

# TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

<b>Report to:</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	9 April 2019
<b>Subject:</b>	Housing Strategy Monitoring Report
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Community Services
<b>Corporate Lead:</b>	Deputy Chief Executive
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Lead Member for Built Environment and Lead Member for Health and Wellbeing
<b>Number of Appendices:</b>	1

## **Executive Summary:**

The Housing Strategy 2017-21 was developed by an Overview and Scrutiny Working Group and 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 four 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 with effect from April 2019.

This report presents Committee with a summary of the key activities during 2018-19 to date, and the changes in activity for year three 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 achievements made to date 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 2017-2021 and associated action plan is reviewed annually by the Executive Committee. The last review in January 2019 introduced updated activities to ensure that our activities in year three continue to meet current challenge. This will be reviewed again in January 2020 to ensure that it continues to be 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 for 2019-20 (year 3) was reviewed in January 2019. 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 2018-March 2019 (although at the time of writing the third quarter activities have not yet concluded and statistical data for this period are not therefore available).

### **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 using modern build methods. A planning application has been received for the Staverton Site through Rooftop, and Bromford have indicated an application will be submitted for Winchcombe by the summer of 2019.

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

New burdens funding was used to recruit a new role within Housing Services to meet additional homeless demand and also to develop a local private sector landlord scheme with the aim of increasing the accommodation available to homeless households.

Tewkesbury Borough led a partnership bid for the Ministry of Communities Housing and Local Government (MCHLG) Private Sector Access funding opportunity (our partnership included Gloucestershire districts and West Oxfordshire). The bid included incentives for PR landlords, the reinvigoration of the fit to rent scheme, and advertising on the Homeseekerplus system. After a protracted bidding period, and ongoing negotiation with the MCHLG, a revised bid was submitted for £566,383 in late December 2018. We were advised on 10 March 2019 that the partnership have been awarded £363,408 for this project. The partnership will meet next week to discuss how to adapt the original project to deliver the objectives with lower funding levels.

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

**4.1** *P2.1 and 2.1a Implement changes associated with the forthcoming Homelessness Reduction Bill.*

This action has been completed following the successful introduction of the new legislation, database, as well as the associated duty to refer, and the appointment of a new member of staff (0.5 full-time equivalent) using new burdens funding. Whilst there is further work to improve our processes as well a further development with the database provider, the service was prepared for change, and Housing Services staff managed the transition seamlessly; delivering the prescribed increased service to homeless households within timeframes outlined in the codes of guidance.

These actions have been updated for the year three action plan.

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

Our partnership work with local authority partners has continued to grow and yield positive results for Tewkesbury Borough residents. Activity of note last year included the successes of the social impact bond (SIB) housing first model, places of safety, the homeless outreach project, target hardening and sanctuary schemes.

It is thought that the success of the SIB reduced the numbers of rough sleepers across the county from 33-40 (on previous years) to 19 in 2018. Whilst media concerns have been raised regarding the MCHLG methodology of rough sleeper counts, it is worth noting that the methodology has not changed for many years. It is reasonable to conclude this year's estimate, therefore, is comparable with previous counts and indicates significant progress.

The MCHLG has released a number of funding opportunities for homeless projects this year and the partners have jointly bid for funding relevant to homelessness in Gloucestershire.

The County Council put in a partnership bid for the Rapid Rehousing funding and were awarded £553,289 to operate two 'Somewhere Safe to Stay' Centres for Gloucestershire (these will be in Gloucester and Cheltenham) which will link in with the countywide homeless single person pathways.

Tewkesbury Borough led on the successful Private Sector Access fund bid for Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire

Stroud District Council is leading on a further Gloucestershire bid to provide move on accommodation (six month tenancies) for victims of domestic abuse who are difficult to move on (chaotic households/households with previous rent arrears).

**4.3** P2.3a *Evaluate the implications of the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) and other forms of welfare reform on housing costs.* This was a new action in year 2 to monitor the effects of welfare reform on residents – and in particular on homelessness.

The demand on Discretionary Housing Payments has increased significantly - largely as a result of Universal Credit - and demand has exceeded the allocation for the year.

No significant rise in homeless presentations have been noted through the introduction of UC alone (without other interactive factors) – although Universal Credit is a relevant factor in many cases.

New Universal Credit claims during homelessness are causing higher costs to the authority whilst in emergency accommodation. This is particularly the case for households in the Gloucester and Cheltenham Job Centre areas.

Benefit capped larger households remain problematic whilst homeless as registered providers are reluctant to accept the large households who cannot afford their rents.

**4.4** *P2.3 Establish options to minimise the risk of homelessness and costs associated with welfare reform*

The Revenues and Benefits Service has offered a personalised budgeting advice for all those affected by welfare reform which has been above and beyond the Government requirements for Universal Credit cases. This will be ending on 31 March 2019, with the service for Universal Support transferring to Citizens' Advice as part of a national initiative. The Benefits team will continue to provide personal budgeting support as part of the discretionary housing payment (DHP) assessment process.

Actions are proposed to limit the number of long-term discretionary housing payment claimants through case management meetings and robust joint action between Benefits and Housing to ensure that households move on to more affordable accommodation and DHP funds remain available for those in crisis.

Prevention initiatives for the private sector for those on Universal Credit will be developed and formalised

Housing Services will continue to encourage social landlords to notify housing if considering eviction – particularly for arrears associated with welfare reform.

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

**5.1** *P3.1 Support the completion of the Local Housing Needs Assessment (LHNA) (previously known as the Strategic Housing Market Assessment.(SHMA).*

Opinion Research Services (ORS) has been commissioned to conduct the LHNA work. An initial inception meeting was held in January 2019 to help identify outcomes. The completion of the assessment is anticipated by December 2019.

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

**6.1** *4.1d Identify existing Housing of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and implement new regulations concerning*

New regulations came into force in October 2018 altering the definition of HMOs which require mandatory licencing. The HMO license fee has been revised to ensure full cost recovery and 11 new applications are currently being processed.

As part of these activities an unlicensed HMO in very poor condition was identified in Tewkesbury resulting in seven prohibition notices on individual units and an improvement notice on the entire building. Affected households needing assistance were rehoused through Housing Services. On 4 February a landlord was prosecuted for not being a licensed HMO and other Housing Act offences. The landlord was fined a total of £6000 which was reduced to £4200 due to the guilty plea.

**7.0** **OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

**7.1** None – this is an update on progress made to date.

**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 3 of the strategy was approved by Executive Committee in January 2019

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**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