

Better Homes for All 2019 - 2024

A Housing Strategy for Wolverhampton



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BETTER HOMES FOR ALL

2019-2024

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INTRODUCTION

Wolverhampton is a City of opportunity and the City of Wolverhampton Council is ambitious, thinks strategically and continually looks to improve how it delivers services to residents. The Council's Plan has a clear vision that by 2030;

Wolverhampton will be a place where people come from far and wide to work, shop, study and enjoy our vibrant City

Good quality housing plays a fundamental role in developing Wolverhampton's identity and economic function on the regional, UK and international stage. It is vital we continue to provide enough good quality homes, including new affordable homes, in our City. We understand the importance of providing greater housing choice and demand high-quality housing design and property management standards. This strategy confirms the importance of, and delivery plans to, accelerate housing development that will support inclusive economic growth, but it also focuses on people and our plans to support our residents and create better homes and communities. We are committed to enhancing the health and wellbeing of the people who live and work here.

This is a housing strategy that recognises our achievements, acknowledges our challenges but most importantly looks to the future. It is underpinned by leadership but works in partnership to deliver its objectives and encourages innovative approaches to some complex housing problems. We are flexible in how we tackle issues and we have greater financial flexibility now that the Housing Revenue Account caps have been lifted. We are a committed authority within the Black Country and West Midlands Combined Authority and our strategy clearly sets out how much we value and invest in these partnerships.

Our Vision for housing is to deliver '**Better Homes for All**' which underpins and supports the fourth strategic outcome of the Council's Plan 2019-2024. In doing so we will:

- **Deliver more and better homes** to meet the needs of our economy, communities and the growing number of households looking to work, study and settle in our City
- **Ensure safe and healthy homes** for all by tackling and challenging criminal landlords and setting excellent levels of housing management and

maintenance standards for all our housing management agents. We will make the best use of housing in the city; bringing empty properties back into use, improving the quality and thermal efficiency of homes and reducing fuel poverty across our City.

- **Provide access to secure homes** for those in vulnerable situations. We continue to tackle rough sleeping in partnership. We will work to prevent homelessness and provide support and advice to people who need sustainable accommodation options to meet their housing needs. We will work to provide housing options that enable choice, good health and wellbeing and promote independent living.

Our Recent Success Stories

Our ambitious plans are underpinned by a track record in innovation and partnership. Since our last strategy, we are proud of what we have achieved to create a better housing offer and service for people living in our City. We have:

- Built the first new council homes in over 30 years with a rolling programme of new build in place across a range of small and large sites throughout the City.
- Established WV Living, the Council's local housing company, which is already delivering homes across the City. From 2017 to 2023, 1072 new homes will be delivered through WV Living. This is set to increase the provision of new housing with an increased housing pipeline over the term of the strategy.
- Brought the Heath Town Regeneration scheme into delivery, demolishing disused commercial assets, and submitting new homes for planning approval.
- Secured funding for further estate redevelopment at New Park Village.
- Delivered and delivering a range of specialist/supported accommodation including ten wheelchair accessible homes, a fourteen-unit mental health scheme, and a seven-unit scheme for people with autism.
- Rolled out the Housing First pilot to provide entrenched rough sleepers with a route off the streets and into housing and support.
- With support from Public Health, established Rent with Confidence to drive up standards within the private rented sector and improve health outcomes for vulnerable residents.
- The Council and Bushbury Hill Estate Management Board, a tenant led management organisation, have signed a Partnership Agreement which provides additional funding, responsibilities and community new build.
- Strengthened our response and support to the private rented sector and tenants and established the Rent with Confidence property and landlord rating system.
- Adopted a range of strategies and policies to support a proactive and targeted enforcement approach. Improved the quality in the sector and continued to bring properties back into use through the empty homes agenda.

Our Current Working Environment

The policy environment that we operate in nationally, regionally and locally sets the context for this strategy. The strategy recognises:

- The need to deliver more housing and enable greater housing choice by delivering a range of tenure options.
- The new freedoms from government in lifting the housing revenue account borrowing cap, allowing councils to borrow to build new affordable homes and ensure that the housing we already have meets modern standards of decency.
- That we must make the best use of the social housing stock that we own; maintaining a fit for purpose allocations policy, retaining numbers through our replacement right to buy programme and adding to that stock where possible.
- The importance of strategically positioning the city to access government funding opportunities to develop more homes, as both a delivery and a change agent, and focusing the role of the public sector as a catalyst for driving forward better asset management.
- How clear we are of the importance of the role and purpose of social housing, giving residents a stronger voice and making us more accountable. The need for us to support the objectives of the social housing green paper; tackling stigma, promoting tenants' views and rebalancing the tenant – landlord relationship.
- The need to work in partnership to deliver the requirements of the homelessness reduction act.
- That we must understand the housing needs of our most vulnerable residents; promoting independence and providing services which will enable residents to remain in their own home for as long as they are able and want to. The need to work with social care and partners to assess and plan for a range of supported and accessible housing options, meet the needs of residents and offer choice.
- The changing debate and Government policy and standards on improved energy and water efficiency, improved building design and use of renewable and low carbon energy sources, all in order to reduce carbon emissions, adapt to climate change, reduce overheating and reduce fuel poverty

We know there are challenges to be addressed in our housing market. We must work to balance our communities, attracting and retaining younger people, as our older population is growing. We must address the challenges of a growing private rented sector in terms of management and quality standards. The City must pool its collective resources to support those residents experiencing financial pressures from the ongoing roll out of Welfare Reforms.

We face these challenges head on. We have a robust knowledge of our housing market; we monitor how it performs and we understand our demographic profile. We are well connected, can be flexible, have the right delivery partnerships and vehicles in place. We are set up and ready to respond over the lifetime of this strategy to achieve our vision of **'Better Homes for All'**.

The objectives of this strategy are based on an extensive evidence base or qualitative data analysis and interviews with partners, compiled independently on behalf of the Council.

1. MORE AND BETTER HOMES

1.1 Building High Quality Homes for Our Future

Ambitious plans for growth

Our plans to deliver more homes is aligned with our Economic Growth Strategy, that seeks to retain and attract economically active people to live and work in our City. Getting the right housing offer, which includes affordable housing and a growing city centre living offer, is essential to attracting and retaining a skills base that will encourage inward investment.

The adopted Black County Core Strategy set a target of around 63,000 additional homes (net) to be delivered over the period 2006-26 to accommodate its growing population. The target for Wolverhampton is 13,400 homes or 670 homes each year. Whilst we have enough land to build these homes on, many of our sites are affected by adverse ground conditions, infrastructure constraints and land assembly issues which need to be addressed to make them ready for development. This, coupled with the location of some sites in areas of low demand, adds to the complexity of developing new homes - costs can be higher, and, in many cases, the sales value of homes may not be high enough to make them attractive to developers.

We will tackle these issues directly, innovatively and in partnership with developers, seeking external funding to support the viability of key sites, where necessary.

WV Living is Proud to be Serving the City of Wolverhampton and its People

Established in 2016, WV Living is a private company wholly owned by the Council, which is developing new homes for rent and sale to meet the needs of local people.

WV Living is unique; it is an innovative model for delivering a greater number of homes in the City. It balances its profit margin with increasing the added social value we receive, through the creation of local jobs and apprenticeships, use of local suppliers and delivering a range of housing options to improve access to good quality homes.

Whilst it competes with developers, its relationship with the City means that it can borrow money from the Council, buy Council owned sites at market value, provide much needed capital receipts and deliver the type of homes that the City needs to deliver, and it can do so with a much lower profit margin.

It will deliver homes for affordable and market rent that will be managed by Wolverhampton Homes and the City's Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs); this delivery and management model maximises the income for the City allowing us to deliver a regenerative impact upon neighbourhoods which have suffered from the blight of derelict land areas.

WV Living has significant plans to grow and diversify its activities and will be delivering 250 homes per year by 2022.

The City as an Investor

We believe in the growth of our housing market and, alongside developers, registered providers and other investors, we will invest in the housing market. We will work at the forefront of best practice and create opportunities to maximise new housing delivery and the land available for new housing. We will make the best use of the assets in the City, creating the right infrastructure for growth, working with partners and accessing funding such as One Public Estate and Home England Strategic Partnership funding.

Key to this will be further work to develop a Housing Investment Fund. We will identify sources of funding that might be drawn together to enable us to provide loans and 'gap funding' to support specific sites to make them viable so that we are better placed to achieve the right mix of homes in the right place. We will undertake further research and consultation with developers and Registered Providers to develop a 'toolkit' of interventions and investment opportunities to increase the delivery of new homes.

Over 2019 - 2020 we will set out our plans to bring more 'challenging' sites through to delivery and our planning teams will be given the flexibility to use these tools to work with developers to bring sites forward for housing development.

Tools could include making loans to developers, making direct investment to buy affordable homes from developers, direct site acquisition, developing new partnership arrangements with the private sector and considering the potential to invest in financial products unique to Wolverhampton, to support local people to access homes to rent and buy.

Who Are We Building For?

Building the right type of home, at the right price, tenure and in locations where people want to live, is just as important as numbers, so we will improve the choice of homes for people to buy and rent to help create mixed and sustainable communities. We know from the Housing Strategy evidence base report that we need more larger homes for growing families and a higher quality offer to retain and attract higher income households to the City. Like many places, we also have a growing older population and we know we must ensure that we have homes that meet the needs and aspirations of people as they age.

We intend to undertake more detailed research to better understand and evidence the need for different types of housing and we will do that through a local housing needs assessment which will help us to deliver our planning policies by allowing us to determine the optimal mix of properties in terms of size, type, tenure and value on each site that we consider.

To help balance the housing market we have identified groups who we want to ensure have a choice of good quality homes in the City, at a price they can afford through rent and sale options. These are:

First time buyers and second stage movers who can't afford to purchase a home on the open market and cannot access affordable housing either. These households

underpin our economy and to support them we will develop more intermediate products for sale and rent with greater flexibility to move between the two tenures.

Households who want to rent especially among young professionals, who want to live close to work. We want to grow a professionally managed rented sector, partly as a response to the challenges of the cost of buying a home and to improve the economic flexibility for residents that renting brings. We want to increase the proportion of quality homes available in Wolverhampton for private rent including a new focus on the City Centre.

People who need affordable homes; we will work to boost the supply of affordable housing in the city, adding to the homes managed by Wolverhampton Homes and the Tenant Management Organisations through new build, private sector leasing, and buying existing properties where it makes strategic sense, ensuring that the City retains a diverse social housing sector. We will continue to secure 25% affordable housing (15% for rent and 10% affordable home ownership) on all sites of 15 homes or more, and 10% affordable home ownership on all major developments, where this is financially viable, in line with our Core Strategy and national policy. The type of affordable homes sought will be determined on a site by site basis, based on the best available information regarding housing need, site surroundings and viability considerations. The Council will make use of the new flexibilities in the Housing Revenue Account to build new affordable housing and we have made provision of £157.3 million up to 2023-2024 for the new build programme.

Homes for new communities who choose to make Wolverhampton their home. We recognise the importance of inward migration in growing our population and we positively welcome new households who bring their skills and knowledge to add value to our workforce. We are committed to ensuring that there are a range of housing choices to rent and buy and that support is available to assist new communities to settle in Wolverhampton.

Homes for people as they get older; by 2041, the number of people age 65 and over will grow by 11,779. The 75+ population is expected to grow by 27% by 2031. We believe that there should be a range of options to support older households make positive choices that work for them, bringing stability and independence for the long term. We will consult our older residents to find out what sort of accommodation they need and aspire to.

Housing for graduates. Wolverhampton values and encourages students to study in the City and we will work with the university to undertake research which identifies the push and pull factors of students remaining in Wolverhampton following completion of their studies. What we learn from that research will establish new policy in how the City can support graduates to remain living and working in the City.

¹ ONS, 2016-based household projections for local authorities and higher administrative areas in England, Table 414: Household projections by age and district, mid-2016 and mid-2041. © Crown copyright: Adapted data from ONS under the Open Government Licence v.3.0.

1.2 A Housing Offer for People that Underpins Economic Growth

Housing has a key role to play in boosting the City's economic wellbeing. Good quality housing is important to attract and retain skilled employees within the City, which in turn will attract businesses to move or set up and grow here. Housing investment can be a powerful driver of local economic activity; new construction and improvements to properties can support local businesses through the supply chain and create jobs for local people. Co-ordinating regeneration and economic development interventions maximises the potential for achieving a virtuous circle that can deliver greater economic inclusion.

Wolverhampton is a member of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), a strategic authority with powers over transport, economic development and regeneration and now includes housing, skills, and digital technology. Its priority is to accelerate an improvement in productivity and enable the West Midlands to become a net contributor to the UK exchequer - while improving the quality of life for everyone who lives and works in the area.

The City of Wolverhampton can play a strategic role as one of the top ten growing economies in the UK and is currently experiencing record levels of private and public investment, with £3.7 billion being injected into regeneration projects Citywide. New housing development will be concentrated in locations that support urban regeneration, minimise environmental impacts, reduce the need to travel, and are, or can be made, most accessible by public transport, cycling and walking. Where possible, brownfield land will be reused, and urban open spaces protected. Development will be managed to ensure it makes a positive contribution to the quality of places and the wellbeing of people delivering genuinely sustainable neighbourhoods with supporting facilities and services.

Strategic Growth Corridors

Priority corridors for new jobs and homes have been identified by the WMCA in their Spatial Investment and Delivery Plan (SIDP), reflecting the brownfield focussed regeneration strategy set out in our Core Strategy. These are strategic locations that will transform these areas, bringing new businesses and jobs and new housing developments. In many cases mixed use developments will enhance the retail and leisure offer and strengthen our strategic links across the City and the region. Two corridors have been identified by the WMCA for growth opportunities in Wolverhampton:

The **Wolverhampton Northern Growth Corridor** – covers Wolverhampton City Centre and north Wolverhampton up to South Staffordshire and the i54 major employment site and will also require joint working with South Staffordshire.

The **Wolverhampton - Walsall** corridor connects the two strategic centres of Wolverhampton and Walsall and covers the south-east quadrant of the City including the town centres of Bilston and Wednesfield.

A Vibrant and Revitalised City and City Centre

Wolverhampton is the only City in the Black Country. It is the focus for economic, social, cultural and community activity serving an extensive catchment area. By 2026

Wolverhampton will be transformed with a wide variety of quality shops and cultural attractions, 21st century offices, urban living and a City-scale public transport interchange.

The **City Centre's** small resident population will be transformed through the provision of over 2,000 new homes, supporting the growth of the City Centre. Raising aspirations by creating a different type of city centre living will help bring residents back into the City, creating high quality homes that support mixed and sustainable communities with sufficient affordable housing to meet local needs. Key strategic locations such as Springfield, Canalside South, the Royal and St George's will anchor the housing offer and, as a landowner, the City will be supporting developers through remediation works, site assembly and the provision of necessary infrastructure.

The Bilston Corridor; today, the Bilston Corridor is one of the key regeneration areas in Wolverhampton. The corridor acts as a "gateway"; linking Wolverhampton to the Black Country and Birmingham by rail, Metro, road and canal. By 2026, there will be major new residential areas on surplus industrial land clustered around Wolverhampton City Centre and Bilston Town Centre. New communities will be served by high quality transport networks, residential services and high-quality job opportunities. The positive impact of this regeneration will also benefit neighbouring communities, as housing renewal activity spreads to adjoining deprived communities.

The Stafford Road Corridor; by 2026, The Stafford Road Corridor will have fulfilled its potential to become one of the premier high-quality employment locations in the West Midlands, already having secured major employers into the City. i54, a flagship business park, will be supported by other high-quality employment locations. To ensure we can provide the homes needed to support this economic growth, new development sites will provide at least 450 new homes, together with 780 homes on existing housing commitment sites.

Creating Employment and Social Value through Growth in Construction

We are determined that any investment made in the City secures economic benefits and social added value for the residents living here. The value of investment which is occurring through construction in housing, commercial and transportation over the coming 10 years, is around £1.1 billion, and is estimated to generate 10,000 jobs across the City.

We will maximise the positive benefits for the City and its residents, building on the City of Wolverhampton initiative - 'Wolves@Work'. This will include working at the planning stage to maximise benefits for residents and supporting contractors to identify skills, jobs and supply chain analysis.

So far, the work has contributed to an increase in work experience opportunities, engagement with schools and young people and apprenticeships. Over the lifetime of this strategy we will set ambitious targets for job creation through the City's construction projects.

Supporting Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SME) through Our Investment

We will continue to ensure that local businesses understand their corporate social responsibilities. Close working with developers and construction-based businesses has created contract opportunities for SMEs across the City.

We will continue to support and work with local businesses who recognise our commitment to our social responsibility policies by supporting upskilling and recruitment in the supply chain, hosting 'meet the buyer' events, providing specialist business support and developing local packages for business to support the aspirations of young people in education.

Embracing Innovation in Design and Construction

As part of the WMCA priorities, we are looking at new approaches to house building, exploring ways to exploit its scale and potential to work with the house building industry. Proposals include supporting the capacity locally for off-site construction and supporting local small and medium-sized housebuilders for whom smaller sites will be more viable.

We are taking opportunities to explore new approaches to house-building to deliver homes that are safe by promoting fire safety measures in the design of new homes, are of a higher quality and/or delivered with greater speed and precision. Our first modular homes were delivered in 2018, and further opportunities to explore the off-site manufacture of housing are being explored.

Our housing developments already meet at least 10% of their energy requirements through on-site renewable energy generation – this typically means that at least half of the buildings on each development have roof-mounted solar photovoltaic panels. We also require most housing developments to provide electric vehicle charging points. With a focus upon delivering high performance homes that are energy efficient and highly affordable to heat, we are exploring the development of Passivhaus standard housing, which achieves optimum energy efficiency and produces close to zero carbon emissions. This will address fuel poverty and provide warm homes that are affordable to run and minimise carbon output.

Innovation and skills ambitions are supported by investment into the Springfield Campus in Wolverhampton and the creation of Europe's largest specialist construction and built environment campus. This will explore new avenues of technology, including batteries to store solar energy for household use, and other innovations to improve the delivery of housing and support our residents to live affordably.

2. ENSURE SAFE AND HEALTHY HOMES FOR ALL

We are committed to providing an excellent level of landlord service to tenants across our City. We work innovatively and in partnership with all landlords and managing agents, to ensure that the levels of service offered are outstanding in the stock that we own, is owned by our housing association partners and meet the Rent with Confidence standards in the private sector.

2.1 Management: Offering a Better Landlord Offer

Creating the Best Service Delivery Arrangements

Wolverhampton Homes has a successful track record of delivering housing management services across the City. An arm's length management organisation of the Council, it is one of our trusted partners, providing a range of services that extend beyond those to Council tenants. We will be reviewing our landlord services delivery model to ensure that the services delivered to our tenants are high quality, cost effective and add significant value to their lives. The Council will ensure that the model for delivery of housing management services to its 20,000+ homes continues to be of a high quality, fit for purpose and contributes to the wider strategic objectives.

The Council has four tenant management organisations (TMOs) who manage over 2,000 properties on our behalf with varying levels of management and repair responsibilities. The Council is supportive of tenant led housing management and the benefit this brings to communities, working closely with the TMOs to ensure all our tenants receive excellent housing management services, monitor service delivery. Offering all performing TMOs new and additional opportunities to enhance their local offer to tenants.

As the major landlord in Wolverhampton, we will strengthen our partnerships with Registered Providers operating in the City. We will work to ensure all tenants in the City receive an excellent service and we will create new opportunities for development, stock rationalisation, alternative and better use of stock and support for growth with Registered Providers who share our high standards ethos. We will explore whether partnership working across the sector, with our housing association partners, will also allow the sharing of resources and other efficiencies.

Private Sector Leasing

Our private sector leasing service is now in its tenth year. Managed by Wolverhampton Homes, properties are leased from landlords to enable us to extend the number of homes available for people in housing need. It supports professional management arrangements in the City and all properties that are accepted onto the private sector leasing programme score at least 3 stars on our Rent with Confidence scheme, thereby also supporting improvements in the quality of homes.

Wolverhampton Homes currently manage around 80-90 properties through the private sector leasing scheme and increasing the number of properties in management is a priority. They will target landlords and developers who own a portfolio of properties as well as taking on the management of WV Living's market rent properties.

Strengthening Partnerships with Private Landlords

The Rent with Confidence (RwC) star rating system came into effect in April 2016. It was and remains a pioneering system to support tenants to find good quality rented property with quality management services and hold landlords to account.

Rent with Confidence will drive up the quality of homes for example making sure homes are safe with all legal requirements being met, that rented properties reach minimum EPC standards, and that tenants are issued with Government approved tenancy agreements. More detail set out in the Private Homes Strategy.

It visibly shows that the City has zero tolerance on 'criminal landlords' and fully supports compliant landlords who share our values. Between 2016 and 2018, 1000 properties belonging to 500 landlords were star rated through Rent with Confidence.

We plan to build on the success of Rent with Confidence and we aim to grow the scheme by 100 landlords each year.

Rent with Confidence will also support us to underpin our homeless prevention commitments. We will ensure that any tenant who is served with a Section 21 notice, which brings their tenancy to an end, receives a visit from the Rent with Confidence team to try and identify the reason that the notice has been served. Research suggests that we can save £25k every time we prevent 10 cases of homelessness this way.

Involving Tenants to have a Greater Influence in Service Delivery

We are responding pro-actively to the 2018 Green Paper 'A New Deal for Social Housing'. We fully support its call for tenants and residents to have a greater voice with their landlords, which will form the foundation of the City's approach to gaining customer insight from all our residents, to respond to their needs and enhance our City's housing offer.

The City's housing management agents will have an important role to play working directly with tenants and residents to increase their engagement and involvement to scrutinise performance and help improve service delivery. It will be a priority to ensure numbers increase and the engaged tenant base becomes more representative.

2.2 Maintenance: Offering a Safer Landlord Offer

Safer Homes

The Social Housing Green Paper made a commitment to delivering homes that are safe and decent and the Council are committed to this being the case whether renting from a social or private landlord.

Wolverhampton Homes provide exemplar compliance services across all Council's homes and continually work to enhance this offer. There is a robust approach in place to monitor and manage the safety of tenants in their homes working in close partnership with the West Midlands Fire Service. Wolverhampton Homes publish the full fire risk assessment process and individual block assessments be accessed on the Wolverhampton Homes website. High rise housing blocks are checked daily by concierge staff and plans are in place for the retrofit of sprinklers across all Council owned high rise blocks.

As part of the City's Safer Homes programme, a multi-agency approach has been put in place to address any fire risk and safety issues identified in high rise homes that are not in the Council's ownership and our enforcement team will continue to challenge poor practice by residential landlords to protect our residents from unacceptable living conditions and overcrowding; prioritising the safety of all tenants in the city including fire safety, no matter what their tenure, will always be our focus.

Developing healthy homes through our Home Improvement Agency

The Wolverhampton Better Care Fund seeks to 'provide individuals and families in Wolverhampton with the services and knowledge to help them to live longer, healthier and more independent lives no matter where they live in the City.

The Plan recognises the role that housing plays in people's health and welfare, and the contribution that can be made by helping people to maintain and adapt their homes, in reducing hospital discharge times, preventing admission/re-admission (particularly from falls), and helping to reduce/delay expensive care packages.

The launch of a new Home Improvement Agency managed by Wolverhampton Homes will provide a tenure neutral service encompassing Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), Housing Assistance, Telecare and Affordable Warmth teams, providing customers with the most appropriate services for their needs to assist them to live healthier lives for longer. Wolverhampton Homes are tasked with radically increasing service take up and maximising the use of available grant.

Improving our Homes

As a landlord we are committed to providing high quality services and homes. Over the past five years we have invested £206.5m in our housing stock and have significant additional investment plans. This includes:

- Delivering approximately 30 new homes a year as part of the redevelopment of infill sites across the city.
- One of the key objectives is to keep the existing homes in a decent condition through the replacement of kitchens, bathrooms, heating etc. And where identified, the completion of structural repairs and £42.3 million has been set-aside to achieve this.
- We adapt homes to help people with disabilities to continue to live independently and £5.5m will be spent over the next five years on a variety of adaptations.
- There is a rolling programme of lift refurbishments to ensure that they continue to operate optimally and £4 million will be spent over the next five years.
- There is a rolling programme to install or upgrade security to blocks of flats through the installation of door entry and CCTV systems (£2.2 million over the next five years).
- We deliver work to improve the sustainability of estates and will be spending £12.45 million over the next five years enhancing the communal space in and around blocks of flats.
- Improving energy efficiency thereby reducing fuel poverty and tackling climate change by reducing carbon emissions.

- Improving water efficiency thereby adapting to the effects of climate change

Creating Healthy and Vibrant Neighbourhoods

The quality of the environment around homes is as important as the homes themselves. We work to create safe, healthy neighbourhoods with the right infrastructure, parking, transport, green spaces, leisure facilities and amenities, achieved through joint working for example across Highways, Planning, Transportation and Public Health. Good design is a priority for helping to build resilient communities; developing connected spaces that encourage social interaction, reduce isolation and build those connections that enable residents to support each other.

Our neighbourhood uplift area programme focuses on building resilient communities by seeking out new models of working with voluntary sector groups to 'uplift' areas using smaller but critical funding to get ideas and initiatives off the ground. Linking in to the latest 5G test bed programme, we will create opportunities for volunteering and local engagement.

We have embraced the Black Country Garden City programme to accelerate house building and develop attractive places where people want to live, while also transforming the reality and perception of the region. Sweet Briary for example, will see WV Living build a total of 34 properties for market sale and rent, with the development comfortably achieving the strict criteria set by the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) by offering residents beautifully designed homes which are energy efficient, close to public transport, schools, healthcare and green spaces.

Our three community Hubs keep the local community up to date with local information, providing events, volunteering opportunities, job prospects, education and more. The hubs offer a wide range of events, classes, and activities for residents as well as support and advice. Low Hill has now achieved the status as a healthy living hub which formally trains community members to enable a social prescribing role; a system where healthcare professionals are able to refer people to local, non-clinical services to meet their wellbeing needs. With formal links to GPs, and pharmacies, the Hub is actively promoting and supporting residents to create and live in healthy neighbourhoods

Supporting Tenants into Work

We support all residents into work through our Wolves@work programme. There is also a specific programme to assist council tenants into training and employment, with Wolverhampton Homes employing three employment coaches to support young people, adults and people who are coming from homeless backgrounds and are new council tenants.

Through the Wolverhampton Homes Employability Team, we have supported over 60 residents into employment. We aim to support 500 residents into employment over the lifetime of this strategy.

Where the City invests in its housing stock it seeks to maximise the social value achieved; for example, the apprenticeship opportunities provided by the City's Strategic Construction Partners and the training programme provided by Wolverhampton Homes teaching local people building skills. The aim of these programmes is to up-skill residents to access employment opportunities.

Improving Existing Homes and Raising Quality Standards

Good quality housing is the cornerstone to what makes a place good to live in and economically competitive; it keeps and makes people feel safe. Well-targeted spending on existing housing can provide significant value for money. It can reduce the cost of health services, increase tenancy success, reduce carbon emissions and improve fuel poverty.

While the quality of both rented and owner-occupied homes is improving, standards remain below the national average and we are committed to focusing our resources on making improvements.

Development of the private rented and home ownership sectors in the City are a priority area for improvement. Our plans are set out in more detail in the Private Homes Strategy 2019-23 and the Empty Homes Strategy 2019-23.

An Improved Private Rented Sector

Evidence tells us that the private rented sector is growing in Wolverhampton; and whilst we are encouraging growth of a higher quality offer in the City, Wolverhampton is also home to a range of existing, older privately rented properties which are often of very poor condition and are held in small portfolios, often by single property landlords.

A stock condition survey of Wolverhampton carried out by the Building Research Establishment in 2016 reported that approximately 5,018 category 1 hazards exist within our private rented sector. The estimated total cost of mitigating these hazards is £9.3 million.

We have made inroads; with the establishment of our Rent with Confidence Scheme, the introduction of an Enforcement Policy and the adoption of a proactive service led by Environmental Health Officers.

Selective Licensing

We have previously introduced selective licensing in the All Saints area of the City. We believe that Selective licensing can be a very positive mechanism for driving up standards of management where concentrations of private landlords are failing to do so. The case for selective licensing will be supported where robust evidence demonstrates it will help to manage and drive up standards in these areas. [Houses in Multiple Occupation \(HMO\)](#)

We will manage the growth of HMOs in the City by implementing Mandatory, Additional and Selective Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation as required, to ensure occupants in HMOs live in safe housing with good quality environments. An Article 4 Direction is now in place which removes permitted development rights to convert houses into small HMOs, allowing more control over the quality of small HMOs.

To support this, we will closely monitor any growth in the number of HMOs by working closely with planners and develop best management practice through our cross organisational working group.

Supporting Owners

A high number of vulnerable households live in privately-owned homes, which means that although home owners are responsible for the maintenance of their homes, the need for support, signposting and advice is significant.

We will undertake research to better understand the condition of private housing across the City, where the biggest problems are and the nature of the problems. We will use the information we gain to take an increasingly targeted approach to how we invest to tackle poor conditions in existing private housing.

We still maintain an active private sector assistance policy and offer grants and loans to households who meet our qualifying criteria. Our Home Improvement Agency will be responsible for ensuring the maximum take up of loans and grants and that the improvements made, are focused on improving homes to create better health outcomes for people.

Bringing Empty Homes Back into Use

Empty homes are a wasted resource and when empty for long periods can deteriorate, attract anti-social behaviour and have an overall negative impact on a street; devaluing nearby properties and being the cause of nuisance to neighbours. Wherever possible the City works cooperatively with owners but will employ the full range of legal actions available including compulsory purchase orders to ensure empty properties are brought back into use for rent or sale, to be lived in as homes.

Wolverhampton has an excellent track record of responding to the challenges associated with long term and problematic empty homes. Since 2010, the City has acted to bring over 1,650 empty homes back into use and the City's Empty Homes Strategy 2019-2024 will set out the range of mechanisms to be deployed by the Council to do more to address empty homes for example over the next 5 year we will introduce both grants and loans to home owners to support them in bringing empty homes back into use.

Delivering Affordable Warmth

The City recognises the importance of tackling fuel poverty and is currently developing a new strategy focusing on improving the health and wellbeing of vulnerable members of the community, reducing excess winter deaths and as a means of reducing carbon emissions. Tackling affordable warmth will be a priority of the Home Improvement agency.

Over the next five years we will be exploring using external funding to improve and support our existing schemes aimed at providing affordable warmth. This will include introducing Energy Company Obligation (ECO) government energy efficiency scheme which helps reduce carbon emissions and tackle fuel poverty. This will provide support to both owners, private tenants or those with a social housing tenancy to improve heating in their home.

We continue to work hard to maximize the number of households that qualify for these schemes to improve the health and well-being of those most in need. We have also identified places in the City that exhibit deprivation, and we will be targeting funding to reduce the effects of fuel poverty in these areas.

Delivering Energy Efficiency and Climate Change Priorities

We are committed to improved energy and water efficiency, improved building design and use of renewable and low carbon energy sources, all in order to reduce carbon emissions, adapt to climate change, reduce overheating and reduce fuel poverty.

The Council publishes its energy conservation measures in the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 (HECA) report, this sets out the measures that the authority considers practicable, cost-effective and likely to result in significant improvement in the energy efficiency of residential accommodation in its area.

Further improvements in this area will be driven by the development of a new fuel poverty strategy – an Affordable Warmth Plan for the City. The City Council will lead on this, in consultation with partners including Wolverhampton Homes, Public Health and community groups.”

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3. ACCESS TO A SECURE HOME

3.1 Improve People's Health and Lives by Delivering Better Housing and Support

Good quality, suitable housing is central to our health and well-being and our ability to positively contribute and take part in all aspects of community life. Our vision for people with social care needs as with the whole population as a whole, is that they have access to a range of housing able to meet their needs and enable choice, allowing them to remain as independent as possible, for as long as possible.

Recent policy both locally and nationally has seen a deliberate move away from traditional residential care and hospital care towards people living independently in their own homes, with their own front door.

Our priorities are to:

- Maintain up-to-date assessments of the housing and support needs of people with social care needs to better inform commissioning and development decisions. This will help ensure that there is a range of housing available and crisis/safe place housing on a temporary basis.
- Continue the development of a full range of housing options in the City that enable choice and good health and well-being, including level access/adapted properties.
- Ensure residents with social care needs can access, secure and adapt housing across all tenures, with the Council ensuring their policies as landlord to most of the social housing in the City recognises and gives priority to those with social care needs.

Support for Older People

Wolverhampton has a growing older population. Many households want to remain living in their own home and that should be their choice.

We understand the need for suitable accommodation for older people and the likely demand for support given the growth projections. Our Council plan 2019-2024 supports residents to remain in their homes as it brings the best outcomes for our people and communities. Where this is not the case or where older households require more intensive support, we will consult our older residents to find out what sort of accommodation they would find attractive and where. We are a dementia friendly city, nationally recognised as such, working to improve the lives of people with dementia, as well as their carers.

Working with partners we will develop services with frailty in mind reducing accidents and hospital admissions and that people remain connected and not socially isolated, supporting people to age well and remain living independently for longer. This will be done by ensuring homes are free from hazards, receive necessary adaptations in a timely manner and that we are tackling isolation in the development of services and new housing for example by planning, designing and developing high quality places that promote physical activity, foster social connections and inspire healthy eating.

We will develop a range of options which will ensure that there are choices for older households to access high quality accommodation as they age with quality support services.

We will be undertaking further research in investment to:

- Ensure that the supply of extra care accommodation meets the demand.
- Research the potential of introducing a right sizing scheme.
- Develop scheme development standards for creating homes that older people will find popular.
- Consider what support could be made available to older households in lower value locations who face a financial gap to make the move to a more suitable home.
- Identify new models for older households such as co-housing, where older people choose to live 'independently together'.
- Prioritise adaptation, potentially funded through loans, enabling people to stay living in their current home for longer.

Supporting People with Disabilities

We expect the number of people with disabilities and long-term conditions, for example, Dementia and autism, to grow and people are likely to live for longer with these health conditions. We support the work of social care in supporting those residents with a physical disability, learning disability or mental health condition to retain their independence and will work with partners to develop advice services, support services and housing options that meet a broad spectrum of need.

Services are being streamlined to improve access to the range of support available to assist people in retaining their independence through the Home Improvement Agency, which will improve access and speed up the delivery of a range of services including disabled facilities grants. We will also review the Council's housing Allocations Policy improving access and making the best use of adapted homes. We will work with the Autism Partnership Board and Experts by Experience Panel to ensure managing agents make reasonable adjustments to support residents to access advice, housing and support and ensuring that housing can be adapted to help meet their needs.

The Council is committed to maximising the opportunities provided through advancements in technology, building on the use of Telecare to embrace the City as a 5G pilot area, exploring Smart City opportunities, using artificial intelligence to improve the services we offer the work Social Care are doing to understand how smart home technology, telecare and the internet of things can make a real difference to people's lives and support them to manage their health care.

The Council will support the development of specialist housing in the City where there is a need, having already led on the development of an autism housing scheme in the Springfield area of the city and a mental health housing scheme in Low Hill.

Supporting Children in Care and Care Leavers

As corporate parent the Council has a responsibility to children in care and care leavers to ensure the Council and its partners work to provide them with the best possible support and care, enabling them to feel in control of their lives and are able to overcome the barriers they face. The City will work in partnership to support and develop services that ensure children and young people are safe, and have stability in their home lives, for example the Council's housing Allocations Policy will prioritise the housing needs of children in care and care leavers. The Council has an internal housing support service that provides high level housing related support to young people who are leaving care or are on the edge of care, which responds to the complex needs of vulnerable young people enabling them to move on to independent living through the Wolverhampton Young Person's Accommodation Forum. The Council is delivering the House Project, which will expand the range of offer available to our young people in care and care leavers who will work together to refurbish properties that become their homes, developing a long-term community of support.

Working in Partnership to Prevent Homelessness

Changes resulting from the economic downturn, and in particular welfare reform, are impacting detrimentally on many low-income groups and those susceptible to homelessness. Since our last housing strategy, we have seen dramatic changes to the environment in which homelessness services are delivered requiring much earlier intervention and tailored advisory services from the City. This is at a time when funding cuts are 'biting' and as a result, our current approach is delivered in a context of shrinking resources and increasing demand for services.

We are a partner with other West Midlands authorities to tackle homelessness. The priorities of our work focus on finding long-term affordable housing solutions for people and increase employment opportunities for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

In Wolverhampton, our homelessness service is provided on our behalf by Wolverhampton Homes, who are focusing on why people are becoming homeless in the first place, so that we can increase the resilience of households and communities, equip them with the necessary skills to prevent crises, such as homelessness, before they occur.

We will extend the use of private sector leasing to bring additional housing options to those using the homelessness services and refer a specialist Health Visitor for all households placed in temporary accommodation where children under 5 are present and where an intentionally homeless decision has been made.

Whilst we are working on measures to prevent homelessness, the need to provide temporary accommodation continues to be an expensive one for the City and we are acting to reduce this cost and increase the availability Council owned temporary accommodation where it is required.

Supporting Rough Sleepers

The problem of rough sleeping is by no means unique to Wolverhampton and tackling rough sleeping is a corporate priority requiring a holistic and cross-cutting approach. The City has established a multi-stakeholder task team and is working with the West

Midlands Combined Authority to tackle rough sleeping as part of a coordinated regional response.

We are part of the Housing First pilot, which offers a unique opportunity to tackle rough sleeping by moving people on the streets into a permanent home with the support to help them keep it.

The City has a plan on reducing rough sleeping to as close to zero by 2022 and we are developing a multi-agency approach that will develop a No First Night Out Model, provide accommodation to react quickly to those who are 'rough sleeping' and need a safe place to sleep that evening and work to find former rough sleepers employment. This will be coordinated through our City-wide rough sleeper plan.

Supporting People Experiencing Domestic Abuse

Significant steps have been taken to strengthen our response to domestic abuse and housing has played an important role. Victims of domestic abuse will be supported to remain in their homes if they wish to do so for example, the Safe Homes Scheme supports people to feel secure in their own home following incidents of domestic abuse. The scheme consists of multi-agency support, with the priority being on making the property secure within 24 hours. The priority is to enable people to feel safe and remain living in their homes.

Where households are in danger of being made homeless due to domestic abuse, the City will provide intense support including rent bonds, cash deposits, paying rent in advance and help towards fees for moving and the City is planning closer working with landlords to encourage landlords to take in domestic violence victims.

Supporting New Communities

Wolverhampton is a diverse City and provides a welcoming place to live for all. We are a recipient City of those seeking asylum. Before households are given leave to remain, we believe that we should still have a duty of care and we have worked hard to provide a range of services and support. We have successfully gained and utilised MiFriendly City funding to provide initiatives to integrate new households into our communities.

We will continue our work with the Refugee and Migrant Centre providing specialist support and tenancy training and look to grow the number of properties we can make available for use by Children's Social Care for No Recourse to Public Funds families and therefore limit any placement in Bed & Breakfast accommodation.

Armed Forces Personnel

As part of the City's Armed Forces covenant, we are committed to ensuring the armed forces community and their families get help and support when needed. Through our Allocations Policy and Wolverhampton Homes' Housing Options team we actively provide support and assistance to ex service personnel presenting as requiring housing, homeless or at risk of being homeless. We can offer emergency accommodation, rent guarantee bonds and are working to engage with private landlords who will be keen in taking veterans without bonds

Site and Pitch Provision for Gypsy and Travellers

The Gypsy and Traveller accommodation requirements for Wolverhampton are small. There are currently 46 pitches available for Gypsies and Travellers in the City. We have a target to provide 10 additional pitches by 2036 and there is a site allocated to meet this need.

Reducing Reoffending

As part of our community safety partnership, the City is proud to be a partner in delivering the Black Country Reoffending Strategy. We work with our partners across statutory, business sector, and the voluntary and community sector, to unblock barriers and to reduce reoffending, which by consequence, will reduce the associated harm to victims, the economy and contribute to the ambitious regeneration of the Black Country.

Housing has a significant role to play. Central to reduce reoffending are the issues of vulnerability and risk. Being homeless, significantly increases the propensity for offenders to re-offend. Stable accommodation can reduce the likelihood of re-offending by more than a fifth and it provides the building blocks for individuals to gain employment and access support services.

We will be developing targeted pre-release support for offenders to access appropriate housing and sustain tenancies in partnership with Wolverhampton Homes, the National Probation Service and Community Rehabilitation Company.

ACTION PLAN AND MONITORING

This strategy will be supported by a **Delivery Plan** which will identify the areas of work and specific tasks needed to deliver the Council Plan's priorities for housing.

The delivery of this strategy will be monitored by the Better Homes Board, a group led by the City Housing Section. The Board has responsibility for ensuring the objectives and priorities for City Housing, as identified in the City's Housing Strategy – Better Homes for All, are delivered through effective partnership working and operational delivery.

Wider strategic links will be made to related strategies, for example the Private Homes Strategy and the Empty Homes Strategy, as well as strengthening links to partners, stakeholders and residents.

Key Performance Indicators for Housing are identified in the Council Plan:

More and Better Homes

1. Net additional homes
2. Net additional affordable homes
3. Net number of empty properties across the city

Safe and Healthy Homes

4. Number of approved Rent with Confidence' private landlords in our City
5. No. of households helped through AWG/ECO schemes

Access to a Secure Home

6. Households in priority need per 1,000 households
7. Number of households in temporary accommodation
8. Average number of people rough sleeping in our City

These KPIs will be built upon and a clear vision for *what success will look like* will form part of the Delivery Plan.

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