

Housing priorities: progress update

Report number:	CAB/WS/21/059	
Report to and date:	Cabinet	7 December 2021
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Decisions Plan: The decision made as a result of this report will usually be published within 48 hours and cannot be actioned until five clear working days of the publication of the decision have elapsed. This item is included on the Decisions Plan

Wards impacted: All wards

Recommendation: It is recommended that, Cabinet:

1. approves an addendum to the Housing Strategy 2018-2023, as set out in Appendix A of Report number: CAB/WS/21/059
2. approves that the life of the Housing Strategy be extended to 2024
3. approves the revised Housing Strategy Implementation Plan, as set out in Appendix B of Report number: CAB/WS/21/059
4. notes progress against the Housing Delivery Action Plan (Appendix C)
5. notes progress against the Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy Delivery Plan (Appendix D)

1. Context to this report

- 1.1 A review of the [Housing Strategy and Implementation Plan](#) has been undertaken during 2021, with progress against actions having been regularly carried out since it was adopted in 2018. Updates on progress against the [Housing Delivery Action Plan](#) and [Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Delivery Plan](#) have also been undertaken regularly since they were first adopted by Cabinet.
- 1.2 The opportunity is being taken to present the documents to Cabinet together in one report, setting out a progress update against our housing priorities. Details are provided in the report below and attached appendices.

The impact of working towards our housing priorities

- 1.3 We know that good housing plays an important role in improving health and wellbeing of people in our area, and it is vital to realising our ambitions for economic growth. We are taking a proactive approach to supporting and promoting housing delivery within the district and to identifying housing need in the area, whether that be affordable housing or planning for accessible and adaptable homes. We have exceeded our housing delivery target of 95 per cent and delivered 112 per cent of the housing required in the Government's housing delivery test for the year 2020 to 2021, including 297 affordable homes. Through the local plan process our aim is to make sure that the right kind of homes are provided in the right places. This means that more people are being supported to access the housing they need to fulfil their future ambitions.
- 1.4 The standard of housing across the private rented sector is another area of focus and by working with landlords and tenants we are working hard to ensure people live in decent homes that can improve quality of life. We are also working with the most vulnerable households to improve energy efficiency standards and help those in fuel poverty live in warmer homes.
- 1.5 The Independent Living Suffolk service was established in December 2020 which helps people to live safely and independently in their own homes by putting adaptations in place through the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). The new service is working incredibly well compared to grants previously progressed through Orbit. It demonstrates the positive impact of introducing the fast-track DFG which has reduced the waiting time for adaptations by 50 per cent. Through the new service we have approved 107 DFGs in 2021 to 2022 (to date) compared with 72 in 2020 to 2021. The average time to complete a mandatory DFG has also reduced from 40 to 24 weeks for the same time period.
- 1.6 Since March 2020, 196 individuals have been accommodated through the government's 'everyone in' initiative which asked that local authorities secure accommodation for all rough sleepers to protect

them during pandemic. We have built on this approach and secured funding from a range of sources to help rough sleepers to access the support and accommodation they need to move towards sustainable accommodation and enjoy settled lives. Between 1 January and 30 September 2021, 1126 households have been provided with housing advice and support and we continue to have high homelessness prevention rates, which means more people are being supported to remain in their own homes when faced with homelessness. As the current situation constantly evolves through recovery from the pandemic, we are responding to households' needs as a result of the end of the moratorium on evictions at the end of May 2021, the end of furlough in September 2021 and the end of the Universal Credit uplift.

Looking to the future

- 1.7 As set out in the appendices to this report, there remains a huge amount of work to be done. Housing affordability remains a big challenge in the local area, and recent events mean that households are facing more challenges than ever in terms of finding and sustaining tenancies that enable them to live full and settled lives. The Council remains committed to addressing these issues through the actions set out in the action plans described in the remainder of this report, which have now been refreshed to ensure they remain current and able to address the challenges faced.
- 1.8 We will continue to be proactive in our role as a local housing and planning authority, a regulator, an investor and local influencer to achieve our priorities for housing in West Suffolk. We will work with government, respond to consultations and drive change.
- 1.9 We continue to report regularly on progress against the Housing Strategy and the Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The Housing Delivery Action Plan has now largely been completed with some action still ongoing.

2. Proposals within this report

Addendum to the Housing Strategy and updated Implementation Plan

- 2.1 The [Housing Strategy and Implementation Plan](#) was adopted by Cabinet in December 2018. As is good practice, regular reviews have been carried out since then. Cabinet considered a [year one review](#) of the Housing Strategy Implementation Plan in May 2020, which set out progress and focused on future priorities.
- 2.2 A mid-term review has been undertaken this year. As a result, an addendum to the Housing Strategy is attached as Appendix A to this report and the revised Implementation Plan is attached as Appendix B (access via electronic [link](#) only).

- 2.3 The addendum provides an update to the Housing Strategy 2018-2023. It sets out significant policy changes and events that have taken place since the Housing Strategy was first adopted, details the revised Implementation Plan and recommends that the life of the Housing Strategy be extended to 2024.
- 2.4 The actions in the Housing Strategy are progressed through the Implementation Plan (Appendix B to this report) that identifies the main tasks needed to increase and improve the provision of appropriate housing over the life of the strategy. As part of the mid-term review, we looked in detail at the actions contained in the Implementation Plan. It was concluded that the housing priorities remain relevant, however, some changes have been made to the actions and these have been detailed at Appendix B.

Progress against the Housing Delivery Action Plan

- 2.5 The Council commissioned a Housing Delivery Study in 2018. The study set out actions that can be taken to boost overall housing delivery and provide greater choice in the types and tenures of new homes. This sits alongside the government's requirement that local authorities undertake a housing delivery test to understand whether they are delivering the required number of homes.
- 2.6 West Suffolk Council achieved a 105 per cent rate of delivery, against a target of 95 percent. Given this rate of delivery it was not a requirement to adopt an action plan, however, the Council agreed to take a proactive approach to housing delivery by preparing an action plan that is aligned to the Housing Strategy.
- 2.7 The progress made towards increasing housing delivery across West Suffolk is detailed at Appendix C (access via electronic [link](#) only) and many of the actions have now been completed.

Progress against the Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy delivery plan

- 2.8 In October 2019, Cabinet considered a [report](#) detailing progress against the delivery plan. This was formerly the Homelessness Reduction Strategy, however, actions to address rough sleeping were included following a government requirement. The Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy was adopted in 2019.
- 2.9 The coronavirus pandemic has presented challenges to our work with rough sleepers and those threatened with homelessness. However, it has also created the opportunity to support and accommodate former rough sleepers in innovative new ways as we work towards pathways to sustainable accommodation. Appendix D attached (access via electronic [link](#) only) sets out progress towards delivering against the delivery plan.

3. Alternative options that have been considered

- 3.1 To continue with the Housing Strategy and Implementation Plan, the Housing Delivery Action Plan and Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy. This means that we would not be ensuring that the documents remain relevant and fit for purpose. We would also not have an understanding of the progress made, the priorities we need to focus on moving forward and any barriers that we need to unblock.

4. Consultation and engagement undertaken

- 4.1 The Housing Strategy and Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy were the subject of public and stakeholder consultation through a workshop and online survey. It was not necessary to consult on the mid-term review of the Housing Strategy.
- 4.2 The Housing Delivery Action Plan was produced following the [Housing Delivery Study](#) which was the subject of consultation by the consultants, Turley Economics.

5. Risks associated with the proposals

- 5.1 Housing priorities not aligned with future housing needs across West Suffolk.

6. Implications arising from the proposals

- 6.1 Equalities
- 6.1.1 Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) were completed for the Housing Strategy and the Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy and it was not necessary to carry out EqIAs on the reviews.
- 6.2 Changes to existing policies
- 6.2.1 The Housing Strategy has not changed; however, an addendum has been prepared by way of an update since the Housing Strategy was first adopted in 2018.

7. Appendices referenced in this report

- 7.1 Appendix A: Addendum to the Housing Strategy (**attached**)
Appendix B: Revised Housing Strategy Implementation Plan (**access via electronic [link](#) only**)
Appendix C: Progress against the Housing Delivery Action Plan (**access via electronic [link](#) only**)

Appendix D: Progress against the Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy Delivery Plan
(access via electronic [link](#) only)

8. Background documents associated with this report

- 8.1 [West Suffolk Strategic Framework 2020-2024](#)
[Housing Strategy and Implementation Plan 2018-2023](#)
[Housing Delivery Action Plan](#)
[Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-2023](#)