

Housing Update

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| Report number: | OAS/WS/24/001 | |
| Report to and date(s): | Overview and Scrutiny Committee | 18 January 2024 |
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Decisions Plan: **This item is not included in the Decisions Plan.**

Wards impacted: **All wards**

Recommendation: **It is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:**

- 1. [Notes progress and challenges against the Housing Strategy Implementation Plan 2018 to 2024](#) (as set out in sections 1.9 and 1.10 of this report)**

- 2. Notes progress and challenges against the [Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy Delivery Plan 2018 to 2024](#) (as set out in sections 1.11 and 1.12 of this report)**
- 3. Notes Council's priorities for housing as set out in the [Strategic Priorities](#) for 2024 to 2028.**
- 4. Considers emerging actions to be investigated and explored and plans for the development of the Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2024 onwards and considers how it would like to be involved. Appendix A provides housing market context.**
- 5. Notes the situation regarding refugees and asylum seekers in West Suffolk and how the council is addressing the issues being faced in the district.**
- 6. Considers the responses provided to questions raised by the committee for the Portfolio Holder for Housing, as set out at Appendix B.**

Context to this report

- 1.1 The council will adopt a new Housing Strategy and is required to adopt a new Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy, in 2024.
- 1.2 During a [mid-term review](#) of the Housing Strategy in 2021 it was agreed that the life of the strategy be extended from 2023 to 2024 to fit with adoption of the new strategic priorities in 2024. Whilst the emerging local plan is programmed for adoption in 2025, in December 2023, Council agreed to its final stages of the plan for consultation prior to examination. This sets the council's planning policies relating to housing, and sites which will form its pipeline for the supply of new homes.
- 1.3 It is proposed that the Housing Strategy is combined with the Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy to form a single strategy document. All local authorities have a statutory duty to produce a homelessness reduction and rough sleeping strategy every five years.

The role of a Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

- 1.4 We know that good quality housing that meets the needs of residents plays an important role in improving health and wellbeing of people in our area and is vital to realising our ambitions for economic growth. Through the development of a Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, we will build on the work of the previous strategies and continue to move this work forward. By combining the housing strategy with the statutory requirement for a homelessness and rough sleeper strategy, this further strengthens and aligns our commitment to housing and homelessness and how services and partners will continue to work closely together to support local people.

Purpose of this report

The opportunity is being taken to present the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with:

- (a) Progress and challenges against the Housing Strategy 2018 to 2024 Implementation Plan (as set out in sections 1.9 and 1.10 of this report).
- (b) Progress and challenges against the Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 to 2024 Delivery Plan (as set in sections 1.11 and 1.12 of this report).

- (c) Council's priorities for housing as set out in the Strategic Priorities 2024 to 2028.
- (d) Taking into account the above information, considers emerging actions to be investigated and explored and plans for the development of the Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy and asks that the committee considers how it would like to be involved in the development of the strategy. **Appendix A** provides housing market context.
- (e) An overview of the situation regarding refugees and asylum seekers in West Suffolk and how the council is addressing the issues being faced in the district as requested by the Chair of the committee.
- (f) Considers the responses provided to questions raised by the committee for the Portfolio Holder for Housing, as set out at **Appendix B**.

1.5 At the last meeting of the Committee, members asked some questions about increases in service charges and other matters involving Registered Providers (RPs). These have been followed up directly with the RPs, who are also keen to attend a scrutiny session with the committee at a later date to discuss them. Some of these topics are also covered in other parts of this update report. However, a briefing on the specific topic of service charges was sent separately to all members at a later date to discuss these and other issues.

The current housing situation in West Suffolk

1.6 It is understood that there is an insufficient supply of some types of housing, and particularly affordable housing, in West Suffolk to meet housing needs, further information is included at **Appendix A**. We also know that there are some key issues emerging around housing delivery with a focus on the right type and mix of housing and the right affordable homes to meet the needs of residents. Affordability and the environment (such as cost and availability of land, build costs and supply issues in the construction industry) are all interlinked. The number of older people and single-person households is expected to increase over the next decade and beyond and this will impact on the type of homes needed, including adaptable homes with increased demand for one and two-bedroom low-level properties.

1.7 There are environmental factors in terms of new build homes and retrofitting the existing housing stock. This is important to both reduce the impact on the environment and to provide good quality housing that provide safe places to live and thermal comfort impacting positively on people's lives and reduces costs to residents. Given all properties being built at the time of writing do not comply with the Future Homes Standard, new builds are included in this cohort of properties that will require retrofitting. The lack of suitable

housing is also a potential factor in overcrowding of existing homes which has a knock-on effect on health, wellbeing and social inequality.

- 1.8 Average house prices and rents have continued to rise in West Suffolk, and this is partly driven by the unique situation around demand from RAF Lakenheath and Mildenhall personnel in the rental market. Additionally, proximity to Cambridge and London and changes in working patterns have an impact. The cost-of-living crisis is making the affordability of housing more challenging for many families. We know this has a detrimental impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing with long-term negative impacts on the population as well as placing additional demand on the wider Suffolk system. The lack of affordable housing places additional demand on the housing register with people finding it difficult to maintain a tenancy in the private rented sector, which is further exacerbated by the fact there are few properties available to rent within Local Housing Allowance levels.

Housing Strategy Implementation Plan – progress and challenges

- 1.9 The current Housing Strategy has been in place since 2018. and progress against the actions have been reported to Cabinet on 7 December 2021 (report CAB/WS/21/059 refers). Significant **progress** has been made against the current Housing Strategy Implementation Plan and the key activities include:
- a. Exceeded our Housing Delivery Test (HDT) target of 95 per cent and achieved 129 per cent for the year 2022 to 2023. The total number of homes delivered was 1003. Following consultation on the proposed revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and planned changes to how the HDT and five-year Housing Land Supply would be calculated, government has not published the HDT results this monitoring year. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has now published the new NPPF which replaces the previous version (published in September 2023). The NPPF provides further guidance including a change in requirements from five to four years for councils that have an emerging local plan that has either been submitted for examination or has reached regulation 18 or 19;
 - b. Continued progress on our commitment to develop a West Suffolk Local Plan by 2025. The Local Plan is at an advanced stage with the draft Local Plan approved by Council on 19 December 2023 for consultation which will commence on 30 January 2024. This is the last consultation before submission to Secretary of State for examination in public. As part of the Housing and Communities chapter policies proposed include increasing the percentage of affordable housing from 30 per

cent to 40 per cent on Greenfield sites to maximise delivery, raising accessibility standards to help support the ageing population remain in their homes for longer and the introduction of new affordable housing products such as First Homes and a new Housing Types Policy.

- c. On 24 December 2023, the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) 2015 was updated. This updated guidance is a response to recent case law which deemed the PPTS 2015 definition of a Traveller to be discriminatory. As a result, the definition will revert back to the PPTS 2012 definition, which encompasses Travellers who have permanently ceased travelling. The West Suffolk Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) was commissioned in 2023. The findings indicate a net shortfall of 39 pitches (cultural need) between 2023 and 2040. It has been recommended that West Suffolk meet the majority of this need by regularising tolerated sites and intensifying and or reconfiguring existing established sites.
- d. Update of Housing Needs Assessment finalised. This update forms part of the evidence base for the Local Plan and provides an understanding of the amount and type of housing that is needed across West Suffolk;
- e. The total number of affordable homes completed in West Suffolk in 2022 to 2023 was 212 (gross). Net homes delivered was 1003. Note that we do not assess delivery on a like for like basis, as the gross number of affordable units is used and a net figure of total completions is used. All sites of 10 or more homes delivered in 2022 to 2023 achieved 30 per cent affordable housing with the exception of one site in Bury St Edmunds which secured 18 per cent affordable housing due to viability issues.
- f. Supporting Registered Providers (RPs) to secure additional affordable homes through “off the shelf opportunities” such as purchasing additional affordable rented or low-cost homeownership homes directly from the developer. By supporting RPs to secure additionality, this has helped to address some of the backlog in affordable housing need which was not meet in previous years.
- g. Wickhambrook and Risby Parish Councils have both commissioned independent local Housing Needs Surveys and the findings have been published on their websites. Wickhambrook Parish Council is currently progressing with a neighbourhood plan which is at pre-submission stage and includes consideration to bring forward a Community Land Trust development. There is a local plan policy in place that supports the delivery of affordable homes in rural areas where there is a proven local housing need. Officers continue to

support parish councils aiming to bring forward affordable housing to meet a local need and where they have expressed an interest in further understanding the housing needs of their community.

- h. There are currently 16 town and parish councils within West Suffolk who are either at draft stage of the Neighbourhood Plan process or have submitted their Neighbourhood Plans and are Under Review. Once adopted, they will have legal force and will form part of the statutory development plan for the area. Some of the advantages of a Neighbourhood Plan include:
- The policies are used in determining planning applications.
 - They enable the community to prepare a shared vision for development and growth in their local area.
 - They can plan for the specific housing requirement of the settlement.
 - Many policies protect and propose protection of local green spaces, gaps etc.
 - Encourage better designed places.
 - They include policies which require a 'local connection' for affordable homes such as housing exception sites.
- i. Barley Homes (council owned housing development company) has completed two developments in Haverhill at Westmill Place in Haverhill and Stonemill Park at which 63 homes were built and sold. Barley Homes will continue to deliver homes in line with its agreed business plan. All sites will meet current Affordable Housing policy.
- j. Continually working with developers and registered providers to bring forward adapted and accessible properties. With the use of commuted sum monies an increase in the housing standards of an affordable rented bungalow in Mildenhall to deliver an M4 (2) accessible and adaptable property was agreed. Through partnership working with a developer, a five bedroom fully accessible house in Exning for a family with multiple medical issues was secured. Two units of temporary accommodation have also been adapted to be accessible and two adaptable bungalows in Brandon have been secured;
- k. The Independent Living Suffolk (ILS) is in place which is a service provided by Suffolk County Council in partnership with local district and borough councils. Through this new model, in place since December 2020, local people are being supported to live safely, comfortably and independently in their own home for as long as possible. Following the introduction of this new model the number of grants approved and completed has increased each year and we now expect to spend the full allocation of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) funding. A key

change was the introduction of a Fast Track DFG for non-complex works that removed barriers to accessing the grant and enabled works to progress rapidly; this included taking referrals from health professionals other than an Occupational Therapist (OT), removing the means test, removing a financial charge and enabling the resident to manage the works. Due to the cost of materials rising the threshold of the Fast Track grant was increased from £7,500 to £15,000. Working with partners across Suffolk there is the aspiration to build on the ILS and maximise the Better Care Fund budget.

- i. Improved safety and living standards in Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) through an in-depth review of data and exploring how we work with landlords, support tenants and undertake HMO inspections. As a result, we have improved engagement with landlords and tenants to help them understand what they should expect in terms of better-quality housing and how to make a complaint in confidence. There has also been a focus on raising awareness of issues relating to fire safety and damp and mould. This work is ongoing and will feed into our inspection programme, mandatory licensing and proactive identification of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs).
- m. Addressed issues around damp and mould in the private rented sector and in the council's properties as a social landlord. This was in response to the increased government focus in this area and has resulted in new guidance, a focus away from tenant lifestyle as a cause to having adequate ventilation and energy efficiency measures;
- n. [Safe Suffolk Renters](#) is a Suffolk-wide initiative backed by government funding with the aim of improving standards in the private rented sector through building relationships between tenants, landlords, property managers and councils and through education and awareness raising to align everyone's understanding of responsibilities and expectations. Specific actions include a Suffolk-wide housing stock condition survey which will inform a more proactive response to poor housing conditions, support for residents facing illegal eviction, support for landlords (to comply with the legislation, access guidance and energy funding) support for tenants (know their rights, access financial assistance available and maintain their tenancies) and support for Private Sector Housing teams across Suffolk through additional resource, intelligence and training;
- o. The council received 231 complaints relating to disrepair in the private rented sector in 2023 and completed 92 inspections. It is a reactive approach to addressing hazards in the private rented sector;

- p. worked with Suffolk partners on a Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards project to identify low energy efficient and non-compliant properties in the PRS. We identified 119 properties that fell below MEES (Band F-G), 43 of these were improved to a Band E, 29 registered exemptions, 10 left the private rented sector, 1 Notice was issued.

1.10 West Suffolk Council has continued to face **challenges** in achieving the priorities set out in the current Housing Strategy. A number of these are outside of our direct control but we continue to liaise with and influence our partners. We are working to address challenges in the following areas which are likely to be included in the new Housing Strategy:

- a. Increasing the rate of housing delivery for the right type of housing. We are taking a proactive approach to exploring new ways of increasing the rate of housing delivery and being more creative in encouraging new types of housing that meet the current and future needs of our residents. Lack of Homes England funding and registered providers needing to be more competitive with their bids due to an increase in registered providers from outside of the area wanting to work in West Suffolk. This has had led to developers expecting a higher rate of return than previously sought on the affordable housing properties. We are working closely with Homes England to support additionality on site and using commuted sum monies to support the delivery of more complex housing types.
- b. Rising construction and development costs. We are meeting with developers regularly, as we do with RPs to understand challenges around delivery and to understand best practice.
- c. Delivering the right amount of affordable housing to meet local needs, including social rented properties;
- d. Change in policy within the emerging local plan to secure 40 per cent affordable housing on greenfield developments over 10 dwellings. The emerging local plan also includes policies:
 - Housing Type and Tenure – to ensure all new homes are of the appropriate size and type continuing towards a mixed, balanced and inclusive communities.
 - Incorporation of space standards to ensure room and garden sizes meet a minimum standard.
 - Accessible homes – All new homes to be accessible and adaptable and 13 per cent of affordable homes are required to be built for a wheelchair user.

- Specific policy to allow affordable homes which would otherwise not be permitted in rural locations (subject to criteria);
 - Specific policy to allow market homes in small rural hamlets which would otherwise not be permitted in rural locations;
 - Specific policy to support the delivery of specialist housing with care accommodation; and
 - Specific policy for supporting custom and self-build development so that people can build homes to meet their own needs.
- e. The local plan strategy directs housing to the most sustainable settlements and has also made provision in smaller settlements which will support local services and facilities. Our strategy seeks to bring forward a range of sites of different sizes to maintain pace of delivery. We also have policies to increase energy efficiency on our new homes.
- f. We will work with RPs to support plans to regenerate housing on significant brownfield sites and will look to develop agreed principles to embed good practice.
- g. Work with Parishes to explore housing needs to bring forward community led exception schemes for local people.
- h. Working with partners through the use of intelligence and putting support in place to reduce the number of empty homes which will provide more accommodation for those in housing need and improve these to a higher energy efficiency standard;
- i. Working with developers to achieve the Future Homes Standard by 2025 to ensure that all new homes are carbon zero-ready;
- j. Improve energy efficiency in existing housing by working with registered providers, the private rented sector and privately owned homeowners. The challenges lie in funding the level of retrofitting that is required;
- k. The demand for accommodation in the private rented sector is increasing and we need to be ready to address concerns that the number of landlords could be reducing.

1.11 Significant **progress** has been made against the current Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy Delivery Plan and the key activities are listed below:

- a. Providing support with a focus on preventing and relieving homelessness to ensure that more people are able to maintain and secure a settled home. In West Suffolk (2022-2023), 46.6 per cent of those owed a duty had a successful prevention duty outcome (compared to 52.7 per cent across England) and 30.7 per cent had a successful relief duty outcome (compared to 36.2 per cent across England);
- b. In West Suffolk (2022-2023), 43.1 per cent of the successful prevention duty outcomes resulted in households staying in their existing accommodation (compared to 33.8 per cent across England);
- c. The number of rough sleepers across West Suffolk in the autumn 2022 rough sleeper snapshot was six;
- d. Contributing to the development of the system wide approach to rough sleeping with a focus on prevention that is being led by the Suffolk Housing Board;
- e. West Suffolk was awarded £453,359 Rough Sleeper Initiative funding in 2020 to 2021 (as part of a joint bid with Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils) and £1,316,852 for 2022 to 2025 (in West Suffolk only) and this included additional funding in 2023 to provide rough sleeper beds and support staff on top of the existing provision;
- f. Providing effective advice, preventative and information services which has resulted in high homelessness prevention and relief rates and accommodating 196 individuals through the 'everyone in', the government initiative to ensure rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness were provided with accommodation during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- g. As part of the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) (funding announced in response to the pandemic) £634,099 of capital and revenue funding has been granted to West Suffolk with additional funding of £131,220 to continue the support of this provision until March 2025. This has provided 14 units of accommodation for former rough sleepers;
- h. Alongside this NSAP funding, West Suffolk has received a further £30,000 funding from the former West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group to provide personalised care that will be delivered by the Marginalised and Vulnerable Adults (MVA) service. We are seeing positive outcomes from this innovative new way of providing personalised and

coordinated health provision such as clients engaging with, and recognising the benefits of support, effective delivery of healthcare and communication between all agencies to provide a joined-up approach;

- i. Working closely with colleagues across Suffolk to support residents who are at risk of homelessness due to the increased cost of living and those impacted by fuel poverty;
- j. Implementing pathways for tackling homelessness, identifying risks early and promoting self-help and resilience and working with partners to provide services with the aim of breaking the cycle of homelessness;
- k. Increasing accommodation options for vulnerable households including those who have experienced domestic abuse specifically two accessible bungalows in Brandon, 11 ring-fenced rough sleeper accommodation units and with Suffolk County Council purchased two units of accommodation for those with high support needs; and
- l. Purchased two units of temporary accommodation, repurposed two units and refurbished two units;
- m. £1,426,858 Local Authority Housing Funding to deliver ten units of accommodation in partnership with local registered providers for the resettlement of Afghans, Ukrainians and for general needs use; and
- n. Responding to new requirements around the Domestic Abuse Act. West Suffolk has been allocated funding to provide a domestic abuse link worker and satellite provision.
- o. Ensured earlier identification of homeless applications with high support needs for example affordability concerns, homelessness and domestic abuse. Supporting residents through the cost-of-living crisis.
- p. Successfully advertised and shortlisted a high number of new build developments and supported the onboarding of new registered providers to the Cambridge Sub-region partnership to provide a smooth allocations process.
- q. Supported landlords to ensure properties are in a habitable and safe condition which has been achieved through engaging with the Safer Suffolk Renters project.
- r. As at January 2024, the total number of properties under the Guaranteed Rent Scheme was 107, the total number of properties under the Rent Deposit Scheme was 146.

- s. From January 2023, the total number of residents moved from temporary accommodation to private rented accommodation was 23.

1.12 West Suffolk Council continues to face some **challenges** in achieving the priorities set out in the current Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy Delivery Plan. A number of these are outside of our direct control but we continue to liaise with and influence our partners. We are working to address challenges in the following areas:

- a. Working with registered providers and the voluntary sector to increase access to accommodation including lodging schemes, shared accommodation, temporary accommodation and tenancies to support move on; and
- b. Accessing accommodation options through private sector landlords in a competitive market. However, the team has been actively seeking opportunities to work with local landlords and estate agents about incentives with the aim of increasing the number of properties to meet demand in the local area. Despite the challenges, between January 2021 and October 2023, 87 new landlords started working with the West Suffolk Lettings Partnership and 145 properties were obtained.

2. Proposals within this report

2.1 Council's strategic priorities for housing 2024 to 2028

At its meeting on 19 December 2023, Full Council agreed its [Strategic Priorities document](#) which set out its housing priority (report COU/WS/23/019 refers). These priorities were set taking into consideration the (i) progress made in the current Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy; (ii) challenges as set out above in paragraphs 1.10 and 1.12; and (iii) housing market context as set out in **Appendix A**.

In order to deliver on our strategic priority of **affordable, available and decent homes**, we will:

- Use planning powers to significantly increase the supply of affordable housing in West Suffolk, particularly for social rent, and explore other options for increasing provision.
- Investigate options to address the specific market conditions in West Suffolk that make it challenging for local people to afford to rent or buy
- Use the council's planning, regulatory and other powers to ensure all housing is of a good quality and sustainably build and has minimal environmental impacts, including noise
- Work with communities to ensure all housing is supported by the right infrastructure

- increase the requirement in the draft Local Plan for the amount of affordable housing that is required on new housing sites, from 30 to 40 per cent on larger greenfield sites subject to viability
- work to understand and address the unique issues and affordability pressures facing West Suffolk residents in accessing the local housing market
- work with partners to bring forward opportunities for regeneration on brownfield sites
- explore the role of different housing models such as custom build-to-rent to diversify our housing and address housing need
- build on the work of the county-wide private rented sector pathway project. This project makes better use of data to improve our responses to hazards and non-compliance in poor quality housing and to enhance engagement and communications with tenants, landlords and communities
- ensure good management and standards in Houses in Multiple Occupation through proactive inspections and licensing
- support the work underway to enable safe and warm homes and to facilitate necessary aids and adaptations to enable residents to continue to live safely and independently within their own homes
- continue to build affordable homes for sale and rent through Barley Homes
- take further opportunities to acquire more temporary and move-on accommodation to support households
- strengthen our strategic partnership with Cambridgeshire and participate in the Suffolk Housing Board to drive forward improvements in the availability and quality of housing and associated support in the county
- increase access to good quality private rented housing including meeting the challenge of empty homes

2.2 **Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 onwards**

Emerging actions to be investigated and explored

There are four emerging themes from Cabinet’s priorities, given the evidence base, our understanding of current housing pressures and options around addressing these in the future. The emerging actions and areas of focus to be investigated and explored are set out below:

| | Priority | Emerging actions to be investigated and explored |
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| 1. | Housing delivery | Increase housing delivery including affordable housing – the right amount in the right place to meet different local need such as for first-time buyers and for older people. The emerging draft Local Plan includes the requirement for the amount of |

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| | | <p>affordable housing that is required on new housing sites, from 30 to 40 per cent on larger greenfield sites subject to viability. Lobby Government for a replacement for Help to Buy to support people who wish to access their first home.</p> <p>Planning to create a sense of community that leads to improved health and wellbeing including through the use of Health Impact Assessments on sites of over 100 homes.</p> <p>Understand need around adapted accommodation</p> <p>Explore options and models such as build to rent and custom build to increase the supply of the right types of housing including affordable housing.</p> <p>To support pace of delivery by providing opportunities on a mix of sites, smaller sites as well as large strategic sites.</p> <p>Review the council’s brownfield sites register, identifying and working with others to address barriers and provide new opportunities to increase delivery. Work with developers to bring forward custom build and self-build and our communities to support Community Land Trusts.</p> |
| 2. | Regulation and housing standards | <p>Monitor and actively promote high standards in the rented sector and take appropriate action where standards are not being met, to tackle disrepair, poor housing conditions and criminal landlords.</p> <p><u>Understand</u> the challenges and scope of our privately rented sector better and influence the private sector to improve standards and access by building relationships across the sector with voluntary, statutory and commercial organisations.</p> <p>Respond to the stock condition survey results in 2024 and develop an action plan to inform our work and improve living conditions.</p> |

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| | | <p>Explore the next steps post the Safer Suffolk Renters Project to continue to grow a better private rented sector for everyone</p> <p>Explore and support networking opportunities for private landlords; promoting events widely and using them to consult the Private Rented Sector on the issues that are affecting them</p> <p>Reduce the number of empty homes and consider how we can bring homes back into use as we respond to the Suffolk-wide review.</p> <p>Proactively support independent living and also support people with disabilities to remain in their homes through disabled facility grants and make effective use of the better care fund.</p> <p>Support and encourage high quality and well managed, Houses in Multiple Occupation in the local area.</p> <p>Ensure all HMOs are licensed and inspected according to necessary timeframes and pursue landlords of unlicensed houses in multiple occupation.</p> <p>Explore all intelligence and data sets available to assist in the positive identification and enforcement of unlicensed and licensable HMOs.</p> <p>Work in collaboration with the Revenue and Benefits team in bringing empty properties back into use by working with property owners and where necessary take appropriate and proportionate enforcement action (and respond to the outcomes of the county wide review)</p> <p>To undertake the licensing of mobile homes and caravan sites.</p> |
| 3. | Supporting and housing local people | In the new strategy to include our statutory duty to produce a homelessness reduction and rough sleeping strategy |

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| | | <p>Prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping at an earlier stage, including working with colleagues across the public and voluntary and community sector.</p> <p>Increase options for temporary accommodation to mitigate the need for bed and breakfast accommodation.</p> <p>Increase access to good quality private rented sector accommodation using the council’s West Suffolk Letting Partnership which provides incentives for private landlords.</p> <p>Provide support and signposting for households facing issues with the cost of living, including using funding and income maximisation.</p> <p>Manage the Home Link Service and allocate housing in line with the council’s Lettings Policy.</p> <p>Work with partners, such as social care and mental health services, to find appropriate accommodation options for those with support needs.</p> <p>Continued support through the outreach team for those who are rough sleeping or former rough sleepers including managing accommodation ring-fenced for rough sleepers.</p> |
| <p>4.</p> | <p>The Environment</p> | <p>Achieve Future Homes Standard by 2025 with developers and all new homes carbon zero ready. The emerging Local Plan includes a policy which seeks to address climate change through sustainable design and construction with a fabric first approach to achieve carbon standards for all new homes. Photovoltaic panel on roofs are requirements where practically possible and on developments of over 100 homes requiring an energy standard certification which is meeting an excellent rating.</p> <p>We will consider bids for future rounds of funding such as Social Housing</p> |

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| | | <p>Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) and the Local Authority Delivery (LAD) funding from the Government and others in order to reduce emissions across all housing markets.</p> <p>We will take opportunities to bid for funding to deliver improvements in energy efficiency particularly focusing on low-income households and vulnerable residents, working with partners across Suffolk.</p> <p>Link the climate change agenda with the inequality and health agendas focusing on responding to poor-quality housing, fuel poverty and the cost-of-living crisis.</p> <p>Effectively promote and administer Government grants available to all tenures.</p> |
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Developing the strategy

- 2.3 Over the next few months, the council will engage with residents and stake holders including tenants, landlords, registered providers, businesses and partner organisations in the development of the new strategy. It is essential that we hear from a range of local voices to ensure we are working to deliver or influence against the council’s housing priorities and the emerging themes. We will undertake this engagement in a number of ways such as online consultation, stakeholder events, social media and learning about the needs of residents through information and knowledge gained through Councillor engagement and by local Ward Members. We will also use information and feedback that we already have, such as, feedback from the local plan process, Safer Suffolk Renters project and user experiences (for example, we have lived experience information from rough sleepers).
- 2.4 We will work with colleagues from local authorities across Suffolk, and the Cambridge Sub Region, as a number of districts and boroughs are looking to adopt new Housing and Homelessness Strategies at a similar time. Furthermore, we will build on the Suffolk-wide work around Safer Suffolk Renters, the Rough Sleeper Project and the Housing and Health Needs Assessment.
- 2.5 Over the duration of the strategy we will continue the conversation with residents, partner organisations and stakeholders to understand local need and how we need to respond through our approach to delivering on our priorities.

- 2.6 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the role it would like to take in the development of the new strategy.

Overview of the situation regarding refugees and asylum seekers in West Suffolk and how the council is addressing the issues being faced in the district

- 2.7 The Chair of the committee requested an update on the situation regarding refugees and asylum seekers in West Suffolk Council.
- 2.8 As a result of international crises there has been an increase in requests from government to support refugees and asylum seekers. In recent years, the Council has responded and provided support in particular the Homes to Ukraine Scheme and the Afghan resettlement schemes. The Council works alongside other organisations, such as Suffolk County Council, the Strategic Migration Partnership (part of the East of England Local Government Association), Home Office and the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to ensure that sufficient support is available to welcome new arrival into the community.
- 2.9 This is an evolving situation with the key support being provided as follows:

Homes for Ukraine scheme – Suffolk County Council manages the host and guest relationships with West Suffolk Council providing the housing checks (to ensure that they are suitable and meet the requirements of the scheme). Housing support is provided to those who require assistance to move from a host home. In addition, the Families and Communities Team identified local community support for guests and hosts.

Afghan resettlement schemes – Via registered providers, some families resettled from Afghanistan have been provided homes in the community. For a period of time a bridging hotel for Afghan families was located in the West Suffolk area and one family was found alternative accommodation before the hotel was closed.

Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) – Working with registered providers, the Council has secured nine additional social housing homes in the districts using funding from LAHF. This is central government money which provides up to 50 per cent of funding to purchase homes for Afghan and Ukrainian families and is used as general needs social housing stock. The Council is currently in the process of purchasing a house for use as temporary accommodation for Afghan families waiting to move from hotels which was subject of a Portfolio Holder decision, implemented on 29 September 2023. Government has announced of a further round of LAHF and we are waiting details of the scheme. LAHF has provided the opportunity to use central government funding to support the increase in social housing stock in the district.

Asylum seekers - The Home Office is responsible for sourcing asylum seeker accommodation via its contractor, Serco. As at December 2023, there was no asylum seeker accommodation in West Suffolk.

3. Alternative options that have been considered

- 3.1 The council could decide not to adopt a Housing Strategy; however, it would not be able to set out the priorities around housing to support local residents with the type of housing to meet their needs and improve the quality of existing housing.
- 3.2 The council has got a statutory duty to adopt a Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

4. Consultation and engagement undertaken

- 4.1 The Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy will be the subject of public and stakeholder consultation. Plans for the consultation will be shared with Members in due course.

5. Risks associated with the proposals

- 5.1 The council is programmed to commence consultation on 30 January 2024 for its third consultation on the Local Plan. Following consultation the plan will be submitted with all the responses received for independent examination. Given the policies have a viability impact, the inspector will examine the deliverability of all the Local Plan policies cumulatively and determine whether the policies are viable and deliverable. This may result in a change to the targets and policies proposed. The outcome of the process is expected in Spring 2025.

6. Implications arising from the proposals

- 6.1 Financial – there will be financial implications arising from the emerging actions to be investigated and explored as set out in section 2.2 of the report. However, these are currently in development as will be part of the budget setting process for the life of the strategy.
- 6.2 Legal compliance – not applicable
- 6.3 Personal data processing - not applicable
- 6.4 Equalities – An Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out as part of the development of the strategy.
- 6.5 Crime and disorder - not applicable
- 6.6 Safeguarding - not applicable

- 6.7 Environment or sustainability – there will be environmental and sustainability considerations around new and existing housing that will be addressed through the new Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
- 6.8 HR or staffing - not applicable
- 6.9 Changes to existing policies – This work will result in the adoption of the new strategy.
- 6.10 External organisations (such as businesses, community groups) – the new strategy will detail how the council will continue to work alongside partner organisations to provide affordable, available and decent homes for those living and working in West Suffolk.

7. Appendices referenced in this report

- 7.1 Appendix A – housing market context
Appendix B - responses provided to questions raised by the committee for the Portfolio Holder for Housing,

8. Background documents associated with this report

- 8.1 [Housing Strategy 2018 to 2024](#)
- 8.2 [Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 to 2024](#)
- 8.3 [Strategic Priorities 2024 to 2028](#)