

Briefing Note

Title: **Better Homes For All; Housing Strategy 2019 – 2024**

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Job Title: **Service Lead Housing Strategy**

Intended
Audience:

Internal

Partner organisation

Public

Confidential

Purpose

To continue to develop the city's housing market offer for current and future residents, a cross tenure Housing Strategy is being developed to ensure there is housing and housing services that meet needs and underpins Wolverhampton as a city to live, work and invest.

Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel is invited to comment on the emerging issues and priorities that form the basis of a draft Housing Strategy for consultation, as set out in this report.

Overview

This report sets out the context in which a new City Housing Strategy is being developed as well as summarising the key priorities identified as part of the evidence review and approach the City will take to address any challenges identified.

Background and context

The city's existing Housing Strategy, approved by Cabinet in 2013 achieved a number of successes in 'Improving the City Housing Offer', under the Council's Corporate Plan. Aligned to a new Council Plan, the new Housing Strategy will provide 'Better Homes for All' by driving forward housing growth, investment and improvement. This will ensure there continues to be a supply of housing and housing services to meet the needs and aspirations of the city's current and future residents and support the City in meeting its vision for 2030.

Better Homes for All

Work is underway to develop the Housing Strategy, which is underpinned by a repository of evidence and will be subject to extensive consultation internal and external to the Council. The proposed vision for the Housing Strategy is 'Better Homes for All'; one of the six priorities for the City identified within the draft Council Plan. This reflects the City's aims to deliver 'more and better homes', 'safer and healthier homes' and 'access to a secure home', that will frame the Housing Strategy's objectives. The table below sets out the key themes within each of these sections of the Housing Strategy:

| City Housing Strategy 2019 - 2024 | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Vision | Better homes for all |

| Priorities | More and better homes | Safer and healthier homes | Access to a secure home |
|------------|---|---|--|
| Key themes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building high quality homes for our future • A housing offer for people that underpins economic growth | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating vibrant neighbourhoods of choice • Improving existing homes and raising standards | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving people's health and lives by delivering better housing and support |

More and better homes

This priority focuses on the City's drive to increase the pace and quantum of new homes delivered in the city to meet the needs of our communities and the growing number of households looking to work, study and settle here.

Underpinned at a national level there is a clear focus to boost the rate of new house building and improve access to home ownership with a national target of 300,000 new homes per year by the mid-2020s. This is being supported in a number of ways including the removal of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) borrowing cap, allowing councils to borrow against their HRA in order to build new affordable homes.

Regionally the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) housing deal to help unlock the 200,000 new homes needed in the region by 2031, will help accommodate the growth needed to support the WMCA Strategic Economic Plan. This has provided great opportunity for the City to access resources and support for growth to be delivered across the Walsall to Wolverhampton Corridor.

Local drivers include the need to accommodate a growing population, which has an ageing profile, with significant increases to the older population, that will need to be balanced by attracting and retaining younger people.

Ambitions to further grow the local economy will need to be supported by a wide-ranging, cross tenure housing offer, through the provision of affordable housing, good quality private rented accommodation as well as homes to attract higher income households. To achieve this, work will be done to improve the financial viability of sites to ensure land that needs significant remediation can be brought forward for development. As well as providing homes, development also has a role in improving economic inclusion through the use of local suppliers and creation and provision of jobs and training opportunities.

The Housing Strategy will commit the City to:

- Deliver more homes across the City through WV Living as well as by creating the right infrastructure for investment by private developers and housing associations;
- Access funding where available, including through the WMCA to improve conditions in the city that help accelerate housing growth;
- Enhance the housing offer to meet a range of needs in terms of type and tenure of housing;
- Build on the current evidence base of housing need to ensure we build the right homes in the right places;

- Maximise economic opportunities through housing development including local jobs and apprenticeships, use of local suppliers and investing in skills to maximise the social value on investment;
- The ongoing regeneration of the City contributing to an improved infrastructure by making use of innovative methods and materials, that will continue to attract investment and economic opportunity;
- Maximising the opportunities provided by the City's strategic growth corridors and the transformational role they play in boosting homes, the economy and solidifying our position in the region as one of the top ten growing economies in the UK;
- Developing a vibrant residential offer to a revitalised City Centre that will create mixed and sustainable communities across a range of tenures and types of housing.

Safer and healthier homes

This priority is concerned with achieving high quality management and maintenance of housing, particularly for those renting in the City, whether that be a from a private or social landlord.

Nationally the Social Housing Green Paper, 'A new deal for social housing', emphasised the need to ensure homes meet modern standards of condition, safety and thermal efficiency and that these standards were the same no matter the tenure as well as a commitment to strengthening the tenant voice.

The Council takes very seriously the safety and wellbeing of the growing number of people who rent a home in the City; whether that be one of the 22,000 properties owned by the Council and managed by Wolverhampton Homes or one of our four tenant management organisations (TMO), additional social homes rented from a housing association or those renting in the growing private rented sector.

The City is committed to a programme of regeneration to ensure communities across the city live in quality neighbourhoods. Large scale stock investment and remodelling of a small number of estates, including the completion of works at Heath Town will be complimented with a programme of neighbourhood uplift working with communities to improve the quality of local environments.

Condition in the private rented sector continues to be a challenge at the lower end of the market. There remain challenges with the incidence of category one hazards, concentrations of poor quality/managed housing and a growing number of houses in multiple occupation (HMO).

The Housing Strategy will commit the City to:

- Improving conditions within the private rented sector through a programme of support, licensing and enforcement, with Rent with Confidence playing a key role in the approach to drive up standards;
- Reviewing the offer of all the City's managing agents to ensure financial efficiencies are achieved, whilst continuing to provide a high quality service to tenants and leaseholders;

- A programme of work to ensure the ongoing safety of the City's high rise stock under Council and private ownership;
- Strengthening the tenants voice through the Council and it's housing management agents;
- Supporting people to live independently and improve their health outcomes for example through the launch of a new cross tenure Home Improvement Agency and offering grants and loans to vulnerable owner occupiers;
- Increasing affordable housing in the city through the purchase of market housing particularly where this supports the maintenance and management of neighbourhoods;
- Improving affordable warmth and the energy efficiency of homes;
- Maximising the use of the City's housing stock with a targeted programme to bring empty properties back into use.

Access to a secure home

This priority focuses on the City's commitment to those residents that need additional support in accessing and sustaining secure accommodation.

Policy both locally and nationally has seen a move away from traditional residential care and hospital care towards people living in their own homes, with their own front door. The City supports residents maintaining their independence within their homes, wherever possible.

Nationally the Homelessness Reduction Act introduced in 2018, increases council's responsibilities to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage than before, whilst Welfare Reforms continue to present challenges for residents and landlords.

Regionally the WMCA is committed to tackling rough sleeping through its Housing First pilot, which has been rolled out in Wolverhampton as a priority for the City. The WMCA is also committed to NHS England's Healthy New Town programme as a focus for growth brought forward through the Walsall to Wolverhampton corridor but contains principles around creating places that better support people through all stages of life and enable them to live healthier lives that can be applied to development and regeneration across the City.

Local drivers include an ageing population with growth in the over 65 age group outstripping others, who need the right housing and housing services that enable them to remain independent for as long as possible but appropriate accommodation available when it is required. This not only applies to older people but those residents with additional support needs.

Changes resulting from the economic downturn, compounded by Welfare Reforms, are having an impact on many low-income groups in the City and those susceptible to homelessness.

The Housing Strategy will commit the City to:

- Continue the development of a full range of housing options in the City that enable choice and good health and well-being;

- Better understanding the housing and support needs of people with social care needs to better inform commissioning and development decisions and ensure that there is a range of housing available as well as crisis housing on a temporary basis;
- Ensure all suitable standard housing in the City, whether private or social landlords, for sale or for rent, can be readily accessed and secured by those who have social care needs;
- Develop a range of options which will ensure that there are choices for older households to access high quality accommodation with quality support services as well as other services that can support them to remain in their own homes;
- Work on measures across partners at a regional and local level to prevent homelessness;
- Provide value, quality temporary accommodation for those that need it;
- Support projects that honours the City's commitment to reduce rough sleeping to as close to zero by 2022;
- Contribute to the City's delivery of the Black Country Reoffending Strategy by developing the support for offenders to access appropriate housing and sustain tenancies;
- Support those at risk of being made homeless due to domestic abuse by providing a package of intense support to secure their housing options;
- Continue to support other cohorts of the community to provide appropriate advice, information and housing options within the City.

Next steps

Consultation will be undertaken with stakeholders including a period of public consultation throughout the development of the Housing Strategy to ensure a range of views are sought, assumptions/priorities are tested and alignment with the wider ambitions of the City are achieved. An equalities analysis will be completed as part of this process.

The report and strategy is to be submitted for adoption by Cabinet in alignment with an approved Council Plan. The final strategy will be subject to further consideration by the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel and Equalities Advisory Group.