

Housing Strategy 2023 – 2028



Foreword by Councillor Laura Rollins

Welcome to Sandwell Council's Housing Strategy 2023 to 2028. This strategy provides a clear vision of how we, along with the public and other stakeholders, can achieve our shared aspiration to provide housing that meets the needs and requirements of Sandwell. It reflects how good housing is vital to the health and wellbeing of residents, the role it plays in building and maintaining thriving communities and how it is entwined with the growth and economic prosperity of the borough.

Not everyone in Sandwell can access affordable, secure, sustainable and good quality housing and yet this is central to residents being able to live prosperous, healthy and happy lives. Pressures of a growing and ageing population will create additional demand. This strategy sets out possible solutions and approaches to overcoming these challenges.

We need to design and build houses that people want to live in and that bring benefits to new and existing communities. We must meet the

requirements of people with specific needs, from providing a wider choice of housing options for young people struggling to get onto the property ladder, to futureproofing homes to support our ageing population, enabling them to remain in their own homes for as long as possible. But the council cannot solve this problem alone. We will work in partnership with housing associations, developers and others to tackle the shortage of affordable housing in new and innovative ways.

Despite the economic and social challenges ahead, I am confident that this strategy will succeed in its aim of providing a blueprint for progress over the next few years in delivering the homes we need, as well as identifying additional opportunities for further progress in this important area.

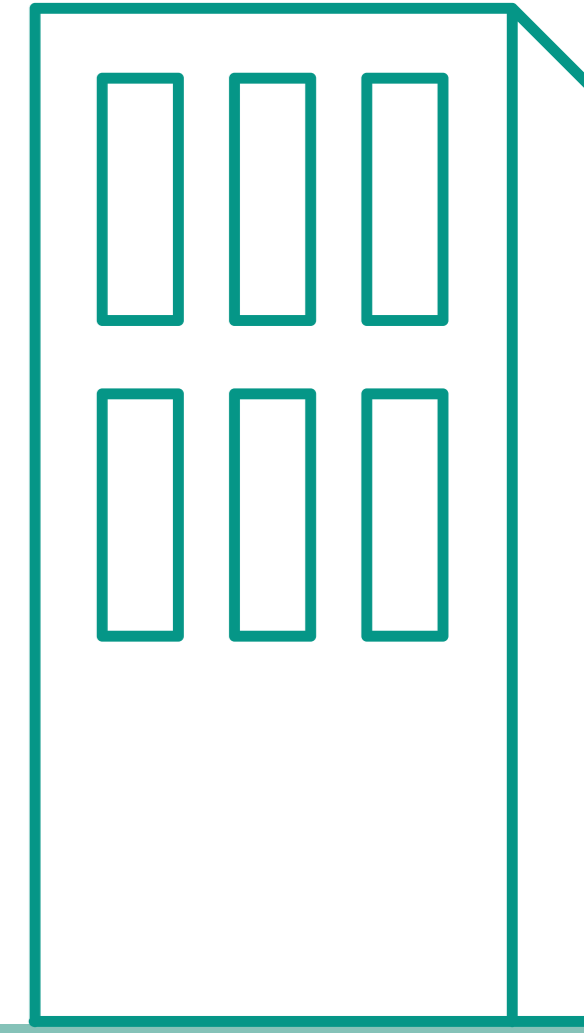
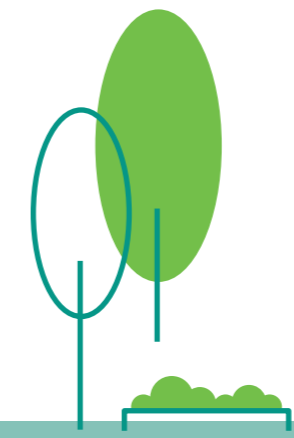
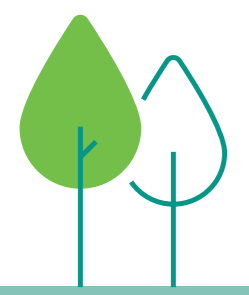
Councillor Laura Rollins - Cabinet Member for Housing and Built Environment



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Executive Summary

This strategy starts with the specific housing needs of the Borough of Sandwell.

The borough has the highest population in the Black Country region and the population is growing more rapidly than in other areas¹. It also has real challenges to address around the income, health needs and housing conditions of its residents. Sandwell is ranked as the 8th most deprived local authority in England, out of a total of 317.

The numbers of disabled people or those in poor health are also significantly higher than national averages. The borough has lower than average levels of owner occupation, a large but dwindling stock of local authority housing and a growing but unaffordable private rented sector.

There is a significant problem with empty properties that could provide homes but can be a blight on neighbourhoods.

Nationally the political, economic and legislative environment has recently gone through huge changes.

The pandemic followed by the cost of living crisis has had a significant impact on the economy and the provision of health and social services.

The council, like most local authorities around the country, is under significant financial pressure whilst seeing an increase in the demand for services.

Dealing with the consequences of climate change has become an urgent priority. New legislation, most recently the Social Housing Regulation Bill, will require landlords to work in a more transparent manner. This will give tenants greater access to information and swifter redress when things go wrong, including greater powers for the Social Housing regulator.

Working closely with our tenants will continue to be key to ensuring our homes are safe and well-maintained.

An affordable, safe, warm and well-maintained home that meets the needs of the resident is key to addressing these challenges.

We will build on our achievements over the last five years and have identified five key priorities for action.

1. Providing more affordable homes
2. Making 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



¹ 2021 ONS census data. The population in Sandwell has increased by 11% since 2011, above the national average of 6.3% and the highest in the West Midlands region. 20% of residents are disabled (national avg 17.8%) with 8% in poor health (national avg 5.4%).

Executive Summary - Five key priorities for action

1. Providing more affordable homes.

We need more affordable homes to address housing demand and the specific needs of our most vulnerable residents. Addressing this means continuing and expanding our own council house building programme and working closely with Registered Providers and other partners to deliver additional affordable homes. We need to maximise every opportunity to provide the right housing in the right places to meet local needs, including on the council's own Estate, and work with local communities to find solutions to the growing housing pressures. We also recognise that access to housing is important to retain our keyworkers who are vital to delivering services in our community.

2. Making best use of the homes we have.

We know we have the potential to make better use of the council housing stock, with many people under-occupying homes and too many people living in overcrowded accommodation. We will increase our focus on helping people who want to 'right-size' into smaller homes, freeing up larger homes for those who need them. We also have a significant opportunity to bring more empty homes in the private sector back into use. The council has recently developed an Empty Homes Strategy where the focus will be on taking more active measures to deal with this issue, including using enforcement powers where other means

have not been effective. We will also make sure that we are as efficient as possible between tenancy changes in our stock, ensuring that 'void' periods to relet properties are as short as possible.

3. Quality housing for all.

We need to make sure that, regardless of tenure, our residents have access to a home that is safe, well maintained and adapted to meet any health or disability needs.

We will continue to use our powers to make sure the private rented sector provides safe and well-maintained homes for tenants, including licensing homes in multiple occupation (HMOs) and helping improve energy efficiency.

We will also continue to manage improvements and repairs to our own stock through an updated Asset Management Strategy and through working with our tenants to improve our reactive repairs service.

4. Supporting people's health through housing.

With the significant health issues in the borough, we know we can play a key role in ensuring homes help people to maintain independence and quality of life. 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.

5. Addressing climate change and fuel poverty.

In 2020 the council declared a climate emergency and published its Climate Change Strategy. Housing plays a key role in this strategy due to its strong environmental impact. Poorly insulated houses with inefficient energy systems also contribute to fuel poverty. We need to ensure that we do what we can to reduce carbon emissions from housing and ensure our homes are well insulated. We will continue to identify funding to help improve the energy efficiency of our own stock, build new homes to carbon neutral standards, help private landlords and homeowners improve the insulation and energy efficiency of their homes and help tenants with the transition to a net-zero carbon future.

In order to deliver this strategy we will be providing regular reports to Councillors and our tenants so that we can monitor our progress. We believe the ambition contained in this document lays out a plan that will make progress against our key challenges in the years ahead and highlights the steps we will take to meet the priorities we are committed to deliver on.

Introduction

Having a warm, safe and secure home in a thriving and attractive environment is vital for the health, wellbeing and life chances of people who live in Sandwell.

This strategy sets out how we intend to address the key housing challenges affecting our communities over the next five years. 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.

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'. The objectives of this theme include:

- The delivery of new homes, especially affordable homes for local people.
- Provision for key workers to support local community especially workers in health and care.
- Keeping people independent in their own home through design and adaptation of homes.
- Meeting the needs of children and young people with complex needs, including those who have been in care, and the needs of adults with a learning disability or mental health problem.
- Developing a second council house build programme.
- Incorporating more renewable energy measures

into the design of new build council homes, including modern methods of construction and heating.

- Exploring all options to increase housing provision including community-led housing.
- Raising the standard of private sector homes and bring more empty homes back into use.
- Bringing in a new tenancy and estate management offer with proactive interventions and working in partnership with communities to address their priorities.
- Improving tenancy engagement including with those in high rise flats.
- Ensuring that tenants live in safe and thriving communities.
- Ensuring the safety compliance of all council homes and working to improve the energy efficiency of council homes including upgrading heating systems.
- Becoming a Borough of Sanctuary for asylum seekers and refugees, supporting this through housing provision.

The strategy will help meet the needs identified in the Housing Needs Assessment, produced in 2022, which sets out the data and evidence of housing needs in Sandwell. This data and intelligence has also been coupled with the voice of our residents and we have consulted widely before finalising the strategy for adoption. By involving local communities in the process, we can develop

sustainable and effective solutions that meet the needs of everyone in the community.

The strategy begins by outlining some of the national changes to housing, welfare and planning policy that have taken place in recent years at a national, regional and local level.

The Housing Strategy is supported by, and links to, the council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, Climate Change Strategy, Housing Revenue Account 30 year Business Plan, Empty Homes Strategy, Asset Management Strategy and Regeneration Strategy but also other emerging strategies and plans where housing has a part to play in meeting the needs and aspirations of our communities.

The strategy identifies five priorities. These priorities include objectives and action points that will help us move forward to address the housing challenges we have.

- 1. Providing more affordable homes**
- 2. Making 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**

Finally, we set out the governance and monitoring arrangements which will ensure we deliver on these strategic priorities.

Sandwell's Key Achievements

There have been a number of achievements as a result of the previous housing strategy.

Included in the progress made is the delivery of new affordable homes, improving existing homes, mitigating climate change and contributing to health and wellbeing outcomes. Our key housing achievements over the course of our 2012 to 2022 Housing Strategy Statement include:

- Between April 2012 and March 2022, the council house new build programme has delivered 465 newly constructed homes to offset loss of stock through Right to Buy and deliver the types of homes our communities need.
- Between April 2012 and March 2022, 1,716 new affordable homes have been delivered in Sandwell through supporting housing developers and registered providers. Including the completion of major projects such as Woods Lane in Cradley Heath and Harvills Hawthorn in West Bromwich, adding 152 affordable homes to the borough.
- A home improvement and housebuilding programme in the heart of Smethwick has raised the quality of existing houses, developed neighbourhood amenities and built 228 new homes (including 93 affordable homes).
- The development of new extra care schemes such as Willow Gardens in Rowley Regis, providing 90 extra council owned and managed extra care housing apartments available for affordable rent.

• Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) work carried out in housing stock across the borough. Adaptations across tenures included 3,064 council owned, 1,811 owner-occupied, 197 registered provider and 98 private rented properties.

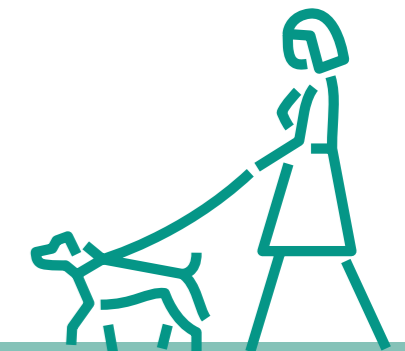
• Awarded 552 grants for heating or boiler repairs and 101 grants to tackle urgent disrepair.

• Reviewed and produced Sandwell's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for the period 2022 to 2025. This will be actively monitored throughout the period.

• Continuing to strengthen our strategic partnership work across the Black Country through contributing to regional documents such as the Black Country Housing Market Assessment and Black Country Tenancy Strategy.

• Allocating Section 106 funding to the repurposing of empty apartment blocks in West Bromwich to provide 54 flats for young people under St Basil's Live and Work Scheme in partnership with Sandwell and West Bromwich Hospitals Trust.

• Work undertaken to amend the age restrictions on the allocation of many council owned flats to enable more flexible use of stock and greater access for younger people.



Changing Context – Legislation and Strategy and the Economic Environment

Legislation and policies at a national, regional and local level all have an impact on the content and delivery of the Housing Strategy

There have been considerable changes to the national policy framework for housing and planning since the last housing strategy document was produced in 2012.

The key legislation and policies that relate to this document are listed opposite:

As well as legislative and policy changes, there have been far reaching factors from the recent economic environment that have impacted the housing market and the lives of residents.

- The effects of the pandemic are still being felt through the impact on public services.
- The cost of living crisis is having an even greater impact on the affordability of housing, including energy costs.
- The council is under significant financial pressure and will need to make tough choices over the coming years. Like all local authorities, Sandwell is seeing increase in demand for services for the most vulnerable residents. And at the same time costs are going up due to the high rate of inflation that is affecting everyone. The political and economic turmoil in the UK in recent months has added to the considerable uncertainty nationally around local government funding, which affects Sandwell too.

- High inflation impacts the services we provide, including rising costs of building material and labour for our new housing developments.
- Sandwell Council has joined other councils in England that have declared a Climate Emergency, and using analysis conducted by the Tyndall Centre at Manchester University, has adopted a goal to become carbon neutral as an organisation by 2030, and as a borough by 2041. To protect against the impacts of climate change we need to prioritise the health of those who are most vulnerable to them, now and in the future.
- Tenants rightly have increased expectations about the service they receive and the communities they live in. Sandwell is committed to ensuring no community gets left behind and housing is an important way to address inequalities.
- These challenges are significant and as a result this strategy needs to be ambitious and focussed to address them.

NATIONAL
Welfare Reform Act 2012
The Care Act 2014
Housing and Planning Act 2016
Welfare Reform Act 2016
The Housing White Paper 2017: "Fixing our broken housing market"
The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
The Social Housing Green Paper 2018
The Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (Prescribed Description) (England) Order 2018
The Social Housing White Paper 2020
The National Planning Policy Framework 2021
People at the Heart of Care: Adult Social Care Reform White Paper 2021
Levelling Up White Paper 2022
Social Housing Regulation Bill 2022
REGIONAL
The Black Country Housing Market Assessment 2021
Black Country Tenancy Strategy 2021
LOCAL
Sandwell Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) 2020
Housing Allocations Policy 2021
Sandwell 2030 Vision: Corporate Plan 2021 - 2025
Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2022 - 2025
Sandwell Regeneration Strategy 2022 – 2027
Empty Homes Strategy 2022
Sandwell MBC Local Development Scheme 2022
Housing Revenue Account 30 Year Business Plan 2023-2053

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Sandwell is committed to ensuring that services are provided that embrace diversity and promote equality of opportunity and access.

We know that poor housing conditions disproportionately affect some communities, for example ethnic minority groups are disproportionately represented on the housing register and more likely to be living in poorer housing conditions.

All policies and procedures will seek to eliminate inequality and unlawful discrimination, recognise and promote cohesion, good community relations and equal opportunities. The strategy will consider the needs and rights of all protected characteristics and take steps to address any discrimination they may face.

Priority 1 of this strategy specifically looks at the needs of disadvantaged groups in the provision of housing and we will seek to continue to improve our data and monitoring of how well our services are addressing these issues and react to changing trends.



Priority 1

Providing more affordable homes



Background

Sandwell's housing market has changed significantly over the last decade and continues to evolve. In recent years the private rental market has expanded greatly, whilst the local authority sector continues to decline in number. However, despite a drop from 27.5% in 2011 to 26.6% in 2021, Sandwell had a higher proportion of social rented properties in comparison to rest of the Black Country local authorities and England and Wales. The proportion of households living in private rented accommodation in Sandwell (18.6%) was below the national average (20.3%).

Property values remain low compared to the wider West Midlands region but remain outside the reach of many households living locally. 54.2% of residents live in owner-occupied housing compared with 62.5% nationally².

Numbers on the housing register remain high with around 12,000 households registered as being in housing need as of May 2023. The current average wait for a house is 1 year and 9 months.

In 2021, Sandwell's affordable housing requirement was set at 343 dwellings per annum. This is significantly higher than in previous years where the need was calculated at 244 dwellings per annum.

Council house building will remain a key part of affordable housing delivery giving the council

control over what is built, house size, tenure and design standards. Looking at identified potential for development sites, our aim is to build between 100 and 150 homes per year within the period.

However, whilst council house building is an important part of the delivery plan we need to work with partners to maximise other delivery opportunities. Sandwell has a range of Registered Providers (RPs) which the council will support to deliver sites which meet local needs. The Council's Regeneration Pipeline has a target of 400 new affordable homes (outside of s.106 provision) being provided by Registered Providers between 2022 and 2027.

The Regeneration Pipeline also includes the former gas works site in Swan Lane, West Bromwich. This site will deliver 147 new affordable homes after the council and the Registered Provider worked together to successfully secure £3m of grant funding to address the scheme's viability gap. Further affordable units will be provided as part of private development sites which are required to provide affordable housing under planning policy (unless it can be proven that a scheme is not viable).

The council is also leading on delivering major regeneration proposals which will, alongside private and public investment, see significant new housing developments coming forward. The Friar Park scheme, for example, could deliver up to 630 new homes of which 158 would be affordable (based on

25% affordable in line with current planning policy). Sandwell has a growing interest from communities wanting to develop very local community-led housing. We recognise that supporting community-led housing can provide housing on sites otherwise unlikely to come forward as well as helping to build strong and resilient communities. Putting housing into a Community Land Trust or other community organisation can protect homes from the Right to Buy and other right to purchase legislation.

Over the next two years, councils are set to retain 100% of Right to Buy receipts. The money which the council retained from Right to Buy sales would then be used to fund the one-for-one replacement of the social housing stock sold off via the scheme.

We aim to investigate the council's own estate for sites that may be too small to be attractive to main developers but if de-risked and packaged could be transferred to small developers including community-led developers. There are a very small number of applicants on the Right to Build register but working with community and small developers could create opportunities for self-build, self-finish or custom-built homes.

Whilst the government's focus on home ownership will help some residents in Sandwell get onto the property ladder through products such as shared ownership, there is also a substantial need for social and affordable rented properties for those that cannot afford to own their own home.

Under planning policy, 25% of homes provided on eligible sites need to be affordable, the tenure will be based on the latest Housing Needs and Demands Study and any other relevant information that the Council may collect.

There is now a national move to provide First Homes as a percentage of affordable housing provision through S106 agreements. Currently, planning applications will be considered where the applicant proposes First Homes, once the Sandwell Local Plan is adopted all eligible applications will need to provide First Homes as part of their proposal.

We offer more social housing than the national average (26.6% of the 341,832 houses in Sandwell are social housing, compared to the national average of 16.8%), but needs for low-cost affordable rental homes remain high and we will continue to focus on this tenure within our council house building programme.

The Black Country Housing Market Assessment, along with housing register figures, demonstrate a high need for a mix of size of homes. Close co-operation with Homes England, West Midlands Combined Authority, registered providers and

developers will help to ensure we are making informed, evidence-based decisions to address housing needs in the borough, particularly relating to tenure, housing size and type, while also addressing the challenges of viability and site availability.

There is also a need to address the increased pressure on local land and infrastructure from new housing development. Sandwell is currently reviewing its Local Plan to provide continued growth and regeneration of the borough's economy in a sustainable way.

Working closely with our Adult Social Care Team and in line with our Housing Needs Assessment, we understand the housing market also needs the flexibility to meet the accommodation needs of vulnerable groups:

- Due to the rise in the numbers of older people and those with impaired mobility, the need for adapted and accessible housing is for 5,516 homes by 2039 of which 3,201 should be affordable and 509 within specialist housing. This would equate to around 368 homes per year of which 200 should be affordable.
- Within the borough, the number of older people over the age of 65 is set to rise by 20% by 2033. In the Black Country region, older people with a life limiting illness will rise by 36.8% between 2020 and 2039. To meet demand rates, the model identifies a requirement for 1,720 additional specialist units for older people by 2039.

• Around 50 units per annum need to be provided for adults with learning disabilities and autism – either provided from council stock or through arrangements with trusted social landlords and housing associations.

• There are also successful schemes for young parents. Although care leavers and other young people have a supported pathway into social housing there is still an outstanding need that may be met through supporting people into private rented sector accommodation.

• Ethnic minority groups represent 35.0% of social housing applicants on Sandwell's housing register. Ethnic minority groups often have distinct characteristics in terms of their housing needs which may leave them disadvantaged. They typically live in poorer housing conditions than white households and are especially likely to experience problems of overcrowding. We need to understand where we require larger homes to meet these needs.

• The Black Country and has a long history of gypsy and travellers. There is a need for between 9 and 14 pitches for gypsy and travellers³. The need for travelling show people is 24 plots - the review of the Sandwell Local Plan will look to identify any suitable sites.

• Retaining essential key workers in the borough to

Priority 1

Providing more affordable homes

provide the services we need is also important and we want to ensure that keyworkers have reasonable access to affordable homes where they have a demonstrated need. A site has received planning for 122 affordable keyworker homes being delivered by Catalyst Mutual Enterprise CIC.

PPTS 2015 definition - all reasons for travelling and not just for work purposes. The

Ethnic need relates to all who are from the G&T communities irrespective of their

travel patterns (i.e. do not need to travel to be included in this need category).

By the end of the strategy period we aim to have:

1. increased the delivery of new build council homes to 100- 150 per annum by

- Focussing on larger strategic sites with high volume and more viable affordable housing
- Using the Housing Revenue Account to purchase land for development

2. increased the amount and diversity of affordable housing by

- Working closely to support RPs on local needs and identifying sites for development
- Considering how to disposal of small sites in line with the WMCA Public Land Charter
- Identifying inward investment opportunities for affordable and specialist housing on regeneration sites
- Exploring collaborations with developers to prepare sites using council acquisitions where appropriate
- Working with local communities and specialist organisations to support opportunities for community-led schemes

3. delivered a balanced mix of affordable housing sizes, types and tenures by

- Engaging proactively early in the planning process to ensure new, affordable homes respond to evidenced need and gaps in the existing stock
- Working with partners to deliver a greater number of one and two-bedroom properties to reflect demand from the waiting list

4. delivered housing that meets the needs of specific, vulnerable groups and helps to address inequalities in housing provision by

- Engaging with partners to maintain an up-to-date

picture of need and exploring opportunities to address this with Adult Social Care

- Exploring options of site allocations for specialist older person's housing
- Undertaking further analysis of the key areas where we need larger family homes
- Considering the purchase of larger market homes for urgent housing register needs
- Ensuring as many affordable homes as possible achieve at least Building Regulations standards for adaptable and accessible dwellings
- Working on Sandwell's new Local Plan to reflect housing needs and developing policies for accessible and specialist housing
- Undertaking further research into the use of private rented sector accommodation for young people and people with support alongside appropriate financial and practical support
- Working with planning policy to identify suitable sites for gypsy, travellers and travelling show people

5. Improved access to affordable housing for essential keyworkers by

- Working with essential service providers to identify their workers' needs
- Considering changes to the allocation system to give keyworkers some priority for affordable housing

PPTS 2015 definition - all reasons for travelling and not just for work purposes. The Ethnic need relates to all who are from the G&T communities irrespective of their travel patterns (i.e. do not need to travel to be included in this need category).

³ The number depends on the definition adopted. The travel for all relates to the



Priority 2

Making the best use of the homes we have

Whilst increasing the supply of new affordable housing is vital, we recognise we also have the potential to better use our existing stock to meet needs.

A third (9,836) of council homes are under-occupied. 2,467 are severely under-occupied (by two bedrooms or more) of which 79.0% (1,948) have a head of household aged 60 plus.

This means helping more people to move to more suitable homes where this could be a benefit. This is sometimes termed 'right-sizing'. Our data shows that there are many people in our council housing who have spare bedrooms, many of whom are subject to the under-occupation charge. If we can improve the supply of suitable and accessible smaller homes in neighbourhoods where older people in particular feel safe and supported, we could help some people move to more suitable housing.

Many older people will want to stay 'hyper local' and so the right kind of housing in the right places will be critical. Having space for visitors and access to outside space will be required by many. It will also be important to provide financial incentives and practical support such as help with moving costs and where needed bespoke support with packing, switching utility suppliers and, if moving to a new area, making connections with the new community.

Conversely, there are many families in our stock who are overcrowded and are waiting for larger family homes.

Using the Bedroom Standard, around 12.0% (3,473) of

the stock is classed as overcrowded, with 718 homes being classified as severely overcrowded.

If we can help with right-sizing we can release more of these homes for families in housing need, many of whom have been waiting for extended periods on our housing register.

The council has identified empty properties as one of its key priority areas in relation to bringing housing in to use and making best use of housing in the borough. With around 3,359 empty properties as at March 2022 there is considerable potential to build on the existing good work in advising and persuading landlords to find proactive solutions where these are needed.

Empty properties are a waste of scarce resources and can detract from neighbourhoods where properties deteriorate. By working with the owners of these homes and exercising our statutory powers where necessary we can address the most problematic empty properties and help free up additional homes. A new Empty Homes Strategy 2023 – 2028 has been developed to tackle this issue.

Addressing the undersupply of suitable accommodation in Sandwell will also require support from the private rented sector because social housing alone cannot meet demand. As is the national picture, the majority of private rented housing is supplied at an unaffordable cost for many within the borough.

We are also seeing some private landlords exiting the market because of increasing costs and legislative requirements and we need to support private

landlords to sustain tenancies, particularly for households where we rely on this tenure, for example, asylum-seekers and refugees.

To this end we will investigate the potential to establish a private sector leasing scheme.

We also need to look at how we can minimise the time we take to turn around our own voids in the council stock, while balancing up the need to achieve the Decent Homes Standard and ensure new tenancies get off to a positive start. We will work with officers and tenants to improve this process.

It is important to acknowledge the unique challenges faced by ethnic minority families, who may have a cultural preference for living with extended family members. As a result, they are more likely to experience issues such as overcrowding and poorer housing conditions. We will strive to gain a better understanding of these challenges and identify the specific need for larger homes in these circumstances.

By the end of the strategy period we aim to have:

1. delivered new interventions and incentives to help council tenants who are under-occupying move and make best use of social housing for those in greatest need by

- Using data to identify households affected by the under-occupation charge and offer customised support to consider other options
- Working to identify older people who may wish to move rather than adapt what still may be an unsuitable home
- Working with partner agencies and older people to develop support to help those who wish to downsize
- Reviewing our policies to optimise social housing prioritisation and making appropriate use of introductory tenancies
- Obtaining data on and exploring options for ethnic minority groups in overcrowded properties
- Continuing to seek opportunities new high-quality housing for older people
- Working with Adult Social Care and Health to inform older people about housing options such as extra care housing

2. brought 200 empty homes back into reuse by 2028 by

- implementing the Sandwell Empty Homes Policy including recruiting an Empty Homes Officer
- developing a policy for offering grants where investment is needed to bring a property in to use at an affordable rent by a household in need

3. maintained and improved supply and access to private rented homes, particularly for vulnerable people and those on low income by

- reviewing private sector leasing and the feasibility for setting up a leasing scheme
- improving our advice and support about what is involved in being a landlord including managing HMOs
- encouraging more landlords through tenancy support initiate to offer homes to asylum-seekers and refugees

4. reviewed our voids process to identify efficiencies and deliver better outcomes for tenants with diverse needs by

- reviewing with staff and tenants the end to end process to identify best practice and reduce turnaround times
- reducing high cost voids through planned programmes and intervention before a tenancy ends
- clarifying and revising the letting standard to offer flexibility and a positive start to the tenancy



Priority 3

Quality housing for all

Background

The proportion of the borough's housing stock that is private rented continues to grow as a percentage of tenure at 18.6%, up from 12.9% in 2011.

This growth, accompanied by the decline of social rented stock due to the Right to Buy policy, has resulted in the private rented sector (PRS) becoming one of the leading tenures for addressing housing need across the country.

We are committed to working with landlords and tenants to ensure private rented housing is accessible, secure, affordable and good quality.

We will investigate the potential for a social leasing agency which could help the council improve standards as well as giving greater access to vulnerable tenants.

Recent consultation by the Government indicates that Decent Homes Standards will be introduced for the private rented sector in a further drive to improve quality in the sector. This is likely to give the council additional powers to act in cases where housing falls below standard.

In 2018, the Building Research Establishment (BRE) recorded 4,300 HMOs located in Sandwell, with particular concentrations in Great Green, Smethwick, Soho & Victoria and St Paul's Wards.

We will continue to identify properties for licensing, deliver the HMO additional licensing scheme for smaller HMOs

in West Bromwich and review if this can be rolled out to other areas of the borough.

We recognise that a proportion of the private sector housing stock in Sandwell is of poor quality in terms of energy efficiency. This includes pre-1930s terraced homes with solid walls which have suffered from lack of investment as rented accommodation.

We also know that a significant number of households experience fuel poverty and poor health and that cold is the major contributory factor because of the poor condition of these properties.

But we cannot be complacent about the quality of our own stock and the need to comply with the current and future Decent Homes Standard. Social housing campaigners and journalists have exposed examples of poor quality and dangerous social housing across the country. There has been a rise in disrepair claims with tenants accessing legal support to challenge the quality of their homes and seeking compensation where the social landlord is found to be liable. Many of these claims relate to mould and damp.

A good place to live means that the house is within a safe and thriving local community and providing good standards within council owned homes means engaging with residents and improving the services we offer and making sure that the communities in which homes are located are safe and thriving places to live.

There are opportunities to support this ambition within the council's ambitious Regeneration Strategy 2022-2027. This includes sites such as West Bromwich town centre – the comprehensive regeneration of the town centre, which remodels the retail core for new housing, modern and dynamic retail, and new workspaces and public realm.

This will unlock land for over 1,000 homes but at the same time provide the facilities for growth and opportunities to improve the quality of life for residents. We also need to look at how estates in general can be improved in partnership with our communities.

There are examples too of community-led regeneration such as the Chance Heritage Trust where opportunities for training, skills, business support can be offered alongside cultural and heritage assets.

We are aware of the risks associated with some exempt accommodation where unscrupulous providers claim high rent levels through housing benefit, without giving the level of support to vulnerable residents that should be available.

By the end of the strategy period we aim to have:

1. raised standards in the private rented sector through advice, support and enforcement powers by

- Growing and embedding the Private Rented Sector Secure and Sustain model
- Exploring the feasibility of a Social Lettings Agency model
- Gather intelligence through tenants, the public and HMO licensing schemes to target interventions at poor quality housing
- Ensuring compliance with the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES) Regulations
- Reviewing the evidence for additional licensing in other parts of the borough

2. improved the quality of council homes and surrounding neighbourhoods including reaching EPC 'C' on all homes by 2030 by

- gaining a comprehensive picture of the quality of the stock to inform repairs and programmes of work to upgrade and refurbish it
- updating the Asset Management Strategy to detail how we will improve the stock over the next ten years

3. improved our management and maintenance services by working with tenants by

- acting on disrepair claims by inspecting properties and taking timely remedial action
- involving tenants, leaseholders and representative bodies in plans to improve the stock
- identifying actions related to housing quality in the tenant satisfaction survey
- continuing to monitor and review our approach to damp and mould cases
- engaging tenants in estate management, identifying community partnerships to improve services and opportunities

4. contributed to the Regeneration Strategy to ensure that new housing opportunities link into wider wellbeing and economic benefits for residents by

- working to identify how inward investment can be of maximum benefit to existing residents

5. identified exempt accommodation and implemented actions to raise standards by

- monitoring the quality of commissioned exempt (supported) accommodation and working with providers to address issues
- using housing benefit data to monitor other exempt accommodation and seek resident feedback on experiences and the quality of housing and support given
- monitoring exempt accommodation and implementing actions to raise standards where necessary



Priority 4

Supporting people's health through housing

Background

In 2019, Sandwell was ranked as the 8th most deprived local authority in England, out of a total of 317. Two thirds of geographical areas in the borough are in the 20% most deprived in the whole country.

The health of people in Sandwell ranks lower in several areas in comparison to the rest of the country: including life expectancy, disability-free life expectancy and long-term physical and mental health conditions. The 2021 census shows 20% of residents are disabled under the Equality Act definition (compared to 17.8% nationally) and 9% of residents stated that disability seriously impacts their quality of life.

The population of adults with disabilities is projected to grow significantly over the next two decades. Sandwell will see increasing numbers of physically disabled adults, adults with learning difficulties, autistic people and people with long term mental ill health who require specialist accommodation to support them to live as independently as possible⁴, this includes general, extra care and supported housing schemes.

Having safe and well adapted housing is essential to help people remain independent if they experience health problems. With this in mind, Sandwell will continue to support independent living, helping disabled and vulnerable people to remain in their own homes where possible. Facilitating adaptations through the council's programme, including the Disabled Facilities Grant, will allow residents to remain in their

own home for longer, relieving pressure on local health and social care services. Improving and adapting existing properties also allows for better use of stock to reduce pressures for new development.

Where new stock is required, there is a pressing need to focus on prevention, futureproofing properties and securing sustainable homes for residents. Wherever possible, we will seek the requirements for enhanced accessibility standards in Building Regulations for new homes. This will provide residents with a home that they can modify relatively easily in the future should their personal circumstances change.

We also have major responsibilities around the health and safety of our residents, both in our own stock and in other rented housing. We are mindful that the cost of living crisis increases the risk of many residents being cold in their homes and of homes being damp as a result. The impact of climate change means temperatures can be higher and we therefore need to ensure homes can be kept cool in summer through ventilation and other measures. This issue is expected to be covered in the revised Decent Homes Standard once finalised.

In the wake of the pandemic more people are experiencing social isolation and mental ill health and it is important our services and initiatives identify people in need and offer support services to keep people well at home.

By the end of the strategy period we aim to have:

1. delivered a programme of appropriate adaptations to current homes to maintain and improve residents' health and wellbeing of residents by

- supporting the new Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing to ensure there is a fair, consistent, and transparent operation in accordance with all relevant legislation and statutory guidance. This will benefit disabled residents via technology in the home, improve the warmth of their living space and support reducing social isolation

2. incorporated better futureproofing and design standards for new build properties to meet the needs of adults with physical disabilities and other disabilities by

- considering accessibility standards in the development of policies in Sandwell's new Local Plan
- identifying with residents and Disabled People's organisations what works and how homes can be improved through adaptations, major works and/or new build

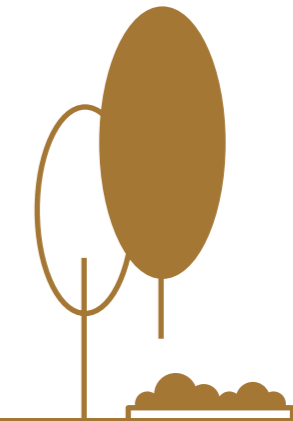
3. reviewed the standard of council stock against the new Decent Homes Standard by

- incorporating the new Decent Homes Standards as part of stock conditions and asset management plans

4. increased enforcement of the Health and Housing Safety Rating System in the private rented sector by

- working with private sector landlords and representative groups to raise awareness and support compliance
- taking enforcement action in cases where the landlord is not responding to early intervention

⁴ Sandwell Housing Needs Assessment 2022 (HNA)



Priority 5

Addressing climate change and fuel poverty

In 2020 the council declared a climate emergency and published its Climate Change Strategy. Housing plays a key role in this Strategy due to its strong environmental impact, in particular through carbon emissions. Poorly insulated houses with inefficient energy systems also contribute to fuel poverty.

- In the case of domestic energy costs, the annual spend on energy is significantly higher than elsewhere because of the poor overall quality of domestic buildings.
- Fuel poverty is a significant issue in many areas (this is largely driven by the quality of existing housing and the income of residents). However, Sandwell is amongst the highest 10% of UK local authorities for incidence of fuel poverty.

Sandwell's industrial heritage has left it with a densely populated built environment; a complicated mixture of domestic properties, commercial activities and the public estate.

This strategy interlinks with a number of other plans towards an outcome where everyone has a home that is safe, secure, affordable, accessible and suitable and is able to make a positive contribution against climate change.

As Sandwell's largest landlord the council has a significant role to play. For some years Sandwell has been carrying out energy efficiency improvements to the council's own stock, including double glazing, loft insulation and cavity wall insulation. In addition, Sandwell has recently undertaken a Warm Homes funded project for the replacement of outmoded electric storage heaters with more efficient wet gas central heating systems.

We estimate that up to 50% of the council stock is below EPC C. However, EPC is only part of the shift towards net zero carbon and we estimate that £600m of capital investment is needed to fully retrofit the stock. We have accessed funding through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, but much more external funding will be needed if we are to fully transform the stock.

Our new build programme has delivered on average 70 council homes per annum over the last few years with the majority being built to EPC B standard and all being above C rating.

An ambitious approach is needed to achieve enhanced energy standards for new homes and encourage widespread use of technologies needed

to decarbonise Sandwell's housing stock. As part of this, new council housing needs to incorporate more renewable energy measures and use modern methods of construction, within financial constraints.

Our tenants directly experience the impacts of climate change through greater fluctuations in air temperature, poor air quality and extreme weather. The neighbourhood as well as the housing itself needs to be looked at in order to mitigate climate change and improve life expectancy and quality of life.

By taking on these measures we have the opportunity to build in opportunities for training and employment in a growing Green Economy for the benefit of local people.

By the end of the strategy period we aim to have:

1. improved the energy efficiency of existing council housing stock and reduced Housing Services carbon footprint by

- continuing the retrofit programme using HRA investment and external funds
- fast-tracking improvements to homes with a disabled, older or vulnerable person
- planning the replacement of diesel vehicles through the installation of electric vehicle charging points

2. higher levels of energy efficiency for new builds and to have decarbonised housing across the borough by

- making use of alternative technologies and fabric first approaches
- following guidance from the WMCA Housing and Health design principles and WMCA Design Charter within future housing developments
- ensuring planning policies, building regulations, procurement and partnership working with registered providers and developers deliver a broad range of housing, supporting the council's climate goals, and meeting local needs
- delivering the refurbishment of Darley House including new heat source pumps

3. accessed external funding upgrade the existing stock and to help homeowners improve energy efficiency by

- delivering retrofit of up to 1,600 more council homes under SHDF Wave 2.1

4. helped landlords improve the energy efficiency of their homes by

- helping homeowners to access retrofit funding and works via regional projects
- encouraging homeowners and landlords to use grants and schemes to carry out energy-efficient improvements

5. implemented initiatives to support tenants and residents in the shift to net zero carbon by

- implementing measures such as promoting active travel and integrating EV charging points
- improving access to recycling facilities particularly in high rise flats
- working with tenants' and residents' groups and the voluntary and community sector to identify impacts of climate change and plan mitigations
- preserving green space wherever possible on our estates
- measuring tenant satisfaction with their neighbourhoods and setting actions for improvement



Implementing this strategy

This strategy covers a period of five years. It is hard to predict what is going to happen in this time and, undoubtedly, there will be changes to legislation, regulation and wider societal and economic shifts that will impact on our communities and what we can and need to do as a council. What we do not anticipate will change are the priorities we have set out in this strategy to tackle the housing needs in the borough of Sandwell.

To make sure that we can deliver our priorities, an action plan will be developed to accompany this strategy, and which will be published alongside the finalised strategy and will be reviewed regularly. We will use key data and other information to tell us what is happening, and review and update our actions accordingly.

Reports will be made to the appropriate tenant and Councillor committees so that there is accountability for the delivery of the action plan.





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