

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 23 NOVEMBER 2020

HOUSING REVIEW: FUTURE HOUSING STRATEGY

Executive Summary

Overview and Scrutiny Committee have included a Housing Review as a key item on their work programme for 2020/21. The Review has been split over three sessions, running from September 2020 to November 2020. This report contains sets out our progress in relation to “Session 3: Future Housing Strategy”, providing an initial picture of what our priorities should be over the next 3-5 years based on the reports from the previous two sessions. The direction of travel for each of our housing strategy objectives has been developed in conversation with colleagues in the service areas delivering them.

This report follows on from Sessions 1 and 2, which evidenced significant affordable housing need within Woking Borough along with the difficulties being encountered in addressing this need while also providing examples of how the Council is actively addressing its statutory duty relating to homelessness and working towards greater increases in affordable housing provision.

Recommendations

The Committee notes the report.

The Committee has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

Background Papers: None.

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee have included a Housing Review as a key item on their work programme for 2020/21. The Review has been split over three sessions, running from September 2020 to November 2020.
- 1.2 This report contains an overview of “Session 3: Future Housing Strategy”. This session will look at the following:
 - the strategic context of this housing review and the development of a new Woking Borough Council housing strategy
 - draft objectives for our priorities over the next 3-5 years
 - potential actions to deliver the draft objectives

2.0 Strategic context

- 2.1 This Housing Review will shape the Council’s next Housing Strategy as future trends, key issues and gaps in the services currently provided have been identified.
- 2.2 Session one of the Housing Review focused on the Council’s current position, seeking to understand local demand and the relevant challenges affecting Woking. It was identified that there is an acute need for more affordable housing of all types, sizes and tenures in Woking. Additionally, it was found that the greatest need is for 1 bed units at 43% but there is also a significant need for 2 and 3 bed homes at 31% and 20% respectively.
- 2.3 Session two outlined the delivery of affordable housing in the Borough and the contribution of the Council’s Let’s Rent scheme and Thamesway Housing Ltd (THL) to meeting affordable housing needs. The barriers to the delivery of affordable housing were also explored. This session gave updates on housing projects that are currently underway, including the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) project and the Sheerwater Regeneration programme.
- 2.4 Since the last Housing Strategy was adopted in 2011, there have been significant changes in Government policy and legislation that have affected the housing sector. In addition to this, there remain several consultations, strategies and policy papers that are in the process of being set out by Government, and will play a part in shaping the future.
- 2.5 There have also been a number of local policy updates and changes, including the joint Strategic Housing Assessment (SHMA) with neighbouring councils of Guildford and Waverley published in 2015 and the emerging Site Allocations DPD
- 2.6 The Housing Strategy will be underpinned/supported by the Council’s Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, Housing Allocations Policy and Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

3.0 Objectives

- 3.1 Work has commenced on the drafting of a new Housing Strategy, which is likely to cover the period 2021-2026. Following workshops with a number of key officers and the discussions during the first two review sessions, some early draft objectives and potential actions have been prepared and are included in Appendix 1.
- 3.2 The Strategy will continue to have an overall focus on achieving an increase in the supply of affordable housing whilst making the best use of the existing stock; improving the customer journey across the service; and enabling residents to fulfil their potential.

Housing Review: Future Housing Strategy

3.3 The initial draft objectives are:

- Providing well designed, high quality homes that are affordable and meet local needs;
- Preventing homelessness and helping those in housing need
- Helping people to achieve independence and wellbeing;
- Delivering an improved housing service to our tenants and leaseholders;
- Enhancing choice, standards and quality within the private rented sector.

3.4 No potential actions have been put forward as yet for Objective 3 (Helping people to achieve independence and wellbeing) as it is vital that this dovetails with work on the draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

3.5 Following the conclusion of the Overview and Scrutiny Review, officers will continue to progress the drafting of the strategy with the view to adopting a new strategy by June 2021 (following public consultation).

REPORT ENDS

APPENDIX 1: DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY 2021-2026: EMERGING ACTIONS

Objective one: Providing well designed, high quality, homes that are affordable and meet local needs

- Continue to work with Registered Providers, Thamesway Housing, and private developers to facilitate the provision of 102 new affordable homes each year, as well as, identifying new-build opportunities on council-owned land.
- Deliver the Sheerwater Regeneration scheme to provide a high quality development and community, including the provision of additional affordable housing.
- Explore alternative funding sources for new affordable homes, including accessing more Homes England funding through the Council's Investment Partner status.
- Undertake a strategic review of the Council's Temporary Accommodation portfolio to identify any future development opportunities.
- Review the Council's incentives scheme to further encourage tenants who are under-occupying Council homes to downsize.
- Complete the Old Woking Extra Care Scheme, and identify further needs for elderly person's provision/schemes in the Borough.
- Meet the need for 22 new Gypsy and Traveller pitches already identified in the Gypsy and Traveller Assessment up to 2027.
- Promote high quality design and ensure that all affordable housing meets the Council's design and space standards.

Objective two: Preventing homelessness and helping those in housing need

- Continue to prevent homelessness using a range of tools available, including our Housing Options Floating Support Service and outreach services
- Further develop Personal Housing Plans (PHPs) to become more holistic and with regular reviews/updates.
- Reduce the number of households placed in B&B, particularly outside the Borough.
- Develop and implement an Exit Strategy for households living in temporary accommodation within the Sheerwater regeneration area
- Maintain Housing representation and participation at multi-agency meetings
- Support vulnerable residents through partnership working with local partners, include York Road Project, Women's Support Centre, Citizens Advice, Your Sanctuary, local foodbanks, Surrey County Council, Woking MIND and JobCentre +
- Arrange and co-ordinate an annual Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy meeting
- Provide suitable move-on accommodation for rough sleepers who have been accommodated during the Covid-19 pandemic and prevent their return to the streets.
- Provide new premises for the York Road Project
- Work with identified landlords in the private rented sector to provide accommodation for rough sleepers.

APPENDIX 1: DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY 2021-2026: EMERGING ACTIONS

Objective three: Helping people to achieve independence and wellbeing

Still to be developed

Objective four: Delivering an improved housing service to our tenants and leaseholders

- Bring housing and asset management services back in-house and re-tender the repairs and maintenance contracts, with a strong emphasis on customer service and first-time fix.
- Explore future opportunities to further increase the use of local labour and local businesses in the delivery of the service.
- Maintain properties at a minimum of the Decent Homes Standard.
- Strive to improve and maintain the appearance of our Council-owned housing estates.
- Rebuild the Council’s relationship with its tenants and leaseholders and increasingly involve them in shaping our service offer.
- Constantly seek to improve all housing services through the greater use of benchmarking data and resident feedback.
- Ensure that our approach to tackling anti-social behaviour is effective, robust and fair.
- Increase the focus on tenancy sustainment to maximise income collection and support positive outcomes for tenants.
- Improve the customer journey, including offering greater self-serve options through our new integrated IT system.
- Improve energy efficiency amongst Council-owned stock through our routine maintenance programmes and new development schemes.

Objective five: Enhancing choice, standards and quality within the private rented sector

- Seek to improve conditions in the private rented sector through negotiation and enforcement (where required).
- Improve knowledge of the location and condition of HMOs through street surveys and other records.
- Review publications, advice and assistance for landlords of HMOs, and develop a publicity plan to maximise compliance with mandatory licensing requirements.
- Conduct an impact assessment of the Canalside Selective Licensing Scheme and use this evidence to inform the decision on the future direction when the current scheme ends in March 2023.
- Continue to prioritise fire safety, including working with property owners to ensure any cladding issues are remediated in a timely manner.
- Continue to develop and promote the Council’s “Let’s Rent” schemes to secure more accommodation for homeless households, including through further joint working with Thameswey Housing.
- Bring a minimum of 40 empty properties back into use through negotiation, using enforcement action as a last resort.
- Work with Action Surrey to access and promote the £6.2 million Green Homes Grant.
- Maintain and improve working relationships with Lettings Agents and Landlords, including holding a yearly Private Sector Landlord Forum to disseminate best practice.
- Review our IT systems for Private Sector housing to deliver a more efficient and customer-friendly service.