

COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

27 November 2019

Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-2023 - Year 1 Progress Update

Director/Head of Service:	Tricia Marshall (Deputy Chief Executive)
Decision Issues:	No decision required
Classification:	This report is open to the public.
CCC Ward(s):	ALL
Summary:	This is a Year 1 (Dec. 2018 - November 2019) position update on progress with the strategy action plan.
To Consider:	That the report is noted
Next stage in process:	For the officer Housing Working Group to review any feedback on the report from the Community Committee.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1. Introduction

Adopted by the Council in November 2018, its Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2018-2023) is an overarching strategy that sets out how it will respond to local housing needs in all tenures, make better use of the existing housing stock and address the housing needs of vulnerable people. It aligns with other key corporate documents such as the adopted Local Plan (2017) and current Corporate Plan 2016-2020 as well as being informed by the Canterbury Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2018) evidence base. In order to better understand how the council should tackle current housing and homelessness challenges various consultation exercises were carried out in 2018 to help shape the development of the strategy. Sitting alongside the strategy is an accompanying action plan comprising a broad range of different areas of housing related work. This committee report provides an end of first year progress update on local housing related action plan activity. The report also provides a brief overview of how the national and countywide housing policy landscape has changed through the year.

2. Detail

2.1 Overview of UK Housing Policy Landscape

The first year of the council's housing strategy period has witnessed a series of key UK policy changes taking place which have further altered the wider housing landscape in which it operates. The table below summarises some of the key policy announcements and the council's reaction and/or response to them.

Table 1: Key UK Housing Policy Announcements (within Year 1 of Housing Strategy)

Timing	Policy Announcement	CCC Response/Reaction
Nov 2018	<p>Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Borrowing Cap - the Government set out plans to remove the cap to help local authorities facilitate new council house-building. The cap had limited the amount councils can borrow for housing projects. This means that for councils there are now no restrictions on HRA borrowing, other than their ability to repay loans and the normal requirements for prudential borrowing.</p>	<p>The present focus is to restore the financial health of the HRA, to enable existing council homes to be maintained to a good standard and more to be developed. This is explained in detail in the HRA Business Plan 2019.</p>
Feb 2019	<p>National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) - a revised NPPF made a series of changes (e.g. introduced planning definition for Local Housing Need and Housing Delivery Test to monitor build out rates of sites with planning permission in each local planning authority to ensure the supply of housing is maintained. The HDT results were published alongside the NPPF. This reflects the push from Government to increase housing delivery in the UK and introduce new mechanisms in an attempt to enforce this.</p>	<p>Officers considered the key revisions. District passed housing delivery test in Feb. 2019. An accompanying action plan was also produced however to ensure good practice in housing delivery.</p>
March 2019	<p>Homes (Fit for Human Habitation) Act (2018) - Parliament passed the act, which saw the reintroduction of standards (i.e. the Act redefines 'Fitness' to include Category 1 hazards) for rented homes that affect landlords who keep properties in a poor condition.</p>	<p>The Act empowers tenants living in unfit properties to take action against their landlord and apply for Rent Repayment Orders. The council may in future be asked to provide supporting information for cases if we have had any prior involvement.</p>
April 2019	<p>A new deal for renting: resetting the balance of rights and responsibilities between landlords and tenants - in April the Government set out its plans to put an end to Section 21 'no-fault evictions' by repealing section 21 of the Housing Act 1988. Under the new framework, a tenant cannot be evicted from their home without good reason, protecting them and enabling them to plan for the future. The</p>	<p>The consultation closed in October 2019. Officers will monitor the Government's next steps on this policy.</p>

	Government also proposed to strengthen the section 8 eviction process, so landlords can regain their property should they wish to sell it or move into it. The Government sought views on how it should implement its decision through a July - October consultation.	
June 2019	Tenant Fees Act - sets out what fees can be charged by an agent or landlord before the property is let. This Act applies to all new tenancies from 1 June 2019, and will apply to all existing tenancies from 1 June 2020.	This is enforced by Trading Standards. Locally the council has dealt with 4 cases informally, in all of these cases the fees were returned to the tenant.
Sept 2019	National Design Guide - this published framework visual design guide follows the 'Creating Space for Beauty': interim report of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission' from July 2019. The guide sets out overarching principles relating to layout, form, scale etc. It is now a material consideration when considering planning applications and appeals, while the NPPF will be updated to reflect this. More announcements are anticipated in this policy area in 2020.	Officers are considering the implications of the new guide and will feed this into the Local Plan review.
Oct 2019	Future Homes Standard (FHS) - this is the first stage of a two-part consultation about proposed changes to Building Regulations relating to new homes. An initial consultation set out Government proposals to increase energy efficiency requirements for new homes in 2020. A future element will require new build homes to be future-proofed with low carbon heating and energy efficiency, to be introduced by 2025.	The FHS policy would inevitably impact planning and building control services. Officers are currently reviewing the proposals.

In addition to these national policy changes, at a county level a draft Kent & Medway Housing Strategy was published in autumn of 2019. Led by the Kent Housing Group this document is being revised following a technical consultation with local authorities and the wider housing sector in September and October.

2.1.1 Possible future changes to UK Housing Policy (Year 2, Dec 2019 - Nov 2020)

In addition some major national policy changes are anticipated to take place over the next twelve months, to include:

Introduction of Future 'Green' Homes Standard - officers will monitor progress with respect to Government proposals that emerge out of consultation that is taking place through autumn 2019. The consultation outlines options to increase the energy efficiency requirements for new homes in 2020. Also a Future Homes Standard, to be introduced by 2025, would require changes to Building Regulations for new dwellings so that these are future-proofed with low carbon heating and energy efficiency. This may require fossil fuel heating systems such as gas boilers to be

banned from new homes by 2025 and replaced with clean technology (e.g. air source heat pumps and cutting-edge solar panels). These changes would influence council planning and building control services as well as its own future housing projects.

Publishing of Accelerated Planning green paper - the Government is set outline proposals to speed up the planning system. This for example may include the potential for more fees to be refunded if councils take too long to decide on specific planning applications.

Introduction of new Housing Design Guidance - under current Government plans, the new national guide will be accompanied by a National Model Design Code in 2020, which will set out detailed standards for key elements of design. This document will also set out guidance for councils in preparing and implementing their own 'local' design guides/codes. These local guides will be able to reflect the unique setting, character and history of an area while being expected to meet national standards.

Introduction of Mandatory Electrical Safety Checks - in January 2019, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced its plans regarding compulsory electrical safety checks in privately rented homes. No implementation date has yet been given, but MHCLG said it hopes to introduce the new legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows for it.

Social Housing Green Paper - in 2018 the Government published its Social Housing Green Paper, which aimed to deliver a 'fundamental rethink of social housing'. A consultation on the paper closed in November 2018, with a response and a potential White Paper expected in spring 2019. In June, the Government announced that an accompanying action plan would be published in September. To date this has not been produced and it is unclear whether this will remain a priority for the Government.

2.2 Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2018-2023)

In recalling the scope and emphasis of the council's own strategy, the document focuses council intervention around three key strategic housing priorities:

Priority 1: Increase the supply and choice of good quality homes that local people can afford;

Priority 2: Make efficient and effective use of existing housing in the district and improve housing quality to ensure it meets current and future housing needs; and

Priority 3: Support vulnerable people to access and maintain housing including preventing and ending homelessness.

The strategy considers each strategic priority area in turn discussing a range of housing and homelessness topic areas, with particular focus on current housing, planning and welfare challenges and opportunities together with an overview of current council and partner activity in that area. The clear message from the strategy is that it should aim to promote sustainable communities and support vulnerable

people. In so doing the council will need to enable people to access and maintain quality, affordable housing and to live independently where possible and provide housing-related support where it is needed most. As a result the document sets out what the council will do to help address these issues, explaining how it will be implemented via its accompanying action plan.

2.2.1 How people were consulted on the Strategy

Various approaches were used to obtain the views and comments of local residents and organisations with an interest in local housing. These included an 8 week period of public consultation which generated over 80 responses not only from the development industry but also importantly from other stakeholders such as community groups, residents associations and housing charities. The council had also sought feedback at workshops with local developers and Registered Providers, the Disability Advisory Panel, the Tenants Consultative Group and at a briefing for councillors. This process enabled the three above strategic priorities to be 'tested' in the draft strategy, the feedback from which suggested strong support for them.

2.2.2 The Strategy's Action Plan

Grouped under the Strategy's 3 strategic priorities, the accompanying strategy Action Plan contains 42 separate areas of activity and actions that are working towards achieving 12 different outcomes. These outcomes are diverse and range from 'producing a programme of council owned development sites to meet local housing need' to ensure 'vulnerable people are supported to access and maintain suitable accommodation'. Work is underway under all of these outcomes. Officers have also tried to ensure that where possible these action plan activities were new and therefore stretched beyond 'business as usual' housing and homelessness work. The action plan activities comprise both direct delivery (e.g. resulting in say new homes purchased/built or families resettled etc) as well as work which is more qualitative in nature, for example activity that is designed to prepare or set in place the foundations for delivery in Years 2 and/or 3 of the action plan. The full action plan will need to be reviewed in mid 2020 in order that this is in alignment with a refreshed Corporate Plan.

The action plan is monitored by the council's Housing Working Group (HWG) which meets monthly and is chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive. HWG is a cross council service and multi-disciplinary group of officers involved with housing related council work which includes planning and strategy, regeneration, affordable housing, legal and financial services, council housing services including private sector, social and homelessness/rough sleeping, the Housing Revenue Account and East Kent Housing. The value of the HWG is that it enables a coordinated and targeted approach to meeting local housing needs and to monitoring the strategy and its action plan. By bringing the council's different housing functions together ensures the authority is agile enough to respond to issues as they arise.

Appendix 1 attaches a detailed action plan that updates on progress by the end of Year 1 (Nov. 2019). The remainder of this covering committee report summarises,

under each of these headings, key achievements over the year and work underway.

Table 2: Summary of Year 1 Progress (Dec 2018-Nov 2019)

<p><u>Priority 1: Increase the supply and choice of good quality homes that local people can afford</u></p> <p>Alongside homes provided by the private sector this priority sets out what the council is doing in respect of encouraging and enabling the provision of affordable/social housing and more specialist delivery. This refers to the council making full use of its financial, planning and housing resources and powers to help meet the district's wider housing needs as effectively as possible.</p>
<p>Summary of actions</p> <p>Relevant activities range from working to develop new council homes using HRA/general funds to promoting and enabling the provision of community led housing initiatives, self/custom build homes and affordable homes including those in rural areas as well as meeting the particular housing needs of older people, students and Gypsies and Travellers. These also include work to identify and overcome barriers to housing delivery.</p>
<p>Some key highlights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The council's ongoing programme to increase its housing stock (which saw £10 million of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) investment made between 2015/16 and 2017/18 to acquire 47 properties) has expanded significantly. £18 million of HRA funds were spent in 2018/19 with a further £5.3 million budgeted for 2019/20. The largest project is the purchase of a series of properties/land in the Parham Road area of Canterbury, the initial remodelling phases of which will provide 61 additional council homes. 24 units will be ready for occupation between Dec. 2019 and Feb 2020, 37 more in autumn 2020.• 3 key council led housing projects at Tivoli/Beach Street site (Herne Bay), Kingsmead Field and Riverside (Canterbury) have secured planning consent. Of the new homes to be built the HRA intends to buy 5 social rent homes at Kingsmead Field, Canterbury (due June 2020) and 10 flats at The Tivoli, Herne Bay (due March 2021).• Significant progress has also been made on a new project to identify council owned land, suitable for the development of new homes. Following assessment of 154 plots, 13 of the best locations are being considered which if financially viable, could help deliver up to 58 new homes. The delivery of further homes may also be enabled on 6 other sites which are earmarked possibly for the private market, market led self build and community led housing projects. Officers are currently undertaking due diligence, capacity and financial viability work on these sites.• The council also works closely with local Housing Associations to enable the delivery of quality affordable housing. Last year 56 new affordable homes were delivered by Housing Associations - an increase on the previous year. By the end of this financial year we expect 109 new affordable homes to be delivered by Housing Associations. The majority of new affordable housing is delivered as part of S.106 agreements which require 30% of new schemes to be made available for affordable housing. This

year, two housing schemes will be 100% affordable and some providers are now looking to deliver more homes, over and above (the 30%) planning requirements.

- The council is offering ongoing support to local groups interested in embarking on Community Led Housing projects. The council for example has provided free training events and held a summer conference with neighbouring local authorities.
- A number of parish councils including Barham, Adisham, Blean and Herne have expressed some initial interest in future affordable housing projects.
- The council passed the 'housing delivery test' for the district (set by the Government in Feb. 2019). 108 other local planning authorities did not pass. As a result there is no formal requirement for the council to prepare a district delivery action plan. However to ensure good practice officers have prepared a plan. The council's work and methodology have now been taken forward by the LGA's Planning Advisory Service as a National Pilot and also highlighted as an exemplar approach to managing housing delivery at the National Chief Planners Conference (Sept. 2019).

Priority 2: Make efficient and effective use of existing housing in the district and improve housing quality to ensure it meets current and future housing needs

As the single largest provider of housing in the district, the council seeks to make best use of its existing homes, across all tenures. It is responsible for managing and maintaining these homes with the aim of achieving high quality while the affordable housing need to be used efficiently. It also needs to ensure poor quality market housing is improved, private rented homes are decent, well-maintained and properly managed and empty homes brought back into use.

Summary of actions

Under this priority the council intends to help improve private (rented) housing standards through targeted interventions such as implementing the extension to the HMOs licensing scheme. It is also delivering a proactive range of interventions designed to identify empty homes and bring them back into use, as well as assisting and incentivising social tenants to downsize to more suitable homes. The plan includes a review of the council's hostel stock which identifies improvement options and taking forward some refurbishment options. Actions to match property to local homeless families who need help accessing rented housing and reduce under-occupation and overcrowding are also in place.

Some key highlights

- Implemented in 2018, the newly extended HMOs licensing scheme the private sector housing team issued 578 new licenses in 2018 and a further 87 licenses by October 2019, all of which are being inspected to ensure compliance with housing standards. Key geographic HMO clusters are being identified and monitored as are HMOs that have not applied for a license.
- 18 Social Lettings Agency properties are now occupied by previously homeless households using Canterbury Lettings and 4 further properties are to be matched with

new tenants. The scheme will now be expanded to 30 properties in 2020/21.

- 20 previously empty homes were brought back into use (target of 15) in the first year. This year 5 further empty homes have been brought back into use so far.
- A pilot scheme (started April 2019) to assist and incentivise social tenants to downsize to more suitable homes supported 6 social tenant moves including 2 significant hoarders (target - 10 tenants moved by March 2020).
- 20 temporary accommodation studio units have been secured as part of the wider Parham Road property acquisition/refurbishment projects, providing more local accommodation to help homeless households stay within the district.

Priority 3: Support vulnerable people to access and maintain housing including preventing and ending homelessness

The third strategic priority focuses on the council's role in improving housing options for people in a wide range of circumstances particularly those experiencing homelessness or at risk of being made homeless. It provides for a host of general needs and specialist support services to ensure people lead healthy and happy lives. To achieve this the council has to work in partnership with various providers across the health and housing agendas. Also accessing and maintaining suitable quality housing options is challenging. As a result developing effective approaches that ensure people receive early advice and support for their housing needs is vital.

Summary of actions

The council has been successful in securing significant external funding to deliver outreach work with rough sleepers with a focus on outcomes such as supporting access to key services and moving from the streets into settled accommodation. These activities are included under Priority 3 of the action plan. Reviews of Temporary Accommodation related issues also form part of this priority, notably in seeking ways to increase provision within existing council stock. Having strong policies (e.g, Allocations/Private Sector Housing) and activity plans (e.g. rough sleeping) in place is also important as well as ensuring compliance with legislation.

Some key highlights

- Improvements have been made to the council's Housing Needs Register. This includes the development of a pre-assessment module, so applicants can check whether they are eligible to join the register. This resulted in a 15% reduction in applications needing to be assessed over the last 2 years (total 47).
- In addition to social housing, the council also secured 57 privately rented units of accommodation for people who are homeless and on low income or in receipt of benefits, since April 2019.
- 8 Syrian families resettled in district since 2015, with the next family due in November 2019 (Target - 10 families resettled in district by 2020 under the Government's Syrian

Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme).

- 33 people (target - 30 clients) were supported into homes and helped to sustain their housing by addressing their needs (e.g. mental health). By October 2019 all clients had maintained their tenancy for 6 months or more.
- A new Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy and refreshed Private Sector Housing Policy were adopted by council. The latter now includes Disabled Facilities Grants, housing licensing, private sector housing standards and empty homes.
- An annual Rough Sleeper action plan and full time Rough Sleeper Coordinator (to work alongside agencies like Catching Lives and Porchlight) are in place. Individual support plans are developed for each rough sleeper the coordinator is in contact with.
- 45 people were helped from the District's streets following the start of a rough sleeper project that enables their access to services and accommodation which seeks to prevent them from returning to the streets. Since September 2018 Canterbury has seen 45% drop in rough sleepers (South East fell 17%, UK fell 2%).
- 'Rapid Rehousing' Grant funding has been secured to deploy Prison Navigators working across Canterbury, Thanet, Maidstone and Medway. Project Coordinator appointed and navigators are also now in post.

2.3 Challenges for Year 2 of the Strategy/Action Plan (Dec. 2019 - Nov. 2020)

The Council's Housing Working Group has identified three major challenges that will have an increasingly important influence on its housing work in Year 2, which are:

The future of council housing management in East Kent

The Council is currently consulting on its proposal to bring housing management back in house. The outcome of that consultation will inform a final decision on housing management by councillors in January 2020.

Meeting the future housing needs of older people

In Year 1 initial groundwork began on a broad review of housing for older people in the district. Into Year 2 this will include both a review of local authority accommodation (e.g. Sheltered Plus) as well as considering how the council can best use its planning powers and other tools to influence and/or encourage wider private sector provision. Housing for older people is a complex area presenting a range of challenges. The council, alongside its partners, has a key role in planning for the very different accommodation, social and health needs of an ageing district population. Future work will involve consultation with tenants and councillor briefings as well as interest groups representing older people and the private sector.

Preparing for the introduction of new 'Green' housing standards - if the Government follows through on the proposal part of this will impact all new-build housing. While the principle of adopting mandatory design standards, together with stronger planning and building regulations to help tackle climate change while keeping household bills low is positive, the council will need to be sufficiently agile to react and adapt accordingly.

3. **Relevant Council Policy/Strategies/Budgetary Documents**

The Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is closely aligned with:

- Corporate Plan 2016-2020;
- District Local Plan (2017); and
- Canterbury Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) - March 2018.

In addition the strategy action plan incorporates commitments to updating/refreshing and enhancing key housing policies including that for Allocations, Tenancy, Private Sector Housing and Temporary Accommodation Placements.

4. **Consultation planned or undertaken**

The strategy was informed by a range of consultation activities, including a formal consultation period to assist the draft strategy/action plan for 8 weeks between 23.07.18 - 14.09.18.

5. **Options available with reasons for suitability**

To consider the report and to note progress on the strategy's action plan.

6. **Reasons for supporting option recommended, with risk assessment**

This report is to note.

7. **Implications**

- (a) **Financial** - activities set out in the action plan are to be delivered within existing budgets. Finance issues associated with council housing stock are covered in the HRA Business Plan, which has recently been to committee.
- (b) **Legal** - the council has a legal duty to support people in housing need, prevent homelessness and support rough sleepers and the strategy sets out how it is doing this. Where there may be legal implications stemming from service delivery or planning thereof, appropriate advice and guidance will be sought to ensure compliance with relevant legislation and/or regulations.
- (c) **Equalities** - an Equality Impact Assessment was submitted for consideration at Policy & Resources Committee alongside the draft strategy and action plan in November 2018. All impacts identified in the assessment were positive.
- (d) **Environmental including carbon emissions and biodiversity** - there are housing actions identified in this area but officers will keep under review whether new activities will be required in Year 2 of the strategy action plan.

8. **Conclusions**

This report provides a Year 1 (Dec 2018 - Nov 2019) position update on progress with the Council's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan. It gives a brief background to the strategy and outlines some key highlights from action plan activities. A more detailed action plan update is also attached to this report as an appendix. The report also highlights the important role of the council's officer Housing Working Group in enabling a coordinated and targeted approach to meeting local housing needs and to monitoring the strategy and its action plan. The action plan will be reviewed in 2020 to ensure it is in alignment with a refreshed

Corporate Plan.

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Appendices (1): Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan - Year 1 Progress Update

Filename

Version

Date

Time