

# Briefing Note

CITY OF  
WOLVERHAMPTON  
COUNCIL

**Title: Private Homes Strategy 2019 – 2024**

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**Job Title: Service Manager Private Homes Services**

**Intended Audience:**

Internal

Partner organisation

Public

Confidential

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## Purpose

A cross tenure City Housing Strategy is currently out for consultation and sets out how the City intends to deliver on the Council Plan's fourth strategic priority, Better Homes for All. With 70 percent of properties in Wolverhampton being in private sector ownership, a Private Homes Strategy has been drafted, developing on the key priorities within the City Housing Strategy, to ensure the City has clear strategies for managing the growth, quality and management of private sector housing in providing safe and secure homes for it's residents.

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

## Overview

This report sets out the context in which a new Private Homes Strategy is being developed as well as summarising the evidence by which it has been informed and resulting key priorities for the sector.

## Background and context

As the fasted growing tenure, doubling between the 2001 and 2011 Census' the private rented sector plays an increasingly important role in the city's housing offer, offering accommodation to people in a wide range of circumstances.

The PRS is now providing a crucial housing option to those in housing need; the depletion of social housing; the Homelessness Reduction Act introduced in 2018, increasing council responsibilities to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage than before; and a greater emphasis on discharging homelessness duties into the private sector. Furthermore, Welfare Reforms continue to present challenges for residents and landlords.

The shared room rate, which limits the amount of housing costs those under the age of 35 are entitled to, to a room in a shared house, has led to a rapid growth of houses in multiple occupation (HMO). Whilst providing a valuable housing solution, this tenure provides additional risk, with multiple households in a confined space and the opportunity for some unscrupulous landlords to exploit vulnerable tenants, as recognised by the Government's

mandatory licensing regime. The City will further bolster this regulation by incentivising the work of our many good landlords, educating, engaging and supporting new and struggling landlords and using our most robust enforcement powers against criminal landlords in the City.

The Council Plan and City Housing Strategy has identified three priorities for the delivery of housing and housing services within the City; safer and healthier homes, access to a secure home and more and better homes. The Private Homes Strategy sets out the specific contribution of private homes in delivering these priorities:

### **Safer and healthier homes**

This priority is concerned with achieving high quality management and maintenance of housing, particularly for those renting in the City. Conditions in the private rented sector continue 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 Private Homes 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;
- A programme of work to ensure the ongoing safety of the City's high rise stock under Council and private ownership;
- 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;
- Improving affordable warmth and the energy efficiency of homes;
- Enhancing the cross tenure service offered to vulnerable residents to improve their homes, to meet their needs, enabling them to remain living independently for longer and improving their health outcomes;
- 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, which increasingly applies to residents in a growing private rented sector, as well as those that owner occupy. The Private Homes Strategy sets out the contribution of private homes in meeting this priority:

- Strengthening the partnership between Rent with Confidence and Housing Options in providing greater choice and availability of quality homes for those in housing need;
- Working with private sector tenants and landlords to help sustain tenancies and preventing homelessness;

- Driving up standards within the private rented sector to support the discharge of homeless duty into safe and secure accommodation;
- Increasing the availability of quality homes to help prevent and reduce homelessness for example by bringing empty properties back into use, growing the private sector leasing scheme;
- Expanding the range of properties and landlords accredited through Rent with Confidence to include adapted and adaptable properties.

### **More and better homes**

This priority focuses on the City's drive to increase the speed and quantity 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, a significant proportion of which will be for market sale and rent. This will help to attract and retain residents who will contribute to the economic growth of the City, through the provision of quality homes, affordable homes and a high quality, well managed private rented sector that provides the flexibility of accommodation for those moving to the city to study, work and settle here.

- Stimulating the market and increasing the delivery of quality homes in the City for purchase and market rent through WV Living;
- Through grant funding, investment and working with the private sector creating the right environment for private investment in new build housing in the City;
- Contributing to a revitalised city centre by supporting commercial to private residential conversions for rent and new build accommodation.

### **Next steps**

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

The final strategy will be subject to further consideration by the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel and Equalities Advisory Group prior to being submitted to Cabinet for adoption.