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| TITLE | Young People's Housing Strategy 2024-2028: <i>To provide safe, secure, and affordable accommodation for our Care Leavers, 16/17-year-olds at Risk of Homelessness and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children</i> |
| FOR CONSIDERATION BY | The Executive on Thursday, 14 March 2024 |
| WARD | (All Wards); |
| LEAD OFFICER | Director, Place and Growth - Giorgio Framaliccio |
| LEAD MEMBER | Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Housing - Stephen Conway |

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To obtain the Executive's approval to progress this strategy to Full Council for consideration of the adoption of Wokingham Borough Council's Young People's Housing Strategy 2024-2028. As per Chapter 4.1.1 of the Constitution, the Council's Housing Strategies must be considered at Full Council.

This strategy outlines four strategic priorities and introduces an action plan to provide the Council's direction to assist our Corporate Parenting responsibility and provide safe, secure, and affordable accommodation for young people priority groups. These have been identified as Care Leavers, Former Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children Care Leavers and 16-17 year olds at risk of homelessness. By providing a clear strategic direction, underlined by a commitment to partnership working, we aim to improve outcomes for our young people and enhance efficiency of Council services and budgets by:

1. Increasing the Council's housing options
2. Developing clear housing pathways
3. Supporting tenancy sustainment
4. Reducing homelessness and rough sleeping

This will increase housing security for our young people, increase support and variance of local affordable housing options and reduce the cost of expensive external accommodation placements. In turn, we anticipate improved outcomes for young people and the wider community through the implementation of this strategy and action plan.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive recommends that Full Council consider the adoption of Wokingham Borough Council's Young People's Housing Strategy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This strategy supports the delivery of the Affordable Housing Strategy and sets out the strategic direction for young people priority groups in the Borough. These have been

identified as Care Leavers, 16/17-year-olds at risk of homelessness and Former Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children Care Leavers (UASCs). The Council's strategic needs data forecasts that by 2025/26 we will have responsibility for an additional 25 former UASC Care Leavers and an additional 22 Care Leavers which, if not addressed, will lead to exponentially rising costs to find alternative accommodation placements. This strategy will support those aims through four strategic priorities:

Strategic Priority 1 – Expanding Housing Options

Strategic Priority 2 – Developing Clear Housing Pathways

Strategic Priority 3 – Supporting Tenancy Sustainment

Strategic Priority 4 – Reducing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

An action plan is included within this strategy which will monitor and evaluate this strategy against these strategic priorities. This will enable us to track our progress, and any blockages, in delivering these strategic objectives including regular reports and feedback with the Council's tenant engagement groups. The strategy will also have oversight from Member/Officer groups. The strategy does not commit additional expenditure but commits to explore opportunities to reduce spending on expensive accommodation placements for these priority groups through invest-to-save models.

This strategy was presented at Children Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2024. It was advised to incorporate commitments to securing affordable housing for veterans and affordable home ownership products for young people in the Affordable Housing Strategy, as it was not in scope of the Young People's Housing Strategy. It was also advised to review the name of this strategy to make it clear who will benefit from its introduction. To this end, a vision statement was included as a subtitle on the front page, other options were considered but not deemed suitable. Following approval at Executive, the strategy will go to Full Council in July 2024 where it is expected to be published shortly after.

BACKGROUND

At a time of national economic turbulence and a cost-of-living crisis, it is important to ensure that the Borough's young people, and young people coming into the Borough, have the necessary housing support to navigate these challenging times. This strategy outlines the Council's strategic priorities to provide innovative solutions and consolidate resources to enable us, and our partners, to address the key challenges facing young people in Wokingham Borough.

The Council is the Corporate Parent for those in care and leaving care. This means that we have a responsibility to provide safe, secure, and affordable accommodation with accompanying support to the young people we are responsible for. An increase in the number of young people that require our support increases the financial outlay for the Council to provide this support. Therefore, this strategy will commit to increasing housing options and supported placements to ensure the Council increases its quality and quantity of accommodation placements. This will be achieved through maximising affordable housing delivery for young people through negotiations with developers, partnership working with our Registered Provider Partners and assessing our existing stock and assets. This strategy has been co-produced with young people, residents, partner agencies and the Council's expert officers. Partnership working is fundamental to the success of this strategy to address the challenges faced by these priority groups. To this end, it is important that every stakeholder this strategy supports can own their objectives within the strategy and that this is a live document owned by all involved.

The Council's previous Young People's Housing Strategy ran from 2014 to 2019 and produced several outcomes. However, given the current pressures being faced by young people and the Council, there is a need to produce a new, bespoke strategy which reflects the current pressures and trends.

In the past 6 years, the Council developed two Semi-Independent Living (SiLs) schemes at Reading Road and London Road in Wokingham. A SiL is a supported placement which provides accommodation and support to young people whilst encouraging independent living. From January 2022 to January 2023 these developments supported 8 and 11 new placements respectively. Both SiLs provide drop-in sessions to support independent living, employment, and education. The Council also has 2 x Supported Lodgings and runs the Shared Lives scheme which enables a young person with a learning disability to live in a family setting as a young adult. There is also floating housing support available across the Borough through our provider Transform Housing.

The Council now needs to build on this and is seeking to achieve the following outcomes from the new strategy, which include:

- Securing specialist accommodation through developer contributions via the provision of affordable housing
- Partnership working with our Registered Provider partners to secure specialist accommodation especially where this can be provided in addition to developer contributions
- Monitoring and applying for external grant funding opportunities to support the provision of new schemes or help with revenue funding to support more young people
- Assessing the Council's existing assets to increase its housing stock

- Working with our Local Housing Companies (Loddon Homes/Berrybrook) to deliver specialist accommodation
- Evaluating and forecasting our young people's housing needs to enable effective commissioning of accommodation
- Continued assessment of the Young People's Housing Panel and partnership working between Children Services and Housing
- Improving communication with Care Leavers who are waiting for an offer of social housing
- Explore the implementation of trainer apartments
- Sign up to the Care Leaver Covenant to embed best practise throughout the Council, and its partner's, services
- Increase support for Early Intervention to prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity
- Undertake a cross-annual service snapshot to identify young people aged 14+ who are at risk of homelessness
- Commitment to ensure young people do not need to present as homeless in order to be accommodated

Moving forwards, the Medium Term Financial Plan for 2024/25 includes an allocation to delivering supported accommodation for Care Leavers at Seaford Court as well as an allocation to develop Care Leaver accommodation at Wellington Road. This demonstrates our pipeline of delivery for providing additional affordable homes for young people priority groups, a key priority of this strategy.

The Young People's Housing Strategy will sit under the Affordable Housing Strategy as the master housing strategy and alongside other housing strategies such as the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and an anticipated Older People's Housing Strategy. This strategy outlines how the Council will support the strategic priorities within the Affordable Housing Strategy and wider Council strategies. An action plan will accompany this strategy which will outline the key deliverables and milestones through the strategy period. This action plan will be updated and refreshed annually and overseen by the Young People's Housing Panel.

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, DLUHC, DfE, Homes England, partner agencies and local charities. It will also be publicised through a press release and our social media. As part of the consultation, we will ask questions around whether consultees agree with the objectives set out in the strategy, what challenges they think the Borough is facing in terms of housing young people, and what fundamental outcomes they would like to see from the delivery of the strategy.

BUSINESS CASE

The last four years since the COVID-19 pandemic have had an adverse and disproportionate impact on young people. A national study completed by Homeless Link in 2021 demonstrated that the pandemic had an impact on youth homelessness as the pressure of lockdowns led to an increase in family breakdowns and services reporting worsening mental health and drugs and alcohol misuse. The subsequent cost-of-living crisis has also contributed to a decrease in the quality and value of the private rental market nationally. Consequently, Centrepoin estimates that 129,000 approached their

council to avoid homelessness in 2022, this figure excludes a significant number who do not present but would meet the homelessness or rough sleeping definition. Locally, a similar picture is forming with 200 homelessness approaches from young people in the 12 months up to October 2023. There is a causal link between this increase and national economic turbulence, with private rents and evictions at an all-time high. This decreases housing security for families and strains relationships leading to a rise in family breakdowns, the leading cause of 16/17 year olds being at risk of homelessness. This is evidenced in Wokingham with the Council's strategic needs data forecasting that by 2025/26 we will have responsibility for an additional 25 former UASC Care Leavers and an additional 22 Care Leavers which, if not addressed, will lead to exponentially rising costs to find alternative accommodation placements.

The draft Young People's Housing Strategy has four key priorities, outlined below:

Strategic Priority 1 – Expanding Housing Options

Increased provision to provide a range of options to suit the different needs of each young person with an emphasis on the right homes in the right places cognisant of the individual contexts and requirements of support for each young person. This involves maximising our resources and our partnerships with external partner agencies including government and our Registered Provider partners.

Strategic Priority 2 – Developing Clear Housing Pathways

The Council has a Corporate Parenting Duty to young people in our care. As well as having sufficient housing options, our young people need to have a robust and planned housing pathway. This priority will ensure our young people have greater confidence in their housing security and the right support in order to fulfil this pathway.

Strategic Priority 3 – Supporting Tenancy Sustainment

Care Leavers have the lowest rates of tenancy sustainment and highest rental arrears compared to the Council's other residents. This makes it more challenging to fulfil a safe and secure home. This priority outlines how we can best support our young people to become tenancy ready which will increase their housing options and reduce financial pressures on the Council.

Strategic Priority 4 – Reducing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

As a Corporate Parent, it is the Council's responsibility to ensure that no young person within our care experiences homelessness or rough sleeping and where it does occur it is rare, brief and non-recurrent. This priority will look to increase support for our most vulnerable young people through the delivery of projects such as the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme whilst increasing support for early intervention to stop homelessness at the earliest possible stage.

Next Steps

The strategy was released for public consultation on the 18th January 2024 which concludes on the 18th February 2024 before it is considered at this Executive meeting prior to consideration at Full Council in March 2024 before publication shortly after. The

strategy will run for 4 years up to 2028 and progress against the strategic priorities will be assessed throughout including annual reviews of the action plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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) | nil | Yes | |
| Next Financial Year (Year 2) | nil | Yes | |
| Following Financial Year (Year 3) | nil | Yes | |

Other Financial Information

One of the key outcomes this strategy seeks to address is cost avoidance and exploring opportunities to invest to save. However, it is not possible to cost these individual savings until business cases for specific schemes or initiatives have been explored in more detail. An action plan accompanies the strategy which will assist the monitoring of this strategy against financial outcomes.

The capital and revenue approvals needed to enact this strategy will be sought and contained within the annual budget setting process whilst external grant funding opportunities will be sourced and pursued in order to maximise the outputs of this strategy.

Legal Implications arising from the Recommendation(s)

This report and decision making process arising from the same has been considered by the Legal Officer within the context of the Constitution and public law.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Public consultation released on the 18th January 2024 and concluded on the 18th February 2024.

Public Sector Equality Duty

A Stage 1 Equalities and Impacts Assessment has been undertaken and found only positive or neutral impacts on each demographic, so a Stage 2 assessment is not required.

Climate Emergency – *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*

This strategy will sit under the Affordable Housing Strategy (2024-2028) which has committed to procure additional affordable and sustainable homes in line with the Climate Emergency Action Plan to do as much as possible to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 by achieving the EPC and efficiency KPIs stated within. Therefore, any

additional homes procured for young people as a result of this strategy will adhere to the same strategic commitment.

Reasons for considering the report in Closed Session

N/A

List of Background Papers

Enclosure 1 - Young People's Housing Strategy Draft

Enclosure 2 - Young People's Housing Strategy – Stage 1 EQIA

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