – Enclosure 2 Equality Impact Assessment – Enclosure 3 Housing Facts and Figures – Enclosure 4

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