

Housing Strategy Development and Consultation

Committee name	Environment, Housing and Regeneration Select Committee
Officer reporting	Mark Billings, Debby Weller. Planning, Environment, Education and Community Services
Papers with report	None
Ward	All

HEADLINES

The Environment, Housing and Regeneration Select Committee were given the opportunity to feed into the development of the draft Housing Strategy at their meeting on 8 June 2021. As part of the broader public consultation, the Select Committee has a further opportunity to provide more formal comments to Cabinet to consider before any final strategy is recommended to Full Council for adoption. The formal consultation period runs for ten weeks from 19 July 2021 to 26 September 2021. A copy of draft is available on the Council's website consultation [pages](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Committee:

- 1. Note the contents of the report and make formal comments for Cabinet to consider**

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1. 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. The Strategy identifies key challenges and sets out priorities for the coming 5 years. It takes account of and is compliant with national policy and legislation and the London Housing Strategy 2018: Homes for London.

Housing Context and Challenges

2. Housing challenges in 2020 were dominated by the immediate issues thrown up by Covid-19, the consequences of which are continuing to play out. 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,

and a preference for houses over flats and for less crowded areas.

3. 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. 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.
4. 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.
5. Many of the recent and forthcoming policy and legislative changes affecting housing are related to:
 - An ongoing need for more affordable homes and the desire to Build Back Better following the pandemic
 - The impact that the Grenfell Tower tragedy has had and continues to have in relation to safety and wider housing standards, housing regulation and the relationship between landlords and tenants
 - The increasing prominence of climate change and the wider sustainability agenda
 - A further notable change is the introduction of Domestic Abuse Act 2021

Housing Strategy Priorities

6. The draft Housing Strategy identifies normalising service delivery following the Covid-19 pandemic and addressing climate change as two driving issues which cut across the various services and priorities. In addition to these two key issues, the following five priorities are 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

Place Shaping

7. The place shaping priority is concerned with looking at the needs of an area as a whole. A key theme is the relationship between housing and health, which has been brought into sharper focus by Covid-19 which revealed an unequal impact related to housing circumstances. Housing is recognised as a key determinant of health outcomes. Other issues relate to the climate and sustainability agenda including issues around flooding and to designing out crime and using data to better understand local issues.

Place shaping

Key outcome: Housing services contribute to ensuring inclusive, greener and sustainable places

Aims

- Assist in shaping the built environment at a local level and collaborate across health, social care and housing sectors to create healthy places and improve wellbeing.
- Improve living standards through investment in stock condition and access to affordable homes.
- Prioritise actions to address fuel poverty.
- Identify and understand conditions and the local context, including environmental concerns such as flood risks that housing in the borough faces.
- Design and implement affordable and socially acceptable retrofit climate change adaptation measures.
- Work in partnership to identify priorities and take part in local area action.
- Take a 'Digital by Design' approach to improving service delivery.
- Improve the security of homes and their immediate surroundings.

Actions include:

- Contribute to the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Review lettings arrangements to increase lettings to overcrowded households
- Identify areas at risk of flooding and increase flood resilience
- Make more use of mapping to understand the spatial dimension of housing issues
- Contribute to local area action from a housing perspective

Increasing Access to Affordable Housing

8. The strategy aims to increase access to affordable housing in both the social and private rented sectors. There is a need for more affordable housing and in particular larger family homes for rent. A relatively small but steady supply of four bedroom homes is needed and a much larger regular supply of three bedroom homes. While demand for single bedroom properties is numerically the largest, supply of these homes in both the social and private sector is also more prevalent and the mismatch is therefore not as great as with larger dwellings. There is not one single initiative that will achieve the required increase in supply, but a concerted approach, looking in detail at the methods deployed and stages involved to maximise delivery by the Council and partner organisations. As well as new development, this includes making best use of existing social housing and accessing properties in the private rented sector.

Key outcome: An improved ability for Hillingdon residents to access good quality affordable housing

Aims

- Increase the provision of new affordable housing
- Take forward regeneration proposals to provide more, good quality, affordable housing
- Increase the proportion of affordable housing delivered as low cost rented housing to meet predominant housing need
- Include within Low Cost Home Ownership (LCHO) provision properties aimed at those with household incomes of £30,000 to £50,000

- Maximise the availability of larger family homes of three and four bedrooms or more to rent at affordable levels.
- Prioritise ensuring the availability of housing to facilitate the progress of regeneration projects and to avoid the use of temporary accommodation for homeless households
- Release more under-occupied social rented properties for use by families
- Make best use of existing housing for instance, through transfers, conversions or extensions

Actions include:

- Maximise contributions via planning and embark on a local plan review
- Plan use of RTB receipts, including a continuing buy-back programme
- Increase council build programme and work with RPs and GLA
- Consider new regeneration options
- Increase low cost rent, provide some LCHO including for earners £30k to £50k
- Review social housing allocations
- Develop policy and register for LLR and other intermediate products
- Continue bespoke service for downsizers
- Review fixed term tenancy arrangements
- Consider extensions and conversions
- Continue to work with the fraud team

Leading on Improving Housing Standards

9. A central commitment of this strategy is to address housing standards. It is proposed that there be an increase in investment in existing Council housing and in particular those elements that relate to safety, compliance and works to address climate change and fuel poverty. The strategy asserts that the Council is ambitious and seeks to set an example in responding to climate change. A Council regeneration programme is underway and further housing led regeneration is expected to follow. We are also determined to tackle poor standards in the private rented sector. We will focus efforts on higher risk properties and will consider options for introducing further licensing arrangements.

Key outcome: Decent, safe, good quality housing across housing tenures

Aims

- Continue to prioritise fire safety in works to and the management of the council's housing stock
- Increase investment in the council housing stock prioritising additional safety elements, compliance and works to address climate change and fuel poverty agendas
- Be prepared to meet the requirement of the new Building Safety regime
- Develop plans to decarbonise housing across tenures, starting with quantifying the requirements to achieve zero carbon in the council's housing stock
- Help low income households to reduce energy expenditure in their home
- Maximise the number of council owned homes with a Band C energy performance rating, or higher
- Develop a more detailed understanding of housing conditions in the public sector and establish a road map to ensuring that all council housing stock meets good housing standards

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- Develop a more detailed understanding of housing conditions in the private sector to inform future policy options including for discretionary licensing
- Work collaboratively across services and agencies and take a robust enforcement approach to combating rogue landlords

Actions include:

- For Council housing works prioritise fire and other health and safety, compliance and heating and insulation
- Improve customer insight across high risk buildings and restrict lettings to those who can self-evacuate
- Analyse costs of day to day repairs associated with disrepair to identify spend to save works
- Develop HRA business plan and Asset Management Strategy
- Develop a specification for private sector stock modelling
- Formalise structures for a joined up approach to the private rented sector
- Continue to use enforcement powers as appropriate
- Consider the feasibility of different licensing options
- Develop understanding of what would be required to achieve zero carbon across the housing stock and set out an approach towards decarbonising council housing stock
- Deliver green home grants work to council stock
- Investigate funding for Colne Park Traveller site

Embracing the Charter for Social Housing Residents

10. The Charter for Social Housing Residents provides an opportunity to renew our relationship with tenants and leaseholders. We are undertaking a fundamental review of how we engage and what we engage about. In doing this we will be informed by our residents, aim for open communication and take full advantage of new digital methods while taking care to ensure that vulnerable residents are not excluded.

Key outcome: The council working together with residents delivers high quality housing services

Aims

- Meet consumer regulation standards
- Build up a more comprehensive profile of our tenants to inform service delivery
- Review how we make information available to residents and what information is provided
- Ensure that the residents' voice is heard at every level from policymaking to front line delivery
- Develop a comprehensive engagement strategy for greater meaningful engagement with council tenants and leaseholders.
- Implement a new structure to encourage wider resident involvement, scrutiny of our services and greater accountability and transparency
- Seek additional opportunities to improve service delivery through digitisation

Actions include:

- An annual review of Fire Safety Management Plans
- Establish a hoarder's panel
- Review structure for engagement and develop a comprehensive engagement strategy

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- Develop engagement strategies related to higher risk buildings
- Complete annual self-assessments against regulatory standards
- Develop a range of methods to capture data regarding our residents and keep it up to date
- Improve customer insight including via the STAR survey
- Set a baseline against the Regulator's proposed tenant satisfaction measures
- Consider residents feedback in developing our approach to investment in shared areas
- Analyse and review complaints regularly
- Identify further opportunities to deliver online services
- Complete post occupancy surveys of affordable housing developments
- Explore how better to engage private sector residents

Supporting Independent Living

11. There is a particular need in the short term around housing homeless households. This is because we aim to reduce the use of temporary accommodation, at the same time that there is an increased demand for temporary accommodation for those affected by regeneration and there is a big risk of increased private rented sector evictions. The pathway around single homeless people and rough sleepers has developed considerably with strong local partnerships having been built up and we aim to further develop the pathway, particularly in relation to those with higher support needs. There is also a specific challenge in relation to those without recourse to public funds.
12. The Strategy reasserts the Council's support for people to live independently as far as possible. In supporting vulnerable groups, housing and social care colleagues work closely and are continually developing our joint processes and procedures. Partnership arrangements continue to strengthen around safeguarding vulnerable people. We are developing joint arrangements in respect of care leavers and are working towards DAHA (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance) accreditation in relation to domestic abuse. We will also be looking at how we can better tailor housing services for those with autism, learning disabilities and disabilities more generally. Existing Council provision for older people will be reviewed.

Key outcome: Hillingdon residents are supported to live as independently as possible

Aims

- Reduce homelessness and rough sleeping
- Support people to sustain tenancies
- Increase awareness and action regarding adult safeguarding
- Achieve sustainable housing solutions for care leavers
- Become Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accredited
- Develop housing plans to support the independence of residents with learning disabilities and/or mental health needs
- Develop autism friendly housing services
- Review existing dedicated housing provision for older people
- Plan for retrofitting of existing housing to address needs for adaptations, including for dementia
- Review the use of grants to support independent living

Actions include:

- Understanding housing and support needs of client groups
- Investigating causes and solutions for family and friend evictions
- Focus rough sleeper work on higher level support, building our partnering arrangements and providing low support HMOs
- A move on panel to ensure movement through the housing pathway
- Track outcomes for the target 1,000 rough sleeper cohort
- Engage with safeguarding partners and arrange refresher training
- Work towards DAHA accreditation
- Complete housing and social care protocol for care leavers
- Develop a supported accommodation plan for people with learning disabilities and mental health needs
- Establish a working group to consider autism friendly housing services
- Complete a review of council owned sheltered housing
- Investigate further measures to provide attractive downsizing options
- Establish a group to look at options to meet the needs of disabled people including a design code and how to increase the provision of evacuation lifts.

Consultation

13. Considerable informal consultation was carried out prior to a complete draft being presented to Cabinet. The formal consultation process includes the following elements.

- All staff email – A notice and a follow up reminder has been placed in the all staff email to encourage staff to complete the survey.
- Hillingdon People – An advertisement was placed in the July/August edition of Hillingdon People directing residents to the online survey.
- Social media – Posts are being made on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and Nextdoor. Engagement has been good with a reach of 13,612 and 529 link clicks.
- Online survey – An online survey is available on the council website 'Have your Say' page. The survey has been sent to a wide range of colleagues across the council and in partner organisations and to residents who have confirmed that we may contact them in this way.
- LBH front line staff workshop – A consultation workshop with front line housing staff took place on 12 August 2021.
- LBH meetings for key staff related to the five priorities – Five individual meetings are being arranged with a small number of key staff related to each of the strategies priorities. This will focus in particular on specific actions and key performance measures and to begin planning for implementation
- Homelessness Forum – An online forum was held on 11 August 2021 focussed on the Housing Strategy Consultation. A wide range of statutory and voluntary organisations concerned with homelessness and related areas attended including mental health, older people, migrants, domestic abuse, disability and access to employment.
- Landlord Forum – An online forum with landlords has been set for the 14 September 2021. This will include an agenda item on the Housing Strategy Consultation.
- Tenant and leaseholder service user workshops – dates have been set for two sessions, one day time (16th September) and one evening (2nd September)

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- Service user meetings – Trinity and P3 have agreed to host consultations sessions with service users. A Housing Strategy consultation item has been included on the Autism Partnership Board meeting on 21 September 2021.
- A Community Services Network meeting discussed the housing strategy on 1 September 2021. This included representatives from H4All, local churches, residents associations and others from the voluntary sector community.
- Housing Associations Meetings – a number of individual meetings are being arranged with some of the housing associations with the largest housing stock holdings in Hillingdon, those that are most active and some specialist providers

Emerging results from the consultation

14. Up to 1 September 2021 the online survey has generated 57 responses. The proportions so far agreeing or disagreeing with the priorities and aims are as follows:

Table One

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1 – Place Shaping	32%	30%	16%	14%	9%
2 – Affordable housing	33%	39%	14%	4%	11%
3 – Housing standards	35%	42%	14%	2%	7%
4 – Charter for social housing residents	39%	30%	18%	4%	11%
5 – Supporting independent living	47%	25%	14%	5%	9%

15. The survey respondents up to 1 September 2021, are made up of 32% council tenants, 2% in temporary accommodation, 18% private tenants, 9% housing association tenants and 40% owner occupiers. A majority are female - 58%, 32% are male and 11% prefer not to say. The most prevalent age bandings of respondents are 35 to 44 and 45 to 54. Only one respondent is under 25.

16. All five priorities have received predominantly favourable responses, with the strongest support for the priorities related to housing standards, independent living and affordable housing. Recurrent themes in the comments include:

- The need to address poor property conditions in existing council and housing association homes
- Affordable housing to be truly affordable, but also to include options for younger, working, low and middle income earners to access housing options including via the housing register
- Ensuring good quality and space standards, indoor and outdoor in new developments
- Actions need to be measurable and delivered. Identifying outcomes, staff, resources and timescales.
- Need for a strong focus on sustainability and for consideration of wider impacts of housing i.e. noise, traffic, pollution, availability of GPs, schools etc.

- Need for more wheelchair/accessible properties for disabled people under 60 as well as for older people
- Those overcrowded wait too long for housing. Some needing 3 bedrooms would accept 2
- Treat people as human beings who deserve to be listened to, not rushed and offered choice
- There is a need for additional support and AI and machine learning needs to be harnessed to assist those who are vulnerable.

A sample of other emerging results from the various consultation workshops and meetings includes:

- A need for greater support for those in temporary accommodation prior to a tenancy sign up to help reduce tenancy failure
- A need for more upstream work to be done with hospitals to prevent homelessness on discharge
- Consider assistance with deposits for working households to free-up social housing
- Form closer working relationships with housing associations to work collaboratively i.e. in relation to under-occupation and over-crowding
- Consider bringing JCP into the service in the form of clinics and work collaboratively alongside housing services, to address issues related to unemployment, UC claims and affordability issues including those linked to furlough.
- Sub-dividing of properties and a lack of proper facilities such as water pressure needs to be looked at in relation to addressing private sector standards. Flats above shops in a poor condition and converted outbuildings are further areas of concern.
- Concerns regarding office to residential conversions and the standard of accommodation provided
- Ongoing issues in relation to cladding
- Family homes being lost through conversion to HMOs
- The likelihood of increased homelessness, with evictions restarting
- A build-up of unsustainable debt
- Much market housing, being small and sold to investors off plan that the council has little influence over
- Concerns regarding those with mental health problems exacerbated by circumstances related to Covid and employment issues
- A big increase in co-morbidity, particularly drug and alcohol problems and mental health
- What additional support can be provided the community to help sustain tenancies
- Suggestion that the strategy makes greater reference to a Trauma Informed Approach across voluntary and statutory services
- The local authority working towards DAHA accreditation is seen as a positive move

17. An update on the consultation will be given verbally at the meeting and following the consultation end, the results will be collated and summarised in a report to accompany the final draft strategy which will be reported to Cabinet on 11th November and to Full Council for sign off on 13th January 2022.

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 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

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report to the Environment, Housing and Regeneration Select Committee 8th June 2021