

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	16 October 2018
Subject:	Housing Strategy Monitoring Report
Report of:	Head of Community Services
Corporate Lead:	Deputy Chief Executive
Lead Member:	Lead Members for Built Environment and Health and Wellbeing
Number of Appendices:	2

Executive Summary:

The Housing Strategy 2017-21 was developed by an Overview and Scrutiny Working Group and it was adopted by Council in January 2017. The comprehensive Housing Strategy incorporates renewal, as well as two distinct sub strategies: the Homelessness and Prevention of Homelessness Strategy, and the Tenancy Strategy.

The Strategy contains 4 key priorities to meet the housing needs of the borough. These are:

Priority 1: Increasing the supply of housing

Priority 2: Prevent homelessness

Priority 3: Meet the housing needs of specific groups

Priority 4: Improving the health and well-being of local people

Annual action plans are agreed by Executive Committee with regular reporting to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for review of achievements and future challenges. The action plan priorities focus on developments in the service rather than service performance which is outlined in the performance tracking. The decision was taken at the Executive Committee to align the Housing Strategy with the financial year.

This report presents Committee with a summary of the key activities in the first six months of 2018/19 of the 2017-21 Strategy. A more comprehensive update of actions achieved against each of the action plan targets can be found at Appendix 1.

Recommendation:

To CONSIDER the progress made in respect of the outcomes identified in the Housing Strategy Action Plan.

Reasons for Recommendation:

The Homelessness Act 2002 and Local Government Act 2003 require all District Councils to develop a strategy which sets out the Council's policies, commitments and programme for a wide range of housing matters. Following development of the Council's Housing Strategy 2017-21, the Overview and Scrutiny Working Group requested that outcomes identified in the strategy action plan be monitored and regular updates be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Resource Implications:

Staff time and Member time. Resource implications will be met from existing budget allocations and, where they cannot, will be subject to a growth bid within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and a separate report to Members.

Legal Implications:

The Council is required to have a Housing and Homelessness Strategy in place so that its duties under the Homelessness Act 1996 (as amended) and Local Government Act 2003 can be met. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to publish a strategy setting out how it will address homelessness and the Localism Act 2011 places a duty on all local authorities to produce a tenancy strategy.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has been effective from April 2018 and further actions are likely to be added as the new legislation is implemented. The action plan is renewed annually to enable the strategy to flexibly respond to legislative change, and the strategy incorporates the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Risk Management Implications:

The review of activities against the strategy action plan has identified that the aims and objectives of the strategy are being delivered in a timely way. This significantly reduces the risk of not meeting statutory housing and homelessness duties.

Performance Management Follow-up:

The Housing Strategy 2017-21 and associated action plan should be reviewed in January 2019 to ensure that it remains fit for purpose in the future.

Environmental Implications:

There are positive environmental implications in the delivery of the strategy objectives e.g. the strategy supports the delivery of new energy efficient homes and energy efficiency improvements in the existing housing stock across the borough.

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

- 1.1** The Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and Local Government Act 2003 require all District Councils to develop a strategy which sets out the Council's policies, commitments and programme for a wide range of housing matters. The Housing Strategy 2017-21 was developed by an Overview and Scrutiny Working Group and was adopted by Tewkesbury Borough Council in January 2017. A review of the activities against the strategy action plan is undertaken six monthly as requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Working Group.
- 1.2** The Housing Strategy Action Plan achievements and a new action plan for 2018-19 was reviewed by the Executive Committee in January 2018. The action plan includes coordinated activities within Development Services, Environmental Health and Benefit Services as well as those of the Housing Services Team to meet the wide range of objectives within the strategy.

2.0 UPDATE AND KEY ACTIVITIES

2.1 The following is a summary of the key activities, identified within the Housing Strategy 2017-21 which have been achieved April-September 2018.

3.0 Priority 1 – Increasing the supply of housing (for full details see action plan)

3.1 *P1.2 Identify TBC owned land suitable for future Affordable Housing Development and consider use of modular housing where suitable.*

Projects have commenced on two former garage sites at Staverton and Winchcombe. Rooftop have held engagement events in Staverton with the Parish Council and the local community with Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) and Tewkesbury Borough. An application for pre-planning application advice has been submitted regarding the site. Both Severn Vale Housing Society and Rooftop are considering 'Modern Methods of Construction' as their preferred option on the Winchcombe and Staverton sites respectively.

3.2 *P1.4 – Identify long term empty homes and use arrange of enforcement and incentive options to bring vacant homes back into use*

The Council Tax Empty Homes premium was introduced from 1 April 2018 in respect of the 88 properties within the Borough which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than two years. All affected Council taxpayers were written to advising that they could contact the Environmental Health Team for advice on bringing the empty property back into use. Six responses have been received to date. Review of empty homes in the Borough will continue under the forthcoming Empty Homes Strategy. Part of this will include further attempts to engage with empty home owners. All 88 empty properties will be subject to the Council Tax premium.

The agreed new structure in Community Services will include an additional post of Private Sector Officer who will develop the Empty Homes strategy and incentives to bring the homes back into use. Recruiting to this post is likely to take place by the end of December 2018. It is intended for this post will be funded externally via revenue from HMO licencing.

3.3 *P1.5: Evaluate potential for additional promotional activities with private sector landlords to boost availability of homes in the Borough*

New burdens funding associated with the Homelessness Reduction Act was dedicated to a new role within Housing Services to increase the capacity of the team and also to develop a local private sector landlord scheme to increase the accommodation available to residents. The Housing Solutions Officer started with the team in June, and after a period of focus on the new legislation, will commence housing standards training and work on developing incentive policies for the private sector in October 2018.

4.0 Priority 2 – Homelessness and Homelessness Prevention (for full details see action plan)

4.1 *P2.1 and P2.1a Implement changes associated with the forthcoming Homelessness Reduction Bill.*

The new extended statutory homeless duties commenced in April 2018, introducing the largest change in homelessness legislation in 20 years, and resulting in a rise in officer caseloads. As well as the additional member of staff outlined earlier, further completed changes include a new database was launched in time for the new legislation, and Housing Services have been continuing to work with the database provider to improve the processes. We are also continuing to develop the information we give applicants and the individualised online personalised housing plans.

The new duty to refer for statutory agencies (also part of the new act) will take effect in October 2018. It has been decided countywide that we would like to extend the option to voluntary agencies. The mechanism for referral is now functional and a countywide publicity launch will be taking place in November 2018 to ensure that statutory and voluntary agencies are aware of how to make referrals and inviting them to engage in delivering personalised housing plans.

4.2 *P2.1b Reduce statutory full homeless duty acceptances and increase statutory homelessness preventions and statutory homeless reliefs.*

This is a new action to monitor activities across the old legislation and the new legislation. The detailed statistics for the last financial year are detailed on the action plan progress in Appendix 1.

High level performance comparators over the past 5 years are outlined in Appendix 2.

2018/19

The service accepted a statutory duty to 75 residents in the first quarter of 2018. The breakdown of these is outlined in the action plan (Appendix 1).

In the first quarter of 2018 the service achieved positive outcomes to end:

- 33 households under the old prevention regime (those who had applied before April)
- 11 households under the new prevention duty (either to sustain present home or in new home)
- 4 households under the new relief duty (into new home)

And Accepted a full homeless statutory duty to 2 households.

4.3 *P2.1d Work with partners to find solutions for high risk/high support/ multiple needs homeless households.*

The countywide 'Sanctuary Scheme/Target hardening' project for victims of domestic abuse has been recommissioned for a further three years. This scheme has been very successful in preventing the use of bed and breakfast for victims of violence who wish to remain in their own homes.

Gloucestershire has been allocated an extra £271,980 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to expand county wide SIB funded New Entrenched Homelessness Service. 'ACTion Glos' was launched at the end of last year for long-term rough sleepers / repeat users of homelessness services. P3 Charity are delivering the 3½ year service across the county. Since it launched in November 2017, 92 individuals from across the county have received support from ACTion Glos, with more people engaging with services and staying in accommodation as relationships develop and resources are acquired. In addition to the original (SIB) funding of £990,000, made available by central government, the extra funding brings a total of £1.27m to the service and will increase the number of places in the SIB from 110 to 126.

4.4 *P2.3 and 3a – Welfare reform – early intervention, transitional support, assistance to find work. And minimisation of homelessness, particularly following the introduction of universal credit for housing costs.*

At this stage, a large rise in homelessness caused solely by welfare reform has not been noted – although resolving those which have become homeless and are affected by these issues is problematic. This is particularly the case for households in temporary accommodation who would struggle to find work whilst in an area they will not stay permanently (see p.2.4).

The Benefits Team have seen a small but steady increase of customers affected by welfare reform requesting budgeting support. The Benefits Team also provided assisted digital support for customers who require help in claiming Universal Credit. The team is working with the Department for Work and Pensions and other partners to expand our offer to increase PBS take up in locations other than the Public Services Centre.

5.0 **Priority 3 Meeting the housing needs of those who need it most (for full details see action plan).**

5.1 *P3.1 – commissioning Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)*

This action had been delayed pending a standard methodology for calculating housing need through the Draft National Planning Policy Framework Guidance. This has now been confirmed and the county is now in a position to progress the SHMA.

The county group has drafted an invitation to tender document in order to begin commissioning a consultant to conduct the project. The forthcoming work will be known as the Local Housing Needs Assessment.

5.2 *P3.4 profile accommodation support that the council has access to in the County*

Tewkesbury borough is part of the Housing with Care Project board which has recently undertaken a survey aimed at older people as well as those with care and support needs across the county to establish aspirations, needs, income etc. The group is currently analysing the data.

Accommodation based support is profiled by county commissioners. Housing Services will continue to work with county regarding the suitability of accommodation for those who approach in need and support joint bids for funding to meet needs. Following a consultation period, the MCHLG has confirmed last month that housing costs for supported accommodation will continue to be paid through housing benefit which will enable more input locally into the suitability of accommodation.

6.0 Priority 4 Improving the health and well-being of local people (for full details see action plan)

6.1 *4.1a Maintain and promote the Fit to Rent Landlord Accreditation Scheme for landlords wanting to work with the council*

4.1c Monitor Private levels of private sector housing complaints

The Community Services restructure places more emphasis on private sector work and the intention is to refresh the Fit to Rent scheme locally with the new private sector role in the re-structure. Recruitment to this post is likely to be at the end of December 2018. A key duty of this post will be to monitor and resolve housing complaints. Monitoring activity has not been conducted to date due to resource issues.

6.2 *4.1d Identify existing Housing of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and implement new regulations concerning HMOs.*

A new definition of mandatory licensable HMO is now in place. Newly qualifying HMOs require to be licensed by 1 October 2018. Potential HMOs will be written to and targeted with publicity. The Council currently has three licenced HMOs.

6.3 *4.2.a Carry out the actions within the strategy for Gloucester and South Gloucestershire Action for Affordable Warmth 2013-18*

An additional targeted publicity campaign is due to be put in place autumn/winter 2018

7.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

7.1 None.

8.0 CONSULTATION

8.1 None – updates have been provided by the relevant service managers.

9.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

9.1 Housing Strategy 2017-21

10.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

10.1 The main documents driving Government Housing Policy and Legislation are:

- National Planning Policy Framework 2012
- Homelessness Act 2002 and Housing Act 1996 & 2004 (Housing Standards)
- Local Government Act 2003
- Housing and Regeneration Act 2008
- Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (Housing grants, loans and home improvement assistance)
- The Future Home Improvement Agency (CLG 2009)
- Equality Act 2010
- Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England (Nov 2011)
- Localism Act 2011
- The Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013
- Welfare Reform Acts 2012 and 2016
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Housing and Planning Act 2016
- Licencing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (prescribed description) (England) Order 2018

11.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

11.1 None directly associated with this report other than staff and Member time. Any resources associated with the actions in the strategy will form part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and Asset Management Plan. Resources implications will be met from existing budget allocations and where they cannot, will be subject to a growth bid within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and a separate report to Members.

12.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

12.1 The strategy includes considerations of sustainability and energy efficiency in addition to the social and economic implications.

13.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)

13.1 Housing is a basic human need. An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken prior to the Council's adoption of the strategy in September 2016, this is still relevant.

14.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

- 14.1** The Housing Strategy 2017-21 has been approved and adopted by Council in January 2017. The Action Plan for year 2 of the strategy was approved by Executive Committee in January 2018

Background Papers: Existing strategies and policies are available on the Council's website.

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Appendices: Appendix 1 - Housing Strategy 2017-21 Action Plan Update April-September 2018
Appendix 2 – Homeless Prevention, Homeless applications, and Homeless Acceptances (chart showing five-year progress)