

# Housing Strategy Development and Consultation

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| <b>Committee name</b>     | Environment, Housing and Regeneration Select Committee                                 |
| <b>Officer reporting</b>  | Mark Billings / Debby Weller - Planning, Environment, Education and Community Services |
| <b>Papers with report</b> | Appendix 1: Policy and Legislative Context for Housing                                 |
| <b>Ward</b>               | All  |

## HEADLINES

The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee regarding progress in preparing the draft Housing Strategy 2021/22 to 2025/26, including the timetable for delivery, the current policy environment and key challenges, emerging strategic direction, and priorities and consultation plans.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

### That the Committee:

- 1. Note the contents of the report and make recommendations on service changes and improvements.**

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The Housing Strategy is a key policy framework document for the council. The strategy provides direction and priorities for housing services but is not a statutory requirement. A draft for consultation is in preparation and is scheduled for Cabinet on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2021. This will then be subject to 10-week formal consultation process, beginning Monday 19<sup>th</sup> July 2021 and ending Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2021. A final draft with amendments following consultation will be presented to Cabinet on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2021 and then to Full Council.

The council has responsibilities for housing both as a landlord and in relation to its strategic housing role. This includes: -

- assessing needs, identifying priorities and planning for the delivery of affordable housing
- standards of housing management across both the social sector and the private rented sector
- homelessness and housing advice
- housing support and aids and adaptations

## Housing Challenges

Housing challenges in 2020 were not surprisingly dominated by the immediate issues thrown up by Covid-19, the consequences of which are continuing to play out in 2021. This has disrupted the housing market, delayed development, postponed evictions and seen a huge response to bring rough sleepers in, off the streets. It has also seen many people falling into difficulties with employment, debt and rent arrears and has brought tensions to the surface which have resulted in, amongst other things, mental health challenges and an increase in domestic abuse. There has been a rapid acceleration in remote working with many more people working from home and there are noticeable impacts on the housing market with a premium being placed on outdoor space, a preference for houses over flats and for less crowded areas.

Prior to the onset of Covid-19 there were already some significant challenges for housing strategy to address. These have not gone away and in many instances, there is an added impetus to tackle these issues as we recover from the pandemic. Building safety remains high on housing agendas in the continuing aftermath from the Grenfell Tower tragedy and there are still many difficult questions regarding the cladding scandal, particularly in relation to leaseholders. The government has reiterated its determination to build back better; affordability is a continuing challenge and the need to increase the availability of affordable homes continues to grow; housing standards across sectors, social housing regulation and the ability of tenants to have their voice effectively heard remain prominent issues.

The government is placing clean growth and the UK's target to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 at the heart of economic recovery. The falling cost of renewables, growing public pressure around climate change and the push for a green recovery is boosting decarbonisation plans. A drive towards decarbonising housing is gathering pace.

Normalising service delivery following the Covid-19 pandemic and addressing climate change are two driving issues which cut across the various services and priorities. In addition to these two key issues, the following five draft priorities have been identified:

- Priority one: Place Shaping
- Priority two: Increasing Access to Affordable Housing
- Priority three: Leading on Improving Housing Standards
- Priority four: Embracing the Charter for Social Housing Residents
- Priority five: Supporting Independent Living

## Current Legislative and Policy Context for Housing

A synopsis of the policy and legislative context for housing is included at appendix 1. Key changes include: -

- Fire Safety Act 2021
- Building Safety Bill
- Charter for Social Housing Residents
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Planning reforms
- Climate change requirements including Future Homes Standard

- First Homes

## **Place Shaping**

The amount, type, and quality of housing available in an area sits alongside a whole host of other elements and characteristics that go to make up what an area is like and how it works. These include other parts of the built environment, open spaces, jobs, schools, leisure activities, people, communities and organisations. This part of the strategy is concerned with how housing impacts on and contributes to wider aims and ambitions of the council for Hillingdon as a whole.

Planning, corporate services and many other parts of the council and partner organisations are involved in place shaping. Housing services are involved with both homes and their environments and the people living in those homes. This dual aspect means that it has connections to a large number of other service areas concerned with both people and place.

Housing services are engaged in managing homes; building and enabling the provision of new housing; preventing and responding to homelessness; and addressing private sector housing standards. In addition, housing has strong links including planning, the physical fabric of homes and community spaces, energy use, fuel poverty and sustainability, the economy of an area, social care and the needs of vulnerable people and specific groups such as older people and care leavers, health and wellbeing, crime and anti-social behaviour; substance abuse, poverty and community cohesion.

Our homes and wider environments can have significant impacts for wellbeing, including on our mental as well as physical health, on education and employment outcomes and on our experience of crime and anti-social behaviour. Our homes also have significant impacts on environmental sustainability.

### Health and housing and the impact of Covid-19

There are substantial links across the housing, health and care spectrum. Healthy homes promote good physical and mental health and good health depends on homes that are safe and free from physical hazards.

Poor quality and inadequate housing contribute significantly to health problems such as chronic diseases and injuries and can have harmful effects on childhood development. The link between housing standards and health is well established with poor stock condition and overcrowding responsible for adverse health outcomes. The prevalence of falls in the home and the nature of treatment and care where falls occur can impact on levels of dependency and resulting demand for specific types of accommodation, care and support.

Poor housing conditions have been highlighted as a key factor in the spread of Covid-19. This is partly related to overcrowding. There is a greater likelihood of overcrowded households being located in more deprived areas, and there is an increase in overcrowding among low-income households. They are also more likely to contain a vulnerable person.

Overcrowding is the most common reason for general housing register applications and housing transfer applications in Hillingdon. In response, it is proposed that the council seek to increase

the proportion of social housing lettings made to overcrowded households.

Other risk factors include damp and mould and cold homes. Damp conditions raise the risk of respiratory illnesses such as asthma and COPD which in turn raise the risk of having more serious Covid-19 symptoms. Good quality homes with sufficient heating are always important but have been particularly so during the pandemic. Low temperatures can reduce the body's immunity to all viruses as well as favour virus survival. There is also a greater risk of developing community acquired pneumonia and having cardiovascular events. Addressing housing standards, especially in relation to warmth and safety is along with increasing access to affordable homes proposed as a key strategic priority.

### Housing, Climate Change and Sustainability

In March 2021, the council published its draft Strategic Climate Action Plan which set out actions to meet the vision of becoming “the greenest London borough, to protect and enhance the environment and to provide a brighter prospect for future generations.”

Improving the energy efficiency of housing is a vital part of tackling the climate crisis. The Climate Change Committee (CCC) is recommending that all homes achieve an EPC rating of C or above within the next 10 to 15 years. Action to achieve this will include councils and other social landlords ‘decarbonising’ properties and encouraging and facilitating decarbonisation in other tenures. The draft housing strategy will propose that the council take a lead role in achieving carbon reductions in residential properties. The first priority in the council's approach is to reduce the amount of energy used by ensuring good insulation and efficient heating in the council owned housing stock. This approach will in particular target households in fuel poverty and in doing so will address health issues as well as combating climate change.

The concept of sustainability is far broader than addressing climate change encompassing a range of environmental issues as well as issues concerned with the sustainability of communities. The quality of social housing and estate management also make an important contribution to sustainable communities as does working to improve quality and management in the private rented sector. The operation of the social housing allocation policy can play an important role in building communities, as can reducing homelessness and households in temporary accommodation. Promoting general well-being of community also includes understanding the issues that face specific localities, their service needs and preferences and regulating harmful and disruptive behaviours.

Flooding is one particular area of risk that is becoming more significant in Hillingdon. In recent years, surface water flooding has impacted on small groups of residents in multiple locations in Hillingdon. Council services, including housing have been developing Incident Flood Plans to ensure that their services are resilient to flooding and setting out how the service will respond to incidents.

Led by the council's Community Safety Team, localised action is carried out in specific areas of the borough which is targeted and bespoke to address the presenting issues in that area. A local estates fund is available to assist. Housing tenancy management services and repairs and maintenance services are an integral part of local area action groups and, depending on the area and presenting issues, there may also be input from other housing services such as private sector

housing and homelessness prevention.

Secured by Design (SBD) is the official police security initiative that works to improve the security of buildings and their immediate surroundings. Consultation with police new development layouts takes place as part of standard procedures for planning applications. Police are also a key partner in local area targeted as specific parts of the borough.

### Regeneration

In response to concerns raised by residents about building conditions and anti-social behaviour, the council has been exploring ways to improve the standard of residential accommodation on the Hayes Town Centre (Austin Road) and Avondale Drive estates in Hayes. The proposed estate regeneration will also deliver additional housing supply and a high quality public realm.

As options to address management and maintenance challenges facing other estates and blocks are considered, further regeneration proposals will be considered to create good quality homes and neighbourhoods for the future.

### Digital by Design

As we emerge from the pandemic, we want to engage with our communities and understand what is important to them. During the course of the pandemic, there have been big advances in the use of digital methods to engage customers and deliver services. Trends towards more digital working approaches were already in place but have been accelerated because of the pandemic. This has come about through necessity but has also demonstrated where and how digital methods can achieve more than traditional ways of working. As we move forward services will increasingly be 'digital by design' making the most of the advantages offered by digital ways of working while making sure that those without digital skills are not left behind.

### **Increasing Access to Affordable Housing**

The affordability of housing continues to be a major challenge for those setting up home for the first time and for those who need to move to a larger dwelling. The inability to afford housing in the local market is no longer an issue affecting a minority of households but one affecting most newly forming households attempting to access the housing market.

There are in the region of 1,200 new households forming in Hillingdon each year. There is a need for affordable homes of all bedsizes however supply of larger family homes is harder to source and the greatest mismatch between supply and demand is for larger properties. Increasing the delivery of three and four bedroom family homes, is a proposed specific aim of the strategy. More than three quarters of those requiring affordable housing can only afford low cost rented products such as Social Rent and London Affordable Rent.

There has also been a considerable increase in need from people requiring one bedroom. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has been in operation since April 2018 and this, alongside an increased focus on rough sleepers, especially since the start of Covid-19, has meant a significant increase in the number of single homeless people that the council has needed to support into accommodation.

The demand for low cost rented homes is increasing. The number of households on the housing register at the end of March 2021 was 2,735 compared to 2,229 one year prior. Homelessness is widely expected to increase this year as a ban on evictions during Covid-19 comes to an end. The number of homeless people in emergency accommodation at the beginning of April 2021 was 169 and there is a target to reduce this to 100 by the end March 2022. Rough sleepers housed under the governments 'Everyone In' initiative in response to Covid-19 are additional to this. At the beginning of April 21 there were 87 housed in temporary accommodation, of which 40 were in emergency accommodation. These form additional demand pressures.

The early part of the Hayes regeneration will also mean an additional demand for properties to decant residents to allow for works to take place. This will be a temporary pressure. Later phases of the scheme should enable a single move without decant and over the longer term the regeneration will provide increased supply.

There is however a need to respond to short term pressures and to increase the supply of affordable homes over the life of the strategy. Without this, demand will result in additional emergency accommodation placements that are costly to the council and fail to provide a settled home. The housing strategy will propose an increased supply of affordable housing, of which an increased proportion will be for low cost rent, and that this will include an increased proportion of larger homes.

While there are a greater number of households needing affordable housing at low cost rent levels, than needing intermediate housing, there is a need to provide a mix of affordable housing types to meet the requirements of different groups. It is proposed that the housing strategy confirms a commitment to continue to support access to home ownership including through low cost home ownership products and recognises that ownership remains the tenure of choice for many households.

London Living Rent (LLR) can be more accessible than Shared Ownership for those on lower incomes, but it is a longer route to part ownership. First Homes can provide an attractive option for those able to afford them. It is proposed that the housing strategy aim to address needs of households at a mix of income levels, but that this will specifically include addressing the needs of those households with incomes between £30,000 and £50,000.

Hillingdon's recently adopted Local Plan Part 2 requires a minimum of 35% of all new homes on sites of 10 or more units to be delivered as affordable housing, with a tenure split of 70% Social/Affordable Rent and 30% Intermediate (Shared Ownership and London Living Rent). Under proposed changes requiring 25% of housing delivered through developer contributions to be First Homes, they would replace the majority of the Shared Ownership and London Living Rent homes provided through planning obligations. There are some exceptions to this, including Build-to-Rent developments.

Current estimates are for combined council and housing association delivery of new 310 affordable homes during 2021/22, of which 147 are for low cost rent (including a purpose built dwelling providing temporary accommodation for 28 households) and 163 are intermediate housing. In 2022/23, estimated delivery is 518 affordable homes of which 223 are for low cost rent and 295 are intermediate housing.

Continuing council delivery beyond schemes currently programmed will rely on identifying new development opportunities and as sites suitable for development diminish, different types of opportunities will be considered. Regeneration of areas of council housing will have a more prominent role to play in future development.

The Housing Strategy will include a range of methods to increase access to affordable housing and this will include making best use of existing housing as well as new build and acquisition of dwellings. The release of under-occupied homes will be incentivised via incentives and priority on the housing register and a small number of homes are released through the seaside and country homes scheme. Fixed term tenancy reviews take place at a rate of around 20 a month and can also release under-occupied homes. Extensions can provide a good value for money solution to providing larger homes and the suitability of properties to be extended will be considered as they become void.

As properties become available for letting, the opportunity to extend the property to provide a larger home or in exceptional circumstances to meet the specific needs of a particular household is considered.

Given the limited supply of affordable housing, it is important that available supply goes to those who need it. The council's Business Assurance Counter Fraud Team (BACFT) investigates cases of suspected housing fraud.

#### Private rented sector

A key barrier to accessing the private rented sector has been a freeze on Local Housing Allowance rates. This was lifted last year as part of the response Covid-19, and a link to the 30th percentile of market rents was reinstated. Although this link is not being carried forward it has, in the short term meant some fairly substantial increases in the maximum benefit payable. Overall access to private rented sector housing continues to be problematic with rents remaining high. Covid-19 has resulted in many tenants falling into arrears with potential repercussions for landlords and tenants. Build-to-Rent developments in Hillingdon have been priced at the top end of the market and are unaffordable to most newly forming households. The council will work with landlords to consider options to bring empty properties back into use.

#### **Leading on Improving Housing Standards**

The safety of resident's is the council's top priority in relation to housing standards. Prior to the Grenfell Tower tragedy on 14 June 2017, investment in safety measures in the council's housing stock had already been underway which meant that the council was in a good position to step up our response to ensuring safety in council homes. In the three years following the fire, in addition to fire safety concerns, housing standards in general have been brought into greater focus including the investment needed to maintain housing; the requirements to achieve carbon emission reductions and the impact that stock condition has on resident satisfaction. Repairs and maintenance of council and housing association housing is a key area of service delivery valued by residents and is also an area with significant demand and cost pressures.

As well as a greater focus on housing conditions in the social sector, there has been an

increased policy focus on housing conditions in the private rented sector especially in relation to rogue landlords.

Climate change has increased in prominence alongside housing standards with the Committee on Climate Change calling for a near complete decarbonisation of the housing stock.

### New Building Safety Regime

The Council is preparing for the introduction of the new building safety regime. This will include key appointments, the development of a Building Safety case for each higher-risk building, the collation of evidence to establish a 'golden thread' of information for each building and the development of a Resident Engagement Strategy.

The council has acted decisively in prioritising work to council housing stock that is directly concerned with fire safety. An ongoing and up-to-date programme of Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) is in place which includes annual assessments for 11 tower blocks and for 21 sheltered housing schemes, the property types identified as having the highest level of risk; and for 489 medium and low rise housing blocks which have the next highest risk rating.

Works have been completed in those building types considered the highest risk first, with high rise dwellings and sheltered housing prioritised. Safety compliant fire doors have been installed in 3,699 homes and additional installations are being programmed. A range of other fire safety work has been completed or is underway and this includes sprinkler systems which are being installed in all council owned residential buildings 18m and above.

The management of higher risk buildings has also been reviewed to ensure the protection of vulnerable tenants. Personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEPs) are in place for tenants within our sheltered housing schemes and across our high-risk buildings and information in the Premises Information Box (PIB) is kept up to date. Management practices to improve safety including looking at how information is best communicated, changes to the Social Housing Allocation Policy for higher risk buildings, and the use of Estate Regulations are being reviewed and improved.

### Planned works

While safety remains a clear priority, going forward the council will also focus greater attention on the overall quality and condition of council homes and the surrounding areas.

There is an ongoing works to stock programme. Going forward, the level of investment in planned works will increase. Intelligent use of data will inform options for planned maintenance, improvements and retrofitting for improved energy efficiency and carbon reduction, alongside redevelopment options to achieve decent housing stock fit for the future. This work will be taken forward as part of the HRA Business Plan.

Considerations taken into account in prioritising works to stock include areas of statutory compliance; elements that are non-decent or shortly to become non-decent; value for money achieved through spend to save to avoid additional costs accruing due to stock deterioration; and impacts for particular vulnerable households. The requirement for planned works in

sheltered housing schemes needs to be reviewed as part of a wider approach towards future housing for older people.

A proposed project will be completed to analyse costs associated with disrepairs to identify areas of planned work likely to make the largest 'spend to save' impact over the short and medium term.

### Private Rented Sector Housing Standards

The private rented sector has doubled in size in Hillingdon in the last 20 years and provides around 22% of homes in the borough. It now accommodates a more diverse range of households including households with children and many remain in the sector long-term. Housing standards generally have improved across all sectors, but category 1 hazards and Decent Home Standard failures are still more likely to be found in the private rented sector than in other tenures.

The council has a statutory duty to keep the housing conditions in their area under review. Experience suggests that there are concerns regarding standards in the private rented sector in Hillingdon and a need for the council to develop a more detailed understanding of the sector including who owns and lives in the sector, the type and location of housing and its condition. A specification for a private sector stock condition survey and/or modelling will be developed. Specific concerns in the private rented sector include lack of fire precautions, inadequate heating, overcrowding, damp and mould growth and poor housing conditions for vulnerable households.

A risk based approach is taken to responding to complaints and enforcement action. The council is committed to using the resources at its disposal to tackle rogue landlords and this relies on taking a holistic approach across various services within the council and with partner agencies. More formalised structures for sharing knowledge will be established and will inform the development of a more detailed Private Sector Housing Strategy. Where appropriate links will be made with local area, community and neighbourhood work which address concerns in particular localities in the borough.

At 1 April 2021 there were 600 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) licensed in Hillingdon (To be updated), but it is thought that the number which should be licensed is considerably larger. Our estimate is in the region of 4,500 HMOs of which an estimated 1,500 would require a licence. Identifying those HMOs that should be licensed and dealing with licensing applications promptly are priorities for the Private Sector Housing Team.

The council increasingly adopts a robust enforcement stance against landlords who do not comply with their statutory obligations. In response to the Covid-19 outbreak, property inspections and enforcement action has been focused on the most urgent and high risk cases. Priority has been given to ensuring that vulnerable residents are protected.

The Private Sector Housing Team focuses effort on properties where the worst housing conditions are found, which is usually in HMOs. These properties tend to be at the bottom end of the private rented housing market, where the poorest and most vulnerable tenants are housed and typically where standards of management are lowest.

The council will continue to use its enforcement powers including Civil Penalties where appropriate and will work with internal and external partners to take holistic and concerted action to deter those landlords who consistently provide poor standards of housing and management. MHCLG funding secured in partnership with the London Boroughs of Hounslow, Ealing, and Slough council is helping to identify portfolio criminal landlords operating across boundaries.

Officers are currently undertaking a feasibility study to determine if adopting discretionary licensing will raise standards and assist in deterring rogue landlords from managing private rented accommodation. The council is giving consideration to both selective licensing for some parts of the borough and for additional licensing powers.

### Climate Change

Work on decarbonising the housing stock will need to combine the challenges of achieving net zero with potentially revised standards in relation to Decent Homes and Health and Safety. In the short term there is a need to develop a granular understanding of the cost requirements of achieving zero carbon across the council's housing stock before setting out an approach to work towards decarbonising council owned housing stock.

Technology is continuing to develop in relation to energy efficiency and in order to take best advantage of innovation, plans will need to have built in flexibility and a number of pilots are anticipated in advance of rolling out a longer term plan.

During 2021/22 the council will set out an approach to work towards decarbonising council owned housing stock and will work with others to similarly encourage decarbonisation in other housing tenures. For the council's housing stock this will include consideration of the replacement of gas boiler systems; measures to improve energy efficiency including wall and roof insulation; expanding the use of energy efficient fittings such as LED lighting and the installation of renewables. The council will encourage owners in other housing tenures to adopt similar measures

Although actions to address climate change and to address fuel poverty are sometimes in alignment, but it is not always the case and there is a balance to be made between meeting requirements to be warm and safe now and promoting energy efficiency and low carbon energy for the future.

The council has successfully bid for Green Homes Grant funding for local authorities for energy efficiency works to council owned properties occupied by those on low incomes. The Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme is being used to upgrade 2,081 council homes with SAP ratings of E, F and G where households incomes do not exceed £30,000. Upgrades will include loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, LED lighting and replacement of single glazed windows.

In developing the Private Sector Housing Strategy options to improve energy efficiency in the private rented sector will be considered and work will take place to develop an improved understanding of how fuel poverty affects Hillingdon residents.

The council will work with HMO landlords to ensure that their properties are compliant with the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) when they grant a new tenancy to new or existing tenants.

## **Embrace the Charter for Social Housing Residents**

The Social Housing White Paper: The Charter for Social Housing Residents, was published in November 2020 and forms a central plank of the government's response to the Grenfell Tower fire. It lays out plans to move back to a proactive system of regulating consumer standards in the social housing sector, with landlords subject to regular inspections and assessment against tenant satisfaction data. Councils are not, as yet, subject to proactive engagement with the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) and will in future have much closer involvement with them.

### Safety

There is no question for the council that safety remains our primary concern. In addition to aspects of safety relating to the buildings themselves, other aspects of safety include paying close attention to safeguarding issues such as domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour. Further developing our understanding of our tenant profile and risk factors for abuse will help in mapping where there are potential concerns.

### Performance information

The white paper sets out that tenants should know how their landlord is performing, including on repairs, complaints, and safety, and how it spends its money, so that it can be held to account. A set of draft tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs) have been published by the RSH which include both tenant perception and quantitative measures. These are expected to be consulted on and finalised by summer 2022 and to be implemented from April 2023. An annual statement to tenants is expected as a minimum, but the intention is for a much more involved interaction between landlords and tenants and leaseholders. We will review the way that information is made available to tenants, including via our website and in our formal annual report to tenants and will also consider how continuous performance reporting can be made available including via an app. The council is keen to embrace the culture change signalled to be more open with residents in sharing information beyond that provided through the tenant satisfaction measures.

### Benchmarking

The council is a member of HouseMark, a large membership organisation that uses data and insight to improve the operation of housing organisations and help them to achieve outstanding performance. Membership of HouseMark enables the council to participate in STAR surveys (Survey of Tenants and Residents) and benchmarking. Baseline benchmarking data for 2019/20 shows, in general that the council has comparatively low operating costs in relation to housing. Data relating to 2020/21 will be submitted by June 2021. Housemark is well placed to assist in setting a baseline for the council in relation to the proposed TSMs.

An initial STAR Survey was completed in January 2021. Analysis of 1,442 responses from tenants and leaseholders shows positive levels of satisfaction overall. A follow up survey will

take place in Autumn 2021 and thereafter every 2 years as recommended by HouseMark.

### Complaints

The council's corporate complaints procedure sets out how people can complain about any service. Regular reports on complaints and their handling are produced and learning is fed back to inform service improvement.

An initial self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman complaint handling code has been completed and shows that the council's complaints procedure is largely compliant with the code. The complaints policy will be widely publicised through many routes. The nature of complaints will be considered on a quarterly basis to identify areas of concern and potential learning points.

### Listening to our tenants and treating them with respect

Work is already underway to respond to the white paper, and the council is making changes to ensure that residents are much more fully and meaningfully involved in shaping services. There will be a new, proactive consumer regulation regime, with updated consumer standards forming the bedrock. The new regulatory system will be outcome-focused, co-regulatory, proportionate, risk-based, and assurance-based. Primary legislation will be required, and full implementation is still some time off, however the RSH is clear that councils should not wait to respond.

To be assured of compliance with existing consumer standards and to look ahead to expected future changes, an initial self-assessment has been completed and it is planned that this exercise will be repeated on an annual basis. This has assisted in identifying priority areas to be addressed and the results of the self-assessment are feeding into future delivery plans. One of the areas identified is a need to review and further develop our current approach to engagement and develop a comprehensive engagement strategy. A failure to listen to and involve tenants meaningfully is one of the key areas of concern to emerge from the work following the Grenfell Tower tragedy where tenants' safety concerns had not been acted upon.

Key elements of the strategy will include:

- Prioritising engagement in relation to health and safety
- Engagement approaches for different groups, including in relation to protected groups recognised in equalities legislation and vulnerable households and
- Use of new digital methods of engagement.

We intend to transform the way we work with tenants and will implement a new involvement structure which supports wider involvement and promotes opportunities for tenants to challenge and scrutinise our services. Involving our 10,000 council tenants and 3,000 leaseholders in the decisions which affect their homes and local communities is a key priority for the council as a landlord and seeking ways to improve meaningful engagement with our tenants forms a key part of our housing strategy. We aim to treat all residents, with fairness and respect and to take their differing needs into account.

The council is exploring different ways to engage with residents through the use of non-traditional methods and will develop a multi-dimensional communication strategy including

virtual meetings and social media. Increasing digital capabilities can also make significant differences to effective management of housing services for both the council as a landlord and other housing services.

In addition to improving engagement with our own tenants, the council will be considering what further action can be taken to provide further opportunities for other Hillingdon residents to make their views known in relation to housing services.

## **Supporting Independent Living**

The council is committed to protecting vulnerable people and enabling people, as far as possible, to live independently. There is a wide and diverse range of supported housing and housing support available in Hillingdon.

### Homelessness and rough sleeping

Hillingdon's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy runs from 2019 to 2024. The action plan for the strategy is updated annually.

Private sector evictions have continued to feature prominently in homelessness approaches but because of the moratorium are not yet resulting in a need for temporary accommodation. The most common reason for homelessness approaches during 2020/21 was being asked to leave by family. Bookings into emergency accommodation have most frequently been for rough sleepers and this is directly related to the 'Everyone In' response to Covid-19. Other prominent reasons include family evictions, followed by domestic abuse, prison release, victims of anti-social behaviour / violence and care leavers.

The council has continued to operate a full housing advice service throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. A great deal more advice has been provided remotely, online and over the phone, however unlike many other councils, we have maintained a reduced office presence throughout with the ability for homeless people to present in person.

The council contracts with P3 to provide homelessness and related advice for young people aged 18 to 25. The HRA has put housing advice onto a stronger statutory footing requiring a robust and meaningful approach. A new two year contract includes the statutory responsibilities within the HRA, following which a full tender process for the service is intended.

Developments in prevention work seek to particularly target the most common reasons for homelessness. This includes working to better understand the causes of parental evictions: working to achieve DAHA accreditation in relation to domestic abuse, and engaging with landlords to, as far as possible, address the significant risk of increased private sector evictions. There is also an increased risk of unlawful evictions. The extent to which the economy is able to bounce back post Covid-19 will be a significant determinant of future levels of homelessness.

In line with government strategy the council aims to eliminate the need for rough sleeping in the borough by the end of the 2024.

In the interests of public health, the government decided at the start of the pandemic to bring all

rough sleepers in, off the streets regardless of homelessness priority need or immigration status. A large-scale exercise at Heathrow at the beginning of April 2020 resulted in a total of 170 rough sleepers from the airport being housed, including 142 into hotels across London arranged by the GLA. The remaining rough sleepers and any subsequent rough sleepers have been housed in borough unless they have been able to be reconnected to another area. At the beginning of April there were 87 rough sleepers remaining in temporary accommodation in Hillingdon including 40 in emergency accommodation.

Hillingdon has and continues to receive rough sleeper initiative funding. Round 4 for 2021/22 continues to support a multi-disciplinary team including outreach and floating support, dedicated mental health support, additional LBH homelessness prevention staff and social care staff at Heathrow Airport. The funding also enables to acquisition of shared accommodation with high level support and to provide access to the private rented sector. Heathrow Airport have invested in regular security at the airport to intervene early when rough sleepers arrive and assist with reconnection work. The RSI funding for 2021/22 covers a small proportion of this.

This council along with others across London is concerned regarding the future availability of resources and consequent impact on the ability to house those with no recourse to public funds. We are working on a pan London basis to seek resolution to this issue, however the issue is particularly pertinent to Hillingdon as should those with no recourse begin to be moved out of accommodation, there is a strong likelihood of some to them gravitating towards Heathrow.

#### Tenancy sustainment

Housing support for those in general needs housing is provided by the council's Welfare Reform and Tenancy Support Team particularly at the beginning of a tenancy to ensure the tenant is best positioned to live independently, sustain their tenancy in the long-term and avoid the need for high cost interventions. The team provide support with re-settlement including 'setting up a home', arranging utilities, household budget management, acquiring essential fixtures and fittings and advice on basic cleaning routines and 'healthy living'. A significant proportion of casework includes debt management, welfare benefit maximisation and addressing rent debt.

#### Safeguarding

The SAB Board and the Safeguarding Children Partnership Board (SCPB) steer learning and development for the safeguarding environment across the London Borough of Hillingdon and are informed by subgroups and task and finish groups as required. There is housing representation on many of these groups and the level of engagement has increased significantly during 2020/21. Safeguarding partners have faced a period of exceptionally high demand and pressure in consequence of the pandemic and the response has served to highlight the importance of effective multi-agency work.

#### Care Leavers

On average, around 50 care leavers a year require assistance with housing. Care leavers are not automatically placed in social housing and in most instances private sector placements are sought. The Social Housing Allocation Policy does make special provision for care leavers. Care leavers are exempt from the residency requirement qualification criteria. If a care leaver

has an identified housing need, they are awarded an appropriate band according to their need regardless of residency. Care leavers that are considered particularly vulnerable are considered by the Care Leavers Panel, the purpose of which is to assess whether young people are ready to live independently rather than in shared or supported accommodation and manage their own tenancy and financial affairs.

The council's Welfare Reform & Tenancy Support Team recognises that care leavers present a 'high-risk' group in the context of tenancy failure when transitioning to permanent accommodation with the council's managed housing stock. This group of new tenants are prioritised for support from the point of 'tenancy sign up' where support is 'front loaded' to maximise the potential for long term tenancy sustainment by ensuring that the skills and awareness necessary for independent living are in place and are developed.

The council's Housing and Social Care teams are working together to develop a joint protocol to help meet the accommodation needs of care leavers. Good preparation, a gradual transition and flexible ongoing support are considered key to helping care leavers achieve a successful move to independent living. The protocol will seek to minimise unplanned moves and evictions through effective early preparation for independent living and through intervening early where care leavers are at risk of losing their placement.

### Domestic Abuse

The Housing Enforcement & Domestic Abuse Team within Tenancy Services has been established to provide a specialist response to residents with council housing who experience any form of domestic abuse. The Team works collaboratively across key partner agencies to maximise the potential for survivors to stay safely within their own home or to be relocated where presenting risks cannot be mitigated to safe and acceptable levels.

The restrictions imposed to stem to spread of Covid-19 have brought additional dangers to those affected by domestic abuse. There has been a significant increase in reporting to the police, voluntary sector agencies and to the council in relation to domestic abuse.

Households fleeing domestic abuse are provided with emergency accommodation while their homelessness application is assessed. Victims may be supported with a sanctuary scheme to remain in their current property.

The council's housing services are working towards achieving accreditation by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA).

### Learning disabilities

There are some specific concerns regarding existing housing provision for people with learning disabilities in Hillingdon.

- Some of the accommodation presents challenges as people age as it is not suitable for adaptation and there is a need for alternative provision.
- Some of those caring for people with learning disabilities are themselves becoming old and frail and hence there is a need to implement a sustainable housing solution for those that are

currently caring for family members with learning difficulties

- There is a need to develop more detailed knowledge of likely presenting needs over the next few years.
- Existing gaps and likely priorities for new supported housing include small schemes to cater for those with high level needs and particularly challenging behaviour.

## Autism

A review has been underway to understand how the council can improve its customer service to support its local residents with autism and make reasonable adjustments to assist autistic people to access our universal services fairly. The review is considering front line services, including housing, to identify current practice, gaps in service and areas for improvement to make services more autism friendly.

There is a growing body of information regarding housing design in relation to autism i.e. to provide for their sensory needs. Sensory needs can be a huge issue for those with autism and sensitive placements that minimise noise in the dwelling and the neighbourhood can make a big difference, as can the provision of outside space. Those with autism may also find negotiating their way around housing services considerably more challenging than others and some dedicated housing staff with an understanding of autism would be helpful.

Making housing services more autism friendly will be an ongoing process. This will be supported by sustaining an ongoing dialogue with those with autism and relevant agencies. An early action will be to arrange autism awareness training for housing staff.

## Older people

There are an estimated 41,700 people in Hillingdon aged 65 and over. By 2035 the number is projected to grow to 60,500. The oldest age group, those 85+, are the most rapidly expanding age group. Growth is not necessarily reflected in equivalent dependency, however the oldest groups are also those most susceptible to disease and disability, as Covid-19 has made us painfully aware.

The vast majority of older people live in general needs as opposed to specialist housing and most do not plan to move and wish to stay in their current home for as long as possible. Often a housing move is precipitated by a crisis when people are ill. Good housing can reduce the demand for care and support and improve health.

There are 21 council owned sheltered housing schemes in the borough providing 840 homes and a further 20 owned by housing associations providing an additional 644 homes. The borough has a total of four extra care housing schemes. There is not an immediate need for further new extra care provision, but it is expected that additional provision may be necessary by around 2025. . There is a need to look again at the council's sheltered housing stock including supply and demand data and financial performance. As part of the ongoing review of assets in its management, Housing will work with Adult Social Care to identify potential opportunities to repurpose existing general and age-restricted housing sites which could be better used to meet the needs of other specific client groups.

The Better Care Fund (BTF) delivery priorities for 2020/21 include meeting the needs of older people in Hillingdon. A key focus is to support the independence of residents in their own homes in a community setting. The BTF includes the funding available for Disabled Facilities Grants.

A successful pilot Hospital Discharge Grant using DFG flexibilities has become part of the council's permanent offer to support hospital discharge. The grant funds house and/or garden clearances, deep cleans and a range of other home-based activities where difficulties in arranging help can delay the return home of people no longer needing to be in hospital for treatment.

There are some impressive technological innovations happening that can assist older people with living independently for longer i.e. technology that can advance the assistance provided by telecare services. The council will continue to review innovations and assess their costs and benefits to assist with both physical and cognitive decline.

### Disability

The strategy will set out plans to review the current housing offer for people with disabilities, including accessibility and adaptability requirements for new homes, and how to ensure that best use is made of existing housing in relation to disability.

### Mental health

Mental health problems are an ongoing concern amongst housing client groups for both homelessness and landlord services. There is a high incidence of mental health problems amongst rough sleepers. The RSI initiative includes mental health social work support specifically for Hillingdon and Harrow rough sleepers (RAMHP).

Covid-19 has had a detrimental impact on mental health generally. Social care colleagues are working on a rehabilitation pathway to prevent the need for high intensity level services. This includes appropriate support.

### **Consultation**

Following the submission of the draft Housing Strategy to Cabinet in July 2021, a 10 week consultation process will commence. This will include:

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| Publication of the draft Housing Strategy alongside an online survey questionnaire<br>(Written copies/large print will be available on request) |
| A variety of methods to promote completion of the survey will be used including:<br>All staff email, Hillingdon People, Social Media            |

## **Workshops to include:**

### Service users and their representatives

- Autism
- Older People
- Gypsies & Travellers
- Mental Health
- Homeless households and people in supported accommodation
- Council tenants and leaseholders
- Residents organisations

### Council staff

- Housing staff across various services (Homelessness, housing advice and allocation, tenancy services, repairs and maintenance, disabled facilities grants and housing adaptations, private sector housing, welfare support, housing enabling)
- Staff in other services (Social care adult and children's, public health, planning, sustainability, environmental health/Anti-social behaviour investigation team, fraud, housing benefit, finance, education, employment, corporate policy)

### Other organisations

- Voluntary sector (Trinity, P3, YMCA, St Mungos, MIND, Citizens Advice, Debt advice, HIDVA, Women / Community Support services, faith groups)
- Housing Associations
- Landlords
- Other i.e. health providers

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## **Implications on related Council policies**

A role of the Select Committees is to make recommendations on service changes and improvements to the Cabinet who are responsible for the Council's policy and direction. The Housing Strategy is a key policy framework document for the Council.

## **How this report benefits Hillingdon residents**

The accessibility and quality of housing and its management have very significant impacts on the lives of residents. The Housing Strategy aims to prioritise activities resources and to achieve good housing outcomes for Hillingdon residents.

## **Financial Implications**

There are no direct financial implications resulting from the recommendations of this report.

It is important that the Committee considers cost effective proposals that benefit resident

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taxpayers in relation to this review, which would ultimately be determined by Cabinet as part of the Council's broader budget planning process.

### **Legal Implications**

None at this stage.

## Appendix 1

### Policy and Legislative Context for Housing

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| Government target 300,000 homes per annum | Homebuilding is expected to play a significant role in helping to get the economy moving as the country moves forward from the Covid-19 pandemic  |
| First Homes                               | <p>From 28<sup>th</sup> June 2021 First Homes sold at a minimum 30% discount in perpetuity to first time buyers and key workers will be considered to meet the definition of affordable housing for planning purposes and a minimum of 25% of all affordable homes secured through developer contributions will be required to be first homes. This will not apply to sites with full or outline planning permission in place or determined before 28 December 2021, or 28 March 2022 if there has been significant pre-application engagement.”</p> <p>After the discount has been applied, the first sale of the home must be at a price no higher than £420,000 in London or £250,000 elsewhere. Combined household incomes must not be in excess of £90,000 in London or £80,000 elsewhere.</p> |
| Shared ownership new rules                | Initial stake reduced from 25 to 10 per cent. Staircasing from 1%. Landlords expected to fund most repairs and maintenance for ten years in newly built properties. Applies to homes funded through 2021 to 2026 Affordable Homes Programme   |
| Help to buy loan scheme                   | Revamped loan scheme 2021 to 2023. The plan is for the scheme to end completely by 2023   |
| Mortgage guarantee scheme                 | Launched April 2021 to help increase the supply of 5% deposit mortgages through a government backed guarantee on 95% mortgages until 31 December 2022.  |
| Use of RTB receipts                       | Period in which they can be used extended to 5 years and can fund up 40% of costs. Can be used for homes built or acquired for shared ownership or First Homes as well as affordable or social rent. Limits will apply on proportion that can be used for acquisitions from 2022/23   |
| Stamp duty holiday                        | Relief up to threshold of £500,000 applies to end of June, then £250,000 to end of September and then back to £125,000 from 1 October   |
| Planning changes                          | <p>Permitted development rights for upward extensions.</p> <p>Amended local housing need methodology</p> <p>Planning for the Future White Paper:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Plan for growth areas, renewal areas and protected areas</li> </ul>   |

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy to be replaced by nationally set flat charge</li> <li>- Additional homes through PDRs within scope on proposed levy</li> </ul> <p>From August 2021 new broad PDR amends some existing commercial to residential and will allow very many properties in Class E to change to residential including retail and other town centre uses.</p>   |
| London Plan                              | <p>In force from March 2021. Strategic target 50% affordable. Fast track route for schemes that deliver at least 35% affordable. Public sector sites and former industrial required to deliver 50% affordable.</p> <p>Sets new homes target for Hillingdon of 1,083.</p> <p>New buildings to be constructed to 'zero-carbon' standards. Urban greening promoted.</p> <p>Intermediate rented products required to be affordable up to £60,000. London Living Rent cap at £1,400 a month.</p> <p>Low cost ownership products required to be affordable up to £90,000 To be considered affordable rent and service charge should be no greater than 40 per cent of net household income (with net income assumed at 70% of gross).</p>  |
| Building Safety                          | <p>Use of combustible materials banned, clearer guidance on existing regulations, mandatory sprinklers in flats over 11 metres.</p> <p>Fire Safety Act 2021 – makes clear that external wall systems, balconies and flat entrance doors fall within the scope of fire safety legislation. Responsible person for the building needs to update their fire risk assessment and implement a fire safety management system.</p> <p>Building Safety Bill – published in draft form last year and included in Queen's Speech 11 May 2021. The Bill will introduce a new regulatory regime, to enhance the fire and structural safety of new and existing residential buildings. A system of 'gateways' will be introduced. The new regime is not expected until 2023, however gateway one is to be introduced from 1 August 2021 by way of amendments to the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (as amended). The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) will become a statutory consultee on relevant planning permissions and a fire statement will need to be submitted with and application.</p> |
| Climate change and decarbonising housing | <p>The UK has set in law an ambitious target to bring all its greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.</p> <p>The Clean Growth Strategy 2017 includes several targets to improve energy efficiency; including upgrading Energy Performance Certificates (EPC) to a band C by 2035 for as many existing homes as possible (where practical, cost effective, and affordable).</p> <p>On 16 January 2020 the council declared a climate change emergency and laid out its intentions for the borough to meet ambitious targets to become carbon neutral by 2030.</p> <p>The Mayor's London Environment Strategy 2018 commits London to</p>   |

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|  | becoming a zero carbon city by 2050.  |
| Future Homes Standard  | <p>Draft regulations propose banning fossil fuel fired boilers in new homes from 2025 with a carbon emissions reduction of 75% to 80% compared with current standards. By 2025 new homes delivered will need to be zero carbon ready, so now The government have set out details of an interim step of a 31% reduction that will take effect from June 2022.</p> <p>A further consultation proposes new energy and ventilation standards for new building as well as addressing overheating in residential buildings.</p>   |
| Fuel poverty   | <p>In Feb 2021 the government published the updated fuel poverty strategy, Sustainable Warmth: Protecting Vulnerable Households. This includes the Low Income, Low Energy Efficiency (LILEE) measure of fuel poverty. A household is fuel poor if it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Has a residual income below the poverty line (after fuel costs) and</li> <li>- Lives in a home that has an energy efficiency rating below Band C</li> </ul>  |
| The Charter for Social Housing Residents<br><br>Social Housing White Paper | <p>A Social Housing Green Paper published in 2018 was followed by a Social Housing White Paper in November 2020. This sets out a new Charter for what every social housing resident should be able to expect.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To be safe in your home</li> <li>2. To know how your landlord is performing</li> <li>3. To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly</li> <li>4. To be treated with respect</li> <li>5. To have your voice heard by your landlord</li> <li>6. To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in</li> <li>7. To be supported to take your first step to ownership</li> </ol> <p>The Social Housing White Paper also sets out plans to review the Decent Homes Standard.</p> |
| Domestic Abuse Act 2021  | <p>The Domestic Abuse Act will establish a Domestic Abuse Commissioner; to improve the effectiveness of the justice system in providing protection for victims of domestic abuse and bringing perpetrators to justice; and strengthen the support for victims of abuse by statutory agencies.</p> <p>The Act includes a duty on Tier 1 local authorities (the GLA for London Boroughs) to provide support for victims and their children within safe accommodation.</p> <p>The Housing Act 1996 Part 7 is amended to provided that applicants who are homeless as a result of being a victim of domestic abuse have 'priority need' for accommodation; and to incorporate the definition of</p>   |

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|  | 'domestic abuse', as defined in the Domestic Abuse Act. |
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