

## **Title of report: Draft Housing Strategy**

**Decision maker: Cabinet member housing, regulatory services, and community safety**

**Decision date: 30th April 2021**

**Report by: Housing Strategy Officer**

### **Classification**

Open

### **Decision type**

Non-key

### **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

### **Purpose**

To approve the draft housing strategy for community consultation and to agree the outline consultation process and timeline.

Developing a Local Housing Strategy provides local authorities with a strategic opportunity to consider the operation of the housing system in its area and to plan strategically for meeting current and future need and demand, and the effective delivery of housing-related services over the lifetime of the strategy.

### **Recommendation(s)**

**That:**

- a) The draft housing strategy, at Appendix 1, is approved for community consultation;**
- b) That approval is given for the outline consultation process and timeline, as set out at Appendix 2.**

### **Alternative options**

1. There is no statutory requirement for the council to produce a housing strategy. The Cabinet Member for housing, regulatory services and community safety could decide not to endorse the strategy and agree that no further work is done on this document. This is

not recommended as it is considered good practice to have a Housing Strategy in place. The strategy gives an oversight of the work that the council does directly related to housing; the council does not have another document that brings all of these elements together.

2. A community consultation plan has been drafted in order to give the wider community an opportunity to review and comment on the draft local housing strategy before it is submitted to Cabinet for approval. As the document is not statutory, there is no requirement to do this. The local housing strategy could be published without going through a consultation process. This is not recommended as it is considered good practice to gain the views of the wider community on the local housing strategy and share with them the wide range of housing related work undertaken by the council.

## **Key considerations**

3. The council has a range of roles in relation to housing including:
  - a) Assess local housing needs and understand the local housing market.
  - b) Develop effective partnerships to increase the supply of affordable housing.
  - c) Prevention and relief of homelessness.
  - d) Improve conditions in the private sector.
  - e) Enable people to live independently in their own homes.
  - f) Ensuring safe and controlled development of new homes across the county through the Core Strategy.
4. Herefordshire faces some significant challenges around the affordability of housing, homelessness, caring for looked after children and young people as well as our aging population, mitigating climate change and ensuring that working age people and families can afford to live and work in the county to support economic growth. Housing is not a stand-alone issue and is closely linked to health inequalities / outcomes for people of all ages across Herefordshire.
5. The strategy has been drafted during the current Covid 19 pandemic and whilst the main issues remain unchanged, some have been exacerbated during this period, particularly homelessness and issues around affordability. Additional government funding has been secured during the pandemic to support the homeless, but it is likely that more people will become homeless once the ban on evictions is lifted on the 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021. We do not yet know what the longer-term impact of Covid 19 might be on the whole housing market.
6. There are a number of Bills and White Papers in progress through Parliament that will influence the council's work over the lifetime of this strategy. These include the Renters Reform Bill, the Domestic Abuse Bill which brings with it new statutory obligations, the Environmental Bill, Changes to the Planning System and Planning for the Future whitepapers, and the Future Homes standard (changes to building regulations). We cannot forecast the impact of these legislative changes on housing in Herefordshire over

the lifetime of this strategy, but have acknowledged that they will all affect housing development and delivery in the county once they pass into law.

7. The local housing strategy lays out a range of challenges that the council is working to address as follows:
8. The median house price-to-earnings ratio in Herefordshire in 2019 was 11.9, this is significantly higher than both the West Midlands and national averages, at 6.2 and 7.1 respectively. This is based on workplace-based earnings and means affordability is a challenge for many people living and working in Herefordshire. The council, who now have approval to start building truly affordable houses for local people, has already highlighted the issue of affordability in the county plan.
9. The recent housing market area needs assessment for Herefordshire (2020) includes a detailed assessment of affordable housing need and points to a need for 422 new rented affordable homes per year, and 175 new affordable home ownership homes per year. We will use this information to negotiate with developers via the planning process.
10. Public Health England consider poor quality housing to be a major public health issue because of the impact that it has on physical and mental health. Housing in poor physical condition can lead to injury and poor physical health, but also has a serious bearing on mental health and wellbeing, particularly cold homes, unsuitable homes and overcrowded homes. Sub regional data suggests that 10,000 households in Herefordshire are living in fuel poverty.
11. Twenty-eight percent of homes in Herefordshire were built before 1919, a large proportion of these are solid wall properties making them much less efficient from an energy efficiency and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions perspective. Keep Herefordshire Warm is an organisation commissioned by the council to support homeowners to improve the energy efficiency of their homes and to reduce their fuel costs. The council also bids for external funding as it becomes available to deliver projects that expand our work in this area.
12. Approximately twenty-seven percent (19,358) of dwellings in the private sector have category 1 Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) hazards. The council has a duty to act upon reports of Category 1 hazards. These are hazards that are a serious or immediate risk to a person's health and safety and include excess cold, excess heat, damp and mould growth, falls hazards as well as electrical, fire and structural hazards. Poor housing conditions affect the health and wellbeing of residents and so it is a priority for the council to increase the quality, accessibility and safety of existing homes across all sectors. Inspection and enforcement around housing quality issues sits with the council's environmental health team, as does the licencing of homes of multiple occupancy (HMO's).
13. Statistics published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) put the number of empty homes in England in October 2019 at 648,114. This represents a 2.2% increase on the previous year's total. Of the 648,114, 225,845 were classed as long-term empty properties (empty for longer than six months)<sup>1</sup>. As of 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021, there were 284 long term empty homes in the county. A dedicated empty homes officer was employed in December 2019 to work with homeowners to bring empty properties back into use; six properties were brought back into use during 2020 even

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<sup>1</sup> [House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 3012, 21<sup>st</sup> October 2020 – Empty Homes \(England\)](#)

with Covid-19 restriction in place. We will build on this success over the term of the strategy.

14. Herefordshire's population is growing. The latest (2018-based Sub National Population Projections) predict that Herefordshire's population will have grown to 209,878 by 2041. Analysis suggests that the largest growth will be in people aged 65 and over. In 2041 it is projected that there will be 67,200 people aged 65 and over. This is an increase of 18,900 from 2020, representing growth of thirty nine %. The population aged 85 and over is projected to increase by eighty-one percent. Looking at the other end of the age spectrum the data shows a projected decrease in the number of children (those aged Under 15), with modest increases or decreases shown for adult age groups. This projected increase in older residents will be a significant pressure on resources available to meet housing need and promote independence. It is as a result of this growing need that the Housing Market Area Needs Assessment carried out in 2020 has highlighted an urgent need for more suitable housing for older people as set out in the strategy.
15. The housing solutions team received 156 presentations as roofless during the government's 'everybody in' initiative (first lockdown period - 2020), with up to 80 being placed in temporary accommodation at any one time. People become homeless for a wide range of reasons, the most common reasons in Herefordshire are family breakdown, section 21 evictions and people fleeing domestic abuse.
16. Homelessness and living in temporary accommodation has a lifelong impact on health. Being associated with increased risk of pre term birth, low birth weight, developmental delay and poor mental health in infants and children (Stein and Gelberg 2000). The average age of a homeless person at death is 47 years (Crisis 2012). Homeless people were 3.2 times more likely to be an inpatient admission than the general population. Homelessness is complex and many people who become homeless need support to help rebuild their lives, this is particularly true of homeless people who become rough sleepers. There is no single solution, so we will continue to work in partnership with a range of local organisations and apply for external funding as it becomes available in order to enable homeless people to rebuild their lives.
17. The community consultation will enable communities across Herefordshire, delivery partners and local organisations to consider the work that the council currently deliver and will seek their views on the priorities that we have outlined in the strategy. Once the consultation period has ended, feedback received will be considered and appropriate changes and clarifications made as required.
18. The final draft local housing strategy is expected to be considered by Cabinet in July 2021 for approval following consideration of the feedback received during consultation. It will then be published on the council's website.
19. Progress against the strategy, once approved, will be monitored through a set of performance indicators, which have been agreed across the range of service areas involved in the development of the local housing strategy.

## **Community impact**

20. Although there is no statutory obligation to produce a housing strategy, the importance of housing nationally and locally is recognised, as is the need to plan for future demand

and ensure that our housing stock is fit for purpose as our population profile grows and changes. The strategy demonstrates how our work to deliver housing links directly with the County Plan 2020 - 2024 themes of connectivity, wellbeing and sustainability. The local housing strategy outlines what is being currently delivered and why, identifies areas of challenge, and details improvements that the council intends to make over the next five years. It draws on existing strategies, plans and reports, but does not aim to duplicate them, instead signposting to them throughout.

## Environmental Impact

21. The accelerating impact of climate change will continue to effect weather patterns across the UK, leading to in an increase in flooding and unpredictable weather events. The Council has recognised this and declared a [climate and ecological emergency](#). This impacts upon every part of the council's work including the delivery of new homes and work to minimise the negative environmental impact of existing homes within our ownership.
22. The average Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating for all private sector dwellings in Herefordshire is 52 (E), which is worse than both England (60) and the West Midlands (58), meaning that there are a significant number of houses that will potentially contribute higher greenhouse gas emissions than similar sized higher rated (D+) properties. The housing strategy summarises the actions that are being taken by the council to address fuel poverty and improve the environmental efficiency of existing homes including Local Authority Delivery of the Green Homes Grant
23. As well as the direct environmental impact of housing itself, the strategy makes links between housing, waste management, connectivity, sustainable water management and air quality, all of which are vital to ensuring quality of life for our communities. Housing does not exist in isolation.

## Equality duty

24. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
25. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in

the delivery of services. The providers that help us to deliver the work detailed in the housing strategy are / will be made aware of their contractual requirements in regards to equality legislation.

26. The work that the council does to provide housing for homeless people and people in housing need, along with the related support that we commission, assists in the delivery of the public sector equality duty, as does our work to improve housing conditions, the allocation of social housing, registering HMO's and the provision of dedicated sites for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople.

### **Resource implications**

27. This strategy brings together the work of a wide range of teams from across the council, each being responsible for their own budgets and any related governance. There are no direct cost implications for this strategy. Actions listed within the strategy are / will be taken forward by their respective teams along with any related governance requirements. Many of the activities listed are already being delivered; this strategy just brings them together into a single document. The strategy itself does not require any additional resources to enable its delivery.

### **Legal implications**

28. There are no specific legal implications in the report. The Deregulation Act 2015 removed the statutory requirement for English Local Authorities to produce a housing strategy as previously required by section 87 of Local Government Act 2003.
29. The Housing Strategy is therefore not a statutory requirement but takes account of the relevant legislation regarding housing, for example that which relate to homelessness, housing conditions and the provision of affordable housing.

### **Risk management**

30. There are no direct risks associated with the strategy; instead, it brings together the work of a range of teams under one umbrella. The development of any new projects to deliver improvements would be subject to a business case and related governance by each team, rather than through this strategy.
31. Whilst having a housing strategy is not a statutory requirement, the council does have a number of statutory duties related to the development, delivery, inspection and licensing of safe housing across the county, and the prevention of homelessness. This strategy reflects the work that the council undertakes to deliver those duties. If we did not have a housing strategy, these activities would be viewed in isolation, rather than as a collective effort to improve the lives of our communities.
32. Progress against this strategy will be measured through a range of performance indicators. These will be updated annually and reported through the council's Housing Board. This will enable oversight of the council's approach to housing in its widest sense.

## **Consultees**

33. To date this strategy has been developed using information and support from the council teams that deliver housing related services. No wider consultation has been undertaken. Approval to undertake a public consultation is being sought through this report.
34. The aim of the consultation is to gain the view of the public and providers / potential providers view on the priorities within the strategy and better understand how they can be supported / delivered.

## **Appendices**

Draft local housing strategy Appendix 1

Outline community consultation plan Appendix 2

## **Background papers**

None.

## **Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.**