

HOUSING STRATEGY 2022 to 2027 – 1 YEAR ON

Housing and Health Advisory Committee - 7 November 2023

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer, People and Places

Status: For Noting

Key Decision: No

This report supports the Key Aim of: the Housing Strategy 2022 to 2027

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Perry Cole

Contact Officer(s): Alison Simmons, Extn 7272, Sharon Donald, Extn 7131

Recommendation to Housing and Health Advisory Committee:

To receive and note the report.

Reason for recommendation:

To raise awareness of the progress being made to deliver the priorities set out in the Housing Strategy 2022 to 2027.

Introduction and Background

- 1 Many people in Sevenoaks District benefit from good housing, and from being able to make choices about where they live that suit their working patterns and family life. Over recent years, housing in our area has become less and less affordable.
- 2 While the District has much to offer, the Council is not being complacent. COVID-19 has brought changes that affect how we all see our homes. It has driven a 'race for space', a desire for flexible home working spaces and a focus on the quality of our residential environments.
- 3 Strategic planning for the continued and effective provision of housing and related services in the Sevenoaks District is therefore a key priority. However, budgets are under pressure, with demand for our services on the increase. At the same time, we have to be realistic about the challenges that we face and prioritise the limited resources that we have. These and other factors, such as the growing and ageing population, are likely to increase the demand for services while simultaneously reducing resources. Nevertheless, the challenge and our intention remains to maximise the supply and quality of suitable homes across tenures, while supporting broader goals around health and wellbeing, tackling climate change and protecting the Green Belt

- 4 The Housing Strategy 2022 to 2027 was adopted at Full Council in July 2022. The Strategy is a working document used by the Housing Service and other Council colleagues and external partners. The Strategy contains an action plan detailing how we will deliver our priorities. The Action Plan enables us to track our progress, report our successes, reflect on areas of concern and highlight the need for remedial action.
- 5 The updated year 1 Action Plan is attached at Appendix A.

Successes

- 6 One year on from July 2022, we have made significant progress in addressing some of the key housing issues and have achieved the following successes:
 - 17 new affordable homes delivered for rent via Quercus Housing and 17 more homes in the pipeline.
 - New specialist accommodation secured by the Council in partnership with HfT – Stay Green House (mothers and babies) and West Kent Housing Association at Vine Court Road and Orchards Close (single homeless).
 - Secured capital funding of £2.8m towards the delivery of affordable housing as part of the Local Authority Housing Fund to support Ukrainian and Afghan households.
 - Designated Rural Area status conferred giving the Council the opportunity to secure additional affordable housing contributions.
 - 2 additional Registered Provider partners have come on board to deliver new affordable homes across the District, and this includes 14 homes at the former Egerton Nursery in Hextable.
 - Rural and Community led housing enabling service secured until April 2025 following the demise of the previous service provider.
 - Allocations Policy approved and implemented, giving much greater emphasis to assisting those with a strong local connection to the District.
 - Allocations Policy adopted by Council for Council owned Gypsy and Traveller sites.
 - Work underway to improve three pitches at the Council owned Gypsy and Traveller site in Hever Road, Edenbridge.
 - Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy approved.
 - Empty Homes Strategy approved and dedicated staff resource in place.
 - More than £1.6 million external funding secured to support home energy efficiency and net zero measures delivered via Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) 1 and 2. 14 homes have been improved as part of the HUG1 project with a target of a minimum of 60 homes to be improved by 2025 as part of HUG2.
 - During 2023, Private Sector Housing Officers responded to 48 Service Requests from customers on a range of housing standards in private rented properties. These included reports of damp and mould, overcrowding and lack of heating. Inspections are undertaken and customers are supported by officers to ensure action is taken to remediate any issues found.
 - Utilising the Better Care Fund, the Private Housing Team processed 250 housing assistance applications which have provided adaptations to support residents to live independently.
 - Changing Spaces social housing under occupation incentive scheme approved and officer appointed.

- Innovative use of funds to provide specialist fixed term posts within the housing department, eg Senior Private Sector Housing Officer – Housing Assistance, Empty Homes and Energy Efficiency.

Concerns

- 7 The Council faces significant challenges as a consequence of key external factors, such as the lack of affordability, the small supply of affordable housing and the implications of inflation and the cost of living. The Housing Strategy can only be delivered in collaboration with partners, and we continue to nurture good partnerships to ensure that the priorities set out in the strategy are delivered.
- 8 Although the Strategy is only a year old, the financial landscape has radically changed during this time having a negative impact on delivery of the action plan. We have the following concerns:
 - Reduced levels of affordable housing secured through the S106 process – this is as a result of greater challenges to achieve viability of new developments owing to rising costs of raw materials, labour and private finance, alongside further pressures due to the requirement for Kent County Council (KCC) contributions to take precedence over the delivery of affordable housing.
 - Registered Provider partners are finding it challenging to deliver financially viable schemes of less than 50 affordable homes or are changing their business model, for example, Golding Homes is focusing its portfolio in Maidstone and is withdrawing from other areas including Sevenoaks District.
 - Reduced turnover in the existing social housing stock which restricts our ability to help those on the Housing Register.
 - Affordability in the private rented sector is particularly acute, with those on benefits limited because of the funding available for supporting housing costs. This is a factor in households being at risk of homelessness due to accommodation costs.
 - Lack of temporary accommodation in the District and the need for continued use of expensive, and far from ideal, nightly paid emergency accommodation.
 - The number of private sector landlords leaving the sector combined with Local Housing Allowance rates not reflecting private sector rental values which are continuing to increase.

Other options Considered and/or rejected

None

Key Implications

Financial

The financial impacts will be dependent on the remedial action taken to ensure delivery of the Action Plan or a review of the actions to be taken.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

None

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the District or supporting the resilience of the natural environment.

Conclusions

Delivery of the Housing Strategy 1 year on, is progressing well with some notable successes, notably in terms of the delivery of affordable housing in the District though the 'massive small' ambitions of the Council's affordable housing company, Quercus Housing. The current financial climate remains challenging and where appropriate, remedial actions have been considered.

Appendices

Appendix A – Housing Strategy 2022 to 2027 Year 1 Action Plan

Background Papers

[Housing Strategy 2022 to 2027](#)

Sarah Robson

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer – People and Places