

Report to Cabinet

21 June 2023

Subject:	Adoption of Housing Strategy 2023-28
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Housing and Built Environment Cllr Laura Rollins
Director:	Director of Housing Gillian Douglas
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Housing Policy and Strategy Lead Officer, Louis Bebb louis_bebb@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval be given to the Housing Strategy for Sandwell 2023-28 as set out in Appendix 1.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The document sets out the Council's housing vision and ambitions for the 5-year period to the end of 2028, showing how we intend to address the key housing challenges affecting our communities.
- 2.2 It sets out the Council's priorities and objectives for meeting housing need and working with tenants and residents to build sustainable and cohesive communities across the borough.
- 2.3 In addition, the document will outline how Sandwell Council plans to meet the current and future forecasts of housing need in the Borough, including specific household groups such as those with care and support needs and people from diverse equalities groups.



- 2.4 The strategy will help meet the issues identified in the Housing Needs Assessment, produced in 2022.
- 2.5 By achieving the strategic housing objectives set out in this strategy we will support the delivery of the commitments in the Corporate Plan 2021-25, specifically on the theme of ‘Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods’.
- 2.6 The Housing Strategy is supported by and links to the council’s Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, but also other emerging strategies and plans where housing has a part to play in meeting the needs and aspirations of our communities.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People Good quality and suitable housing are essential to delivering this objective. The Housing Strategy will also help to steer this objective by providing greater choice on accommodation and location for care leavers in relation to housing support and allocations.</p>
	<p>People Live Well and Age Well The Housing Strategy meets this objective by considering the types of housing needed to support people at each life stage. The document addresses the housing needs for both young people and older people within dwellings. Quality homes will have a positive impact on the lives of children and adults and help residents maintain their independence as they get older.</p>
	<p>Strong Resilient Communities Housing and the quality of the neighbourhood contribute to delivery of this objective. Sandwell has diverse communities made up of differing socio-economic status, race, ethnicity and disabilities. The document recognises Sandwell’s responsibility to invest in housing within the Borough to promote wellbeing and help people live healthy lives - this will continue to create mixed and sustainable communities.</p>
	<p>Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods The Strategy links directly to this priority in the Corporate Plan and expands on how we will deliver and</p>



shape future housing development and ensuring that the right homes are built. It also highlights the importance of raising standards of design, quality and sustainability across the Borough.
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Housing Strategy is an important document in setting out the council's priorities and objectives for meeting the housing needs of our communities.
- 4.2 Although not a statutory document like the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy, it is nevertheless a key strategy in articulating what actions we will take to address and meet diverse housing needs in Sandwell.
- 4.3 This 2023-28 Strategy will replace the 2012 Housing Strategy Statement which set out 4 priorities that remain highly relevant today, namely:
- Making better use of existing housing
 - Improving the quality of housing available
 - Encouraging the building of new homes
 - Protecting and promoting health, safety and wellbeing
- 4.4 The refreshed priorities are:
1. Providing more affordable homes
 2. Making the best use of the homes we have
 3. Quality housing for all
 4. Supporting people's health through housing
 5. Addressing climate change and fuel poverty.
- 4.5 The Strategy was presented to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny (SNAC) Board on 24th November 2022.

Consultation

- 4.6 Public consultation on the draft Housing Strategy ran for a 6-week period from 8th February until 22nd March 2023. Two versions of the Strategy were uploaded to the online consultation page – the full version of the strategy and a summarised version for people interested in the key highlights.
- 4.7 We have shared the draft Strategy with various stakeholders including:



- SMBC members
- Registered providers operating in and with an interest in Sandwell
- West Midlands local authorities
- Black Country Health and Housing Partnership
- Sandwell's Tenant and Resident Scrutiny Group
- Housing and advice organisations in the voluntary and community sector
- Homes England and the Regulator of Social Housing
- Multi-agency Homelessness Forum
- Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)

4.8 In total, we received **36** responses to the Housing Strategy public consultation (both online and through focus group events).

4.9 In the consultation survey, there was a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. A variety of public consultations have helped inform this strategy including:

- Public consultation on strategy – 32 responses
- Consultation events with Sandwell's Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group – 4 responses

4.10 In addition to the public consultation response, there were also formal responses received. Including from partner groups and organisations, registered providers and neighbouring local authorities.

- Black Country Health and Housing Forum
- West Midlands Housing Officers Group (WMHOG)
- Black Country Housing
- Bromford Group
- Midland Heart
- Walsall Council
- Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
- Wolverhampton City Council
- Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council
- Warwick District Council
- Coventry City Council
- Homes England



4.11 Consultation Findings

- Support across all themes and priorities was relatively high, with a large proportion of the respondents either tending to agree or strongly agreeing. The average agreement was 85%, which demonstrates the strong level of support for the Housing Strategy overall.
- Respondents seem confident that these are the right ways to achieve the overall priorities.
- Across the 5 priorities for housing, the most well received amongst respondents was ‘providing affordable homes’, which had 100% agreement overall.
- Other priorities also still received high levels of support, with ‘supporting people’s health through housing’ producing 94% agreement, ‘quality housing for all’ receiving 91.5% and ‘making the best use of the homes we have’ gaining 85% agreement.
- The only area where agreement was below average (85%) was on whether respondents support the council’s priorities on addressing climate change and fuel poverty, which 66% supported.
- A number of key words and phrases emerged repeatedly, with references to housing affordability, preservation of open spaces, local people, supportive infrastructure and increased social housing.

Detailed contributions and amendments:

The consultation also highlighted a number of additional suggestions which have been considered and adopted in the final Housing Strategy draft.

Response Received	Action Taken
Any housing development needs to be supported by the suitable infrastructure.	Further information required in Priorities 1 and 3 as to how Sandwell Council will help to deliver infrastructure and services to support growth.
Sandwell Council needs to compensate for the loss of Council houses that were sold off but not replaced.	We will include information that ‘Councils are set to retain 100% of right to buy receipts for two years’. Further, we will add an action ensuring that the money which the council retains from right to buy sales will then be used to fund the one-for-one replacement of the



	social housing stock sold off via the scheme.
More choice in accommodation when prioritising keyworkers.	Within page 12 of the document, under our commitment to 'Improve access to affordable housing for essential keyworkers', we will include a commitment to explore how housing allocations can prioritise keyworkers as part of our Housing Allocations Policy review later in 2023.
Preserving green spaces and not using these for housing developments is essential.	Within priorities 1, 4 and 5 of the Housing Strategy, there needs to be an explicit link between housing and greenspaces. The document also needs to link in with overarching priorities such as Sandwell's Climate Change Strategy. In addition, outlining commitments such as supporting the Greenspace Strategy Delivery Board.
We need more housing that will help young couples get onto the housing ladder. There is a shortage of affordable homes for first time buyers.	Within Priority 1 of the document, greater promotion needs to be made on how young couples and families amongst others can benefit from schemes such as First Homes which will provide additional affordable housing on S106 developments.
There is a lack of connection between LHA rates and PRS rents. I am not sure the strategy provides any solution as to how rents can be brought to affordable levels.	More direct actions needed in priorities 1 and 3 in relation to how we will address the lack of affordability in the private rented sector.
Sandwell should be looking at how to raise money to build more housing stock.	Whilst funding is mentioned in relation to retrofit, funding within new builds isn't mentioned. Priorities 1 and 3 of the strategy need to provide more detail in our aims and objectives around how we aim to acquire external funding for new build housing, for instance, elaborating on how we have said we will work with Homes England within future housing development.



<p>Damp and mould within properties needs to be addressed.</p>	<p>Implementing direct actions, particularly within priorities 3 and 4 about how we intend to deal with damp and mould issues. Currently, the strategy does not contain enough detail on how we will deal with damp and mould.</p>
<p>More focused education and energy efficiency awareness with incentives to move to net zero could be considered.</p>	<p>Action to be added to Priority 4 outlining how we will explore incentives for both homeowners and households renting to move to carbon neutral facilities within their homes.</p>
<p>Building on brownfield sites regardless of costs. Not building on Green Spaces.</p>	<p>Within priorities 1, 4 and 5 of the Housing Strategy, more details need to be provided on greenspaces. Particularly greater details on the opportunities for inward investment will include the West Midlands Brownfield Site Fund to deliver the challenges of bringing brownfield sites into development.</p>
<p>There is strong reference to needs of ethnic minority groups and the disadvantage faced and volume of social housing applicants from this community. The BEM community is not a homogenous group, and there are specific issues for our refugee cohort, especially larger families which could be addressed more clearly in the strategy.</p>	<p>Within Priority 1 of the Housing Strategy, broadening out the housing issues beyond just ethnic minority groups to a more detailed analysis of how we can help asylum seekers and refugees too. We will include greater details on the Borough of Sanctuary Strategy and its subsequent actions.</p>
<p>The document needs to provide more specific details on how housing will work with Sandwell Children's Trust and Children's Services to ensure there is appropriate and accessible accommodation options this could also again link back to our Council wide corporate parenting responsibility.</p>	<p>Under priority 1, an action needs to be included that specifically details how housing will work with Sandwell Children's Trust and children's services to ensure there is appropriate and accessible accommodation options this could also again link back to our Council wide corporate parenting responsibility.</p>



5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The Local Government Act 2003 requires all local housing authorities publish a Housing Strategy setting out a vision for housing in its area, including objectives, targets and policies on how the authority intends to manage and deliver its strategic housing role.

6 Implications

Resources:	Delivery of the Strategy will be through existing resources including the Housing Revenue Account but is also based on being able to attract funding from external sources such as Homes England and West Midlands Combined Authority as well as Government funding towards retrofit of homes.
Legal and Governance:	<p>The Local Government Act 2003 requires all local housing authorities publish a Housing Strategy setting out a vision for housing in its area, including objectives, targets and policies on how the authority intends to manage and deliver its strategic housing role. The Strategy provides an overarching framework against which the authority considers and formulates other policies on more specific housing issues.</p> <p>The Housing Strategy Action Plan will provide oversight ensuring implementation of the Housing Strategy 2023-2028, including monitoring of the delivery of actions against the key objectives. Unless there are major legislative changes or significant service changes this strategy will be reviewed every five years.</p>
Risk:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial resources available to deliver the strategy, including inflation. • Data quality in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the local housing market and a robust evidence base on which to make informed decisions about future housing provision.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of land to build new homes and availability of appropriate infrastructure e.g. schools, GPs, transport and public spaces. • Future changes to national policy and requirements (particularly on planning) that could impact on the Council's ability to deliver new housing that meets locally identified needs. For instance, Right to Buy proceeds, climate change and materials used for new homes and retrofits, etc.
<p>Equality:</p>	<p>The Housing Strategy is key to reducing housing related and wider inequalities and addressing the diverse housing needs of our communities.</p> <p><u>Age:</u> A strategic approach is necessary to meet the housing needs of Sandwell's growing younger population, whilst also considering Sandwell's older population too. The document considers the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There will be an impact on younger people and their accommodation choices through the removal of age restrictions on the allocation of many council-owned flats to enable more flexible use of stock and greater access for younger people trying to access affordable housing. • There will be greater choice on accommodation and location for care leavers in relation to housing support and allocations. • Older people will have improved supply of suitable and accessible homes where they in particular feel safe and supported. <p><u>Disability:</u> The numbers of disabled people or those in poor health in Sandwell is significantly higher than the national average. Outlining our priorities for safe and well adapted housing is essential to help people remain independent if they experience health problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackling the shortage of accommodation for people requiring disabled units.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater utilisation of Disabled Facilities Grants – this will provide more housing options and enable disabled residents to remain in their own home for longer. • We have outlined that in affordable housing developments there needs to be the provision of additional support services to make independent living successful for both old and young. <p><u>Race:</u> The strategy will have an impact on ethnic minority groups in several ways. These households have distinct characteristics in terms of their housing needs which may leave them disadvantaged in some way. How the strategy will address this housing inequality is outlined below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gypsy, Roma and Travellers (GRT) will benefit from maintained and improved sites and extended locations for additional pitches. • Our commitment to ‘make the best use of the homes we have’ will benefit ethnic minority groups particularly. These households typically live in poorer housing conditions than white households and are especially likely to experience problems of overcrowding.
<p>Health and Wellbeing:</p>	<p>The proportion of those in poor health in Sandwell is significantly higher than the national average. With the significant health issues in the borough, we know the Strategy can play a key role in ensuring homes help people to maintain independence and quality of life. For instance, we will continue to improve our home adaptations service to enable people to remain at home if mobility becomes an issue and also work to provide new homes that are designed to be adaptable for changing health and mobility needs. In the private rented sector, we will aim to be as proactive as possible with landlords to ensure they meet the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.</p>



Social Value:	<p>A large part of social value in this Housing Strategy is about creating communities in which people want to live and spend their time. Local areas that cover every need, providing access to all the necessary services and resources, and promoting greater wellbeing and satisfaction will provide social value. Through procuring council housing and in the delivery of new build, social value considerations are built into the tendering process to maximise use of local labour, offer apprenticeships to local people and reduce climate change impacts. Additionally, engaging with Sandwell’s tenants and residents e.g. through public consultation generates social value through interacting and empowering the community to help shape the Council’s housing aims and aspirations for the next 5 years.</p>
Climate Change:	<p>Housing plays a key role in addressing climate change due to its strong environmental impact. The document links to the council’s Climate Change Strategy and priority 5 is based on the need to reduce carbon emissions from housing and ensure our homes are well insulated. It outlines our commitment to identifying funding to help improve the energy efficiency of our own stock, build new homes to carbon neutral standards, help private landlords and home owners improve the insulation and energy efficiency of their homes and help tenants with the transition to a net zero carbon future.</p>
Corporate Parenting:	<p>The Housing Strategy will help to steer corporate parenting work by providing greater choice on accommodation and location for care leavers in relation to housing support and allocations. In addition, providing good quality and suitable housing will result in positive health and wellbeing outcomes for children and younger people.</p>

7. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Housing Strategy 2023-2028

Appendix 2 – Housing Strategy 2023-2028 Action Plan



8. Background Papers

The strategic outputs outlined in the document have been formulated around a considerable amount of research and associated data most notably that sourced from the Housing Needs Assessment (published in 2022).

https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/33803/housing_needs_assessment_2022

Additional sources include:

- Sandwell's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-2025
https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/28975/homelessness_and_rough_sleeping_strategy.pdf
- Sandwell Regeneration Strategy 2022-2027
<https://www.bigplansforsandwell.com/media/9575/sandwell-regeneration-strategy-2022-2027.pdf>
- Black Country Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2021
<https://blackcountryplan.dudley.gov.uk/media/18015/black-country-hma-22321.pdf>
- Frail Older People Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2012
https://www.sandwelltrends.info/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/06/JSNA_Frail-Older-People-Apr-2012_Full.pdf
- The Black Country Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment
<https://go.walsall.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-09/Black%20Country%20Gypsy%20and%20Traveller%20Accommodation%20Assessment%20%28GTAA%29%20%28July%202008%29%20Fordham%20Research%20Group.pdf>
- The National Policy Planning Framework (NPPF)
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1005759/NPPF_July_2021.pdf
- 2021 Census for England and Wales
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E08000028/>

