

# HILLINGDON'S HOUSING STRATEGY 2021 - 2026

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<b>Cabinet Portfolio(s)</b>	Cabinet Member for Environment, Housing and Registration
<b>Officer Contact(s)</b>	Debby Weller / Mark Billings / Dan Kennedy – Planning, Environment, Education & Community Services
<b>Papers with report</b>	Appendix 1: Hillingdon Housing Strategy Consultation Report <b><u>Appendix 2: Hillingdon Housing Strategy 2021/22 to 2025/26 – circulated separately on Separate Appendix Pack B</u></b> Appendix 3: Minutes of Environment, Housing and Regeneration Select Committee, 14 September 2021

## HEADLINES

<b>Summary</b>	<p>This report sets out the results of formal consultation process for the draft Hillingdon Housing Strategy for the next five years.</p> <p>The report submits to Cabinet a final Housing Strategy document for it to recommend to Full Council in January 2022 for adoption.</p>
<b>Putting our Residents First</b>	<p>This report supports the following Council objectives of: <i>Our People; Our Built Environment; Strong financial management.</i></p>
<b>Financial Cost</b>	<p>There are no direct financial costs relating to this report</p>
<b>Relevant Select Committee</b>	<p>Environment, Housing and Regeneration Select Committee</p>
<b>Relevant Ward(s)</b>	<p>All wards</p>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet:

- 1) **Considers the outcome of the Housing Strategy consultation process as outlined in Appendix 1 and;**
- 2) **Formally recommends the Hillingdon Housing Strategy 2021/22 to 2025/26 set out in Appendix 2 to full Council for adoption as a policy framework document.**

## **Reasons for recommendation**

The Housing Strategy is a key policy framework document for the Council and provides the Borough's strategic direction and priorities for housing services.

## **Alternative options considered / risk management**

The alternative options available to Cabinet are not to endorse the Housing Strategy or to require further amendments prior to formal approval.

Without a Strategy, the Council would not be able to make clear its priorities in relation to housing and assist in the development and performance management of work streams, provide a framework for our work with partner organisations and support funding bids.

The development of the Housing Strategy includes consideration of the wider environment for housing including current challenges and risks for the housing sector and how they might best be addressed.

## **Democratic compliance**

The development of the Council's Housing Strategy has been in full compliance with the Council's constitutional rules regarding policy framework documents, including early engagement and later consultation with the relevant Select Committee, along with a significant public consultation period and timetable set out for its ultimate adoption by full Council.

## **Select Committee comments**

The Environment, Housing and Regeneration Committee were given the early opportunity to feed into the development of the draft Housing Strategy at their meeting on 8 June 2021. The Select Committee had a further opportunity, at their meeting on 14 September 2021, as part of the broader public consultation on the draft Strategy, to provide more formal comments to Cabinet to consider before any final strategy is considered by Cabinet and recommended to Full Council for adoption.

The Committee requested that the Strategy includes a key focus on bringing empty homes back into use, potentially linked with the Council's Buy Back scheme, building relationships with key stakeholders such as housing associations, and downsizing/upsizing tenancies where required. The full minutes from this meeting are included at Appendix 3.

It should also be noted that in support of delivering priority 4 of the Strategy - *Embracing the Charter for Social Housing Residents* - the Environment, Housing and Regeneration Select Committee are currently undertaking an in-depth review into 'Engagement with Tenants and Leaseholders' and will present their findings to Cabinet in early 2022.

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### Background

1. In July 2021, Cabinet approved the Draft Hillingdon Housing Strategy for consultation. A ten-week consultation process followed. This report provides a brief overview of the strategy, the outcome of the consultation process and subsequent amendments to the draft strategy. The final draft is included at Appendix 2.
2. The Housing Strategy is a key policy framework document for the Council, which provides direction and priorities for housing services. The Council has responsibilities for housing both as a landlord and in relation to its strategic housing role. This includes assessing needs and priorities and planning for the delivery of affordable housing; standards of housing and management across both the social sector and the private rented sector; homelessness and housing advice, housing support and aids and adaptation. The Housing Strategy identifies key challenges and sets out priorities for the coming five 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

3. 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.
4. 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 significant issues relating to cladding. 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.
5. 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.

6. 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

### **Hillingdon Housing Strategy Priorities**

7. The 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:

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

#### **Priority one - Place Shaping**

8. The place shaping priority is concerned with looking at the needs of the 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.

#### **Priority two - Increasing Access to Affordable Housing**

9. 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 by the council and other providers, this includes making best use of existing social housing and accessing properties in the private rented sector.

### **Priority three - Leading on Improving Housing Standards**

10. 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.

### **Priority four - Embracing the Charter for Social Housing Residents**

11. 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. The Environment, Housing and Regeneration Select Committee are also undertaking an in-depth review into 'Engagement with Tenants and Leaseholders' in support of this priority and will present their findings to Cabinet in early 2022.

### **Priority five - Supporting Independent Living**

12. 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.

13. 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.

## Housing Strategy Consultation

14. The formal consultation period ran from 19 July to 26 September 2021. This followed considerable informal consultation that was carried out prior to the initial draft. The consultation included a variety of methods detailed in appendix 1 along with the results of the consultation. A positive response was received overall. The only survey confirmed agreement by between 63% and 76% for each of the priorities. The main themes from the consultation were:

- Performance outcomes need to be measured and there is a need to ensure joined up activity, improved communication and active engagement.
- Comments in relation to the place shaping priority were mainly concerned with infrastructure, healthcare provision, access to GPs and other aspects of sustainability to accompany housing development; anti-social behaviour and criminality; and the green / climate change agenda.
- Respondents are concerned regarding an ongoing shortage of affordable housing. They are also concerned that it should be truly affordable and of a good size and standard. Concerns extend to the length of time taken to be housed via the social housing register; that access to the register should be permitted as a result of affordability alone and that support should be given to working households. Access to the private rented sector is also seen as problematic and there is a concern that local housing options should be available, and people should not have to move away.
- Keeping properties in good condition is an ongoing concern. More information needs to be made available to tenants regarding planned works. Poor housing conditions have wide impacts including on health, education well-being and on rent collection. Lettable standards are an issue. There are concerns regarding standards in the private rented sector and that enforcement action needs to be across services. Particular areas of concern are sub-divided dwellings, damp and mould and overcrowding. There is also disquiet regarding standards in new buildings especially in relation to the size of dwellings and new build via permitted development rights.
- Tenants want to be treated with respect, listened to and offered choice. A variety of methods should be used to ensure engagement. Communication is key and tenants should be empowered to do more for themselves. Communication and services for leaseholders need to be taken into account in the strategy.
- There was a consensus that more work needs to be done upstream in collaboration with Voluntary and Community Services as well DWP to help prevent homelessness in particular with cases that involve mental health concerns. This will involve joint working between housing, social care and health providers to act quickly and safely.
- An increase in engagement with the diverse community of Hillingdon will help in understanding their needs and how the local authority can be better situated in meeting their needs through the strategy. Outreach work in the community and faith centres will help reach those who are otherwise forgotten.

15. The full report of the consultation is included at appendix 1.

## Amendments to the Draft Housing Strategy

16. Key changes made to the draft strategy are summarised below:

- Updating of policy context including publication of Building Safety Bill, a new autism strategy and a national disability strategy
- Additional action in the Place Shaping priority – contribute from a housing perspective to the delivery of Hillingdon Strategic Climate Action Plan 2021
- Additional actions in Affordable Housing priority – A review of the current situation regarding the number of empty properties in the Borough and action to address them will be carried out. This will consider good practice in dealing with empty property and will link action to securing nominations for homeless households and potentially to the Council’s buy-back scheme – Downsizing initiatives will continue to be made available. We will also collaborate with Housing Association Partners regarding downsizing and overcrowding solutions. These additions have been included in response to points raised by the Select Committee.
- An action in the Housing Standards priority has been amended to include – The Asset Management Strategy will include consideration of the lettable standard
- Additional actions in the Charter for Social Housing priority – Review the Fire Risk Assessment regime for the HRA flatted estate and document procedures for administering and ensuring compliance with the updated process – Review what information is available to tenants and leaseholders, how it is accessed and how bespoke it is for different groups
- An additional aim and an associated action has been added to the Supporting Independent Living priority – Foster a trauma informed approach to working with vulnerable people
- Sections have been added to the Supporting Independent Living priority relating to refugees and asylum seekers and to young people
- The following text has been added to an action regarding domestic abuse – We will review current approach and partnering arrangements and pathway in relation to domestic abuse

17. Subject to endorsement by Cabinet, the Housing Strategy will be presented to Full Council on 13 January 2022 for formal adoption.

## Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications resulting from the recommendations of this report. The resource implications of the final strategy will be considered as part of the Council’s MTF process which will take into consideration the various funding streams available including the Council’s general fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the availability of external funding streams such as grants from the GLA and Central Government through the MHCLG.

## RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION

### **The benefit or impact upon Hillingdon residents, service users and communities?**

The Housing Strategy sets out identifies key challenges and sets out priorities for the coming five years and has a direct bearing on the Council's vision of 'putting residents first.'

The Council will need to ensure that any policies or decisions in relation to housing take account of requirements under equalities and human rights legislation, including ensuring that policies and decisions do not discriminate against those with protected characteristics, and complying with the public sector equality duty. In developing the Housing Strategy information was collated to understand the demographics of Hillingdon residents, including age, ethnicity, housing circumstances and vulnerabilities. Equality impact assessments will be carried out where relevant and appropriate to do so in the delivery of the strategy.

The online survey as part of the consultation on the draft strategy collected information relating to protected characteristics including gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, marital status, disability, ethnicity.

Male and female responses were broadly similar for all priorities other than for affordable housing where greater support for the priority was expressed by female respondents.

There is little discernible difference in responses by sexual orientation. The majority of respondents are either heterosexual or they prefer not to say, and the responses are broadly similar.

Most respondents were between the ages of 35 and 55. There were small numbers of older people and very small numbers aged under 25. Responses were similar across age groups. There was a slightly higher proportion in the older age group disagreeing with the affordable housing priority, although even amongst this group, there was three times as much agreement as disagreement and as the overall numbers were small, extrapolation is unreliable.

Most respondents identify as either Christian or not religious or no religion. There is no correlation between different religions and different types of response.

Both married and single people were in support of the priorities, however support is stronger amongst single people in relation to place shaping, affordable housing and independent living. A significant proportion, one in four, of respondents were disabled. Disabled respondents exhibit higher levels of support for the place shaping and affordable housing priorities.

Almost half of respondents were White British or Irish or White Other. There were 17% of respondents who ticked preferred not to say in relation to their ethnicity. There was not a discernible difference in responses between groups.

## Consultation carried out or required

A formal 10-week consultation process commenced on the 19<sup>th</sup> July 2021 and end on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2021. The results of the consultation are summarised in the body of this report and a full consultation report is included at appendix 1.

## CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

### Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and concurs with the financial implications set out above, noting that there are no direct financial implications associated with the recommendations within this report.

### Legal

In preparing the local Housing Strategy, it must, pursuant to section 28 of the Greater London Authority Act 2007, be in general conformity with the London Housing Strategy prepared by the Mayor of London.

The Council has a range of statutory duties relating to housing, homelessness and reviewing housing conditions and the proposed policy document sets out the Council's approach to such duties, will assist the Council in meeting such duties and allow members to scrutinise their delivery.

There are no specific legal implications in approving the recommendations.

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Cabinet Report July 2021, Hillingdon's Housing Strategy](#)