

# Wokingham Borough Council Housing Strategy 2020-2024



## “Right Homes, Right Places”

**Housing plays a huge role in the health, environmental and economic well-being of everyone who lives in the borough. It is more than just bricks and mortar; everyone is affected by housing. Housing has become the defining economic and social issue of our times.**

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has stated its intention to fix the broken housing market and increase housing supply, unlocking homes in areas where need is greatest and encouraging best practice in delivering high quality design to underpin the creation of great places to live. Our residents and partners have told us they are most concerned about the impact of development upon communities and that some people find challenges in finding an affordable home. We want to improve the outcomes of our residents by delivering the strategic priorities outlined in our **Community Vision 2020 – 2024**, of which housing plays a key integral role. 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 Council’s role includes:

- Working with developers and partners to deliver good quality sustainable homes in the right places.
- Investing in our own housing stock and delivering ambitious estate regeneration programmes.
- Working with landlords to improve standards of private rental sector properties.
- Working across different departments, agencies and other Berkshire authorities to ensure effective infrastructure delivery to mitigate against development and support new and existing communities.
- Prioritising people with additional support needs to access appropriate accommodation and support.
- Acting as the corporate parent and providing for children in care and young people leaving care.
- Improving the health and wellbeing of the Borough’s residents by helping to provide stable homes and develop well connected and socially inclusive communities.

### Key facts and figures

- **167,979** people live in Wokingham Borough, and this is expected to grow by **5.4%** by **2030**, to **177,100** people (ONS, 2018)
- The average price of a home in the Borough is **£416,612** compared to a national average of **£234,853** (HM Land Registry, August 2019)
- Those on the Council’s Housing Register identified as being in **housing need** stands at **563 households** (October, 2020)

## Our housing priorities – what we will do

Priority	Why is this important?
Address and understand our housing needs	The population of our Borough is changing. More housing will be needed to meet demand, with a diverse mix of homes to meet the changing needs of our growing population including a growing older population as well as helping to retain and attract a professional workforce including essential keyworkers. As part of this we will invest in our own housing stock and deliver a step change in the provision of new affordable homes through the Council’s housing companies and Housing Revenue Account. We also need to understand and address the immediate and longer impact of Covid-19 on our housing needs.
Support our vulnerable residents through a range of housing options	We want to support more people to live independently and keep healthy for longer by offering the right housing options to meet their needs. Following the impact of Covid-19 we will offer more support to those who are homeless, sleeping rough or at risk of homelessness. We prioritise those children in care and young people leaving care, ensuring that there are clear housing pathways to a stable home, helping young people in need by providing additional support to live independently.
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, sustainable and well managed housing will help the Borough to achieve many of its ambitions, including its vision to be carbon neutral by 2030.
Enriching people’s lives	The Council, together with our partners, has a vital role to play in creating vibrant inclusive communities, 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.

## Our successes since the last Housing Strategy

- As a Local Authority we delivered one of the highest numbers of affordable homes in England, completing 1182 affordable homes during 2015/16 – 2018/19 and generating a future pipeline of over 2000 additional affordable homes
- Due to the large number of affordable homes delivered, compared to other Berkshire and Greater London authorities the number of people on our Housing Register remains static but low
- By securing external grant funding from Homes England, our housing companies delivered affordable housing schemes such as Phoenix Avenue, Fosters extra care scheme and a supported housing scheme for young people at risk of homelessness in Reading Road
- Delivered an affordable rented scheme for key workers in Wokingham town centre
- Completed 2 Extra Care schemes for older people at Fosters and the Birches in Woodley
- Developed temporary accommodation for adults at Foxwood and Broadway House
- Delivered a range of support services to enable vulnerable adults to live more independently
- Maintained low levels of homelessness by focusing on practical responses and prevention and enhancing housing pathways to help end rough sleeping
- Helped people access and secure 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 target on our own housing stock
- Enabled 43 residents to set up their own business through the “Strive” enterprise programme

## Our challenges going forward

- We have a challenge within the Borough to manage and balance need with requirement for new housing, whilst protecting the quality of our environment and the sustainability of our existing communities. Creating places and communities fit for the future that are inclusive to all and have the right infrastructure in place. Ensuring that our homes are affordable, sustainable and of good quality and supporting those with specialist needs or who are at risk of homelessness.
- We need to understand and address the impact of Covid-19 on our housing requirements, especially for our older and vulnerable residents.
- Wokingham Borough has a growing population with many thriving communities but with an increasing proportion of residents with long term health conditions, such as dementia, and people with learning disabilities or difficulties, it is important that we address and manage demand for long term care and maintain high quality services.
- Tackling health issues and social isolation is a challenge in the Borough, particularly in older people, those with mental health issues and carers. There are pockets of deprivation, unemployment and a risk of poverty within working families. There has been an increase in the number of children and young people seeking support for mental health issues.
- To tackle climate change, achieve carbon neutrality by 2030, while adapting for a growing population and seeking out value for money.

## What do our residents say?

### In the New Homes Survey 2020:

- **83%** of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with their new home
- **74%** of housing association tenants were satisfied with their new home
- **94%** agree that their house and area are attractive
- **83%** do not feel socially isolated with **74%** seeing their community as good or growing

## What we are going to do - how we will address our priorities

Priority	Outcomes	What are we going to do?
<b>Address and understand our housing needs</b>	Delivery of more homes in the Borough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Council to lead on the delivery of 1000 additional homes over the 4 year strategy period (Housing 1-4-5 Challenge*) with at least 50% being classified as affordable</li> <li>Work towards ensuring delivery of the number of homes per annum (all tenures) set out in the Local Plan Update and prescribed by Government and maintaining a robust 5 year housing land supply</li> <li>An additional 800 affordable homes to be delivered through the Council's partnership with housing associations</li> </ul>
	More opportunities for low cost home ownership and private renting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliver the Council's first affordable self-build scheme and develop other opportunities for community led housing</li> <li>Explore new tenures and opportunities to help those who want to get onto the home ownership ladder</li> <li>Work with private landlords to expand the private rented sector to increase the range of available housing options</li> </ul>
	The Council helps to deliver the right homes in the right places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a strong evidence base of need and develop housing policies which will inform and complement the new Local Plan</li> <li>Ensure that any development with housing provision addresses local need and essential infrastructure is delivered up front</li> <li>Make the best use of Council-owned land setting the standard for high quality sustainable housing</li> <li>Continue to deliver high quality affordable and market homes for local people in Wokingham Borough by working with a range of partners and agencies</li> <li>Ensure we can meet the housing needs of the Borough's key workers</li> <li>Implement a new Allocations Policy to ensure best use of the Borough's affordable housing stock</li> <li>Address the housing needs of our Gypsy Roma Traveller and boat dweller communities</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting our vulnerable residents through a range of housing options</b>	Delivering housing and support tailored to meet identified need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing more supported housing for vulnerable people based on need including rough sleepers, homeless or those at risk of homelessness, adult social care clients, children in care and care leavers</li> <li>Continue to provide a range of housing support services to help vulnerable people live independently</li> <li>Delivery of a new council owned care home</li> <li>Delivery of two additional semi-independent living schemes for young people and care leavers in Wokingham, providing housing pathways for those in need of support</li> </ul>
	Improving guidance and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to improve access to information, advice and guidance on housing, distributing information through a variety of partners including our town and parish councils, Citizens Advice Wokingham, voluntary and charity sector partners</li> <li>Enhance the digital advice and guidance available to residents via the Council's website and social media</li> </ul>
	Developing effective policies and strategies to ensure supported housing meets need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing policies and strategies around the development and use of housing for vulnerable residents including a learning disability accommodation strategy, accommodation for those with mental health, the use of extra care for older people and move on accommodation for care leavers and vulnerable young people</li> </ul>
<b>Improving the quality, sustainability and management of the Borough's homes</b>	Improving the quality and management of homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the quality and on-going management of homes and environment on all new developments</li> <li>Make best use of existing homes and assets to help tackle housing need as well as over-crowding and under-occupation</li> <li>Ensure all landlords in the Borough engage with and listen to their tenants and deliver the best possible housing management service</li> <li>Ensure that the Council continues to engage with and involve its tenants through the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel and ensure the core values of their Tenants Charter are reflected across all housing</li> <li>Support our Private Rented Sector (PRS) residents and work with PRS landlords to improve standards of properties</li> <li>Improve the temporary and emergency accommodation offer for rough sleepers and homeless residents</li> <li>Ensure that fire safety, health and safety remains the top priority in every home and housing scheme</li> </ul>
	Ensuring quality and sustainability of design of all homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The adoption of a new Local Plan, Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document and Borough Design Guide</li> <li>Improve energy efficiency, reduce carbon emissions and fuel poverty, working towards net zero carbon by 2030</li> <li>Explore more innovative ways of housing delivery including modern methods of construction</li> </ul>
	Regenerating communities and housing stock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to deliver regeneration programmes of older, poor quality housing stock such as at Gorse Ride in Finchampstead</li> <li>Ensure any regeneration projects are led by the local community and address their needs and priorities</li> </ul>
<b>Enriching people's lives</b>	Developing more socially inclusive communities through employment opportunities and skills development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote independence, health and wellbeing to all residents</li> <li>Work to provide all tenants with a stable home to increase life chances</li> <li>Create communities and homes, not housing and estates, ensuring that the impact on existing communities from new development is minimised during the development period and is positive in the longer term</li> <li>Continue to expand employment and training opportunities for all residents including exploring and implementing opportunities for vulnerable residents</li> <li>Improve day to day housing affordability through preventative projects to tackle challenges such as fuel poverty</li> <li>Work together with partner Housing Associations (RPs) on specific activities which contribute to social and community inclusion and reduce any stigma relating to social housing</li> </ul>

## How will we measure success? We will use the following example indicators to measure our progress against the high level outcomes:

Address and understand our housing needs	Supporting our vulnerable residents through a range of housing options	Improving the quality and sustainability of the Borough's housing stock	Enriching people's lives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of new homes delivered</li> <li>Number of affordable homes delivered</li> <li>Delivery of an affordable self-build project at Toutley</li> <li>Implementation of new Allocations Policy</li> <li>Delivery of additional GRT pitches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Numbers of people accessing information, advice and guidance</li> <li>Number of care leavers and LD residents in suitable accommodation</li> <li>% of those presenting as homeless, homeless acceptances and use of B&amp;B</li> <li>Delivery of supported housing projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>% of affordable housing stock which meets the Decent Homes Standard</li> <li>Ensure all new homes are carbon-neutral</li> <li>Adoption of a new Local Plan</li> <li>Affordable Housing SPD and Borough Design Guide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of households lifted out of fuel poverty</li> <li>Number of residents participating in business enterprise/skills development courses</li> <li>% satisfaction levels in the annual New Homes survey</li> </ul>

An accompanying action plan has been developed which will be updated annually and will set out how the Council will deliver against the priorities set out above. Progress will be monitored by the Council, AHIG (member/officer group) and the Housing Delivery/RP Partnership. Local housing data is collated, analysed and published every 6 months in the Housing Facts and Figures report available on the Council's website.

\* The Council's housing development challenge that aims to deliver 1000 homes over a 4 year period generating a 5% return rate on investment