

Report of the Chief Executive

HOUSING STRATEGY 2020 -20241. Purpose of report

To seek committee approval for a new Housing Strategy

2. Background

In January 2020, Housing Committee discussed the key themes to be included in the Housing Strategy 2020-2024. Committee agreed a timetable for the completion of the Strategy, including consultation.

3. Detail

Due to Covid-19, the initial plan for consultation was not possible. However a meeting was held with the Resident Involvement Group prior to lockdown and an online consultation was used. There were 51 responses to the online consultation from tenants, borough residents and employees. Overall the consultees agreed with the key themes that had been proposed.

The strategy is based on the Housing priorities in the Corporate Plan:

- Build more houses, more quickly on under used or derelict land
- Invest to ensure our homes are safe and more energy efficient
- Prevent homelessness and help people to be financially secure and independent

Once approved the strategy will be designed in a variety of formats, including on our website so that it is accessible to our tenants, customers and partners.

The strategy contains an action plan for the first year of the strategy. The action plan will be refreshed each year considering any changes to guidance, legislation or priorities.

4. Financial implications

All actions contained within the first year action plan of Housing Strategy can be achieved within existing budgets. The action plans for subsequent years will be considered in line with budget planning.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to RESOLVE that the Housing Strategy 2020-2024 be approved.

Background papers

Nil

Broxtowe Borough Council

Housing Strategy 2020 -2024

Our Vision

As set out in the Corporate Plan, the aim for Housing at Broxtowe is:

A good quality home for everyone

For this to be achieved the Corporate Plan also has three priorities for housing:

- Build more houses, more quickly on under used or derelict land
- Invest to ensure our homes are safe and more energy efficient
- Prevent homelessness and help people to be financially secure and independent

Why have a Housing Strategy?

The Housing Strategy brings together the priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan with the other strategies in Housing, including the Engagement Strategy, the Neighbourhood Strategy and the Garage Strategy. It is a central document to capture all of the key actions within the department. Naturally there is also overlap with some of the actions contained with the Housing Business Plan and the actions within the strategy reflect the Housing Committee work programme.

What was achieved in the last Housing Strategy?

Broxtowe Borough Council's Housing Strategy 2015-2020 set out key outcomes to be achieved during the five year period, some achievements to highlight include:

Tenancy Sustainment and Financial Inclusion

A restructure of the housing service introduced new posts of Tenancy Sustainment Officer and Financial Inclusion Officer. Prior to this these services were not offered by the housing department and reliance was on external agencies to provide this support. Due to the reduction in funding available the department was finding it more difficult to provide tenants with the support they required. These posts addressed that gap. Both services have been very successful and provided essential support to tenants to enable them to sustain their tenancies and remain in their homes. Due to the demand for the Financial Inclusion Service a second officer was appointed in 2019.

Independent Living Service

The Retirement Living Service had not been reviewed for many years and the last strategy identified that some changes were required to ensure that the Council was offering the best possible service to our tenants living in our schemes. An external

review was commissioned and in 2018 following extensive consultation the service changed to the Independent Living Service. This created new roles of Independent Living Co-ordinators and also specialist roles of Lifeline Co-ordinator, Facilities Co-ordinator and Activities Co-ordinator. All tenants now have a specialised independence plan which ensures that they receive tailored support to meet their individual needs. The introduction of a new activities programme has been particularly successful, with positive feedback regularly received.

Leaseholder Service

In 2015 there was not a dedicated officer responsible for the Leaseholder Service. The last strategy identified that this was required to be able to deliver an efficient and effective service. Following appointment of a Leaseholder Officer an action plan was produced to improve the service, particularly in regards to communication and the service charge process. Information regarding leaseholders was previously kept outside of the housing management system, which created some problems. Information regarding leaseholders is now kept and recorded within the housing management system which has led to further improvement for the service.

Social and Affordable Housing Need Study

When the last strategy was written there was a lack of information regarding housing need in the borough. Waiting list data was used to predict demand, which does not provide a true picture of emerging need. To address this a social and affordable housing need study was commissioned in 2018. This provides essential information to base decisions around the type, size and location of affordable housing required. The information informs our Housing Delivery Plan, including the development of garage sites, and allows the department to provide robust information in response to planning application consultations.

Housing Management System

The last strategy identified that the housing management system used to monitor tenancies and record repairs was outdated. Starting in 2017 a project was undertaken to upgrade the system. The current system has more functionality which allows tenancies, including rent arrears, to be monitored much more easily. The system also has a reporting portal which provides information for performance monitoring and day-to-day management of essential work of the department, such as gas servicing. This project also introduced tablets and mobile working for a number of roles leading to efficiency savings and better service for our tenants.

Review of policies and procedures

In the last five years 16 new policies have been approved by Housing Committee ensuring that the work of the department is compliant with legislation and follows best practice. All procedures used by the department have been reviewed. This provides an essential framework for the housing service to be delivered.

How the Housing Strategy has been developed

A discussion paper was presented to Housing Committee in January outlining the key themes to be included in the strategy and the proposed format.

A meeting was held with the Resident Involvement Group to discuss the proposed themes. Ideas provided by the group have been incorporated into the strategy, including:

- The length of time it takes to relet some properties and the lack of demand for Independent Living is concerning
- The department should consider the decoration of properties before they are let or increasing the decoration allowance offered
- First impressions matter, the department should look at communal areas as well as the interior of properties
- The department should support tenants with downsizing and offer incentives for this to free up larger properties

An online consultation was completed, seeking comments from tenants, borough residents and employees. Responses provided have been incorporated into the strategy, including:

- 'Customer involvement with complaints through providing a 'critical friend' response to complaint handling would add a customer perspective into the way complaints are being handled.'
- 'A particular focus should be the environmental considerations.'
- 'Invest in council properties to ensure they are safe, comfortable and energy efficient.'
- 'Welfare reform is a priority.'

Housing Strategy Priorities

Building upon the consultation responses, current department priorities have been developed as actions under one of the three Corporate Plan priority headings.

The Housing Strategy covers a four year period and will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that the strategy continues to meet the Council's priorities.

The strategy will be supported by an annual action plan:

Build more houses, more quickly on under used or derelict land	
Strategy Action	To be achieved in Year 1 of the Strategy
Deliver the Housing Delivery Plan	Approval of phase 1 garage sites Development of Fishpond Cottage site
Continue to build dementia friendly accommodation	Handover of two dementia friendly bungalows at Willoughby Street

Build a provision of specialist accommodation	Handover of five flats for ex-services personnel at Oakfield Road
Consider energy efficient measures on all new build properties	Research into the experience of tenants who live in our properties with energy efficiency measures Air Source Heat Pumps at Willoughby Street
Implement actions in the Garage Strategy	Identify phase 2 garage sites suitable for housing development

Invest to ensure our homes are safe and more energy efficient

Strategy Action	To be achieved in Year 1 of the Strategy
Develop and deliver an Asset Management Strategy	Committee approval for a new Asset Management Strategy
Ensure fire safety is effectively managed and risks mitigated	Update Fire Risk Assessment procedures Review the work of the compliancy team
Ensure complaints are responded to in a timely manner	Work with the Resident Involvement Group to consider how tenants can be involved in reviewing the outcomes of complaints
Ensure our properties are let at a high standard	Review the Voids Policy and lettable standard, including level of decoration allowance
Implement actions in the Neighbourhood Strategy	Identify priority neighbourhoods Assess the condition of communal areas
Implement actions in the Engagement Strategy	Work with tenants to identify the areas in their communities that require improvements
Engage with the work of the Climate Change and Green Futures programme	Deliver actions identified in the Housing Improvement and Housing Delivery strands

Prevent homelessness and help people to be financially secure and independent

Strategy Action	To be achieved in Year 1 of the Strategy
Complete stock options review and implement approved recommendations	Reports presented to Housing Committee for phases 1, 2 and 3.
Increase the number of family homes available	Pilot incentives for tenants to move from larger Council properties no longer required to smaller properties
Increase number of temporary accommodation units	Identify suitable properties within the Housing Revenue Account and use for temporary accommodation
Reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation	Council owned temporary accommodation to be increased

Maintain strong partnerships with organisations offering advice and assistance	Continue work with Broxtowe Women's Project Set up a mediation service with Broxtowe Youth Homelessness
Provide support through the financial inclusion service	Support people through transition to Universal Credit Support people with fuel debts to address fuel poverty
Implement actions in the Engagement Strategy	Consider traineeships and apprenticeships in the housing department