

Cherwell District Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

14 July 2020

Housing Strategy Progress Report

Report of Assistant Director, Housing and Social Care Commissioning

This report is public

Purpose of report

To report back on progress in implementing the Council's Housing Strategy 2019-2024 and to gain Overview and Scrutiny Committee's input to the action plan for 2020/21.

1.0 Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

- 1.1 Note and comment on the contents of this report and appendices in advance of the Strategy Action Plan 2020/21 being finalised.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 'Housing that meets your needs' is a corporate business plan priority for Cherwell District Council (CDC), particularly as good quality housing also has a positive impact on residents' health and wellbeing, the development of sustainable communities, community resilience and economic growth. The Housing Strategy 2019-24 is an important document setting out the council's housing ambitions and priorities over the 5-year period.
- 2.2 While a Housing Strategy is not a statutory requirement (unlike a homelessness and rough sleeping strategy which is) housing has been a longstanding priority for CDC and there is a strong commitment to delivering innovative approaches to meeting housing need.
- 2.3 The Housing Strategy Action Plan 2019-20 was a relatively ambitious plan developed at a time of reorganisation i.e. as the CDC partnership with South Northamptonshire Council was ending and the new partnership with Oxfordshire County Council was being launched. From January 2019 CDC has had a shared Assistant Director for Housing and Social Care Commissioning with both councils beginning to work on common housing objectives. As the CDC Housing Strategy 2019-2024 was being put together it was recognised that the relationship between the 2 organisations would grow and develop; presenting opportunities to work

together over the lifetime of the strategy to join up services and improve housing solutions for our residents, including people with care and support needs.

- 2.4 Much of what is in the strategy is aspirational and can only be delivered with our partners and with investment (financial and staff resources). Whilst many of the actions in the 2019/2020 action plan have either been completed or are in progress, it has not been possible to deliver all actions within the proposed timescale and some of the actions will need to roll forward for completion in 2020/2021.
- 2.5 As part of the development of the Housing Strategy, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the draft Strategy at its meeting on 19th February 2019, and it was agreed that the Committee would receive a report on delivery of the strategy action plan, 12 months from adoption. The Strategy was formally agreed by the Executive on 4th March 2019.
- 2.6 This report sets out the progress to date in respect of delivering the strategy actions agreed in 2019 and suggests the future actions to be taken for the period 2020 to 2021.
- 2.7 The coronavirus pandemic has had a significant impact on housing demand and delivery and will continue to do so in the medium if not long term. The 2020/21 action plan has been revised to take account of the changes and new challenges emerging as a result of the pandemic.

3.0 Report Details

- 3.1 The Housing Strategy 2019-2024 sets out the Council's priorities for responding to the wider housing needs of the district but with a focus on affordable housing. It takes particular account of the current and future needs of groups such as older people, disabled people, young people, vulnerable families and people on a low income. The housing needs of these groups are a priority in terms of their vulnerability, access to housing, affordability and the need to achieve positive health outcomes. The Strategy aims to guide and influence partners, particularly developers and Registered Providers, in helping to deliver quality housing that meets the community's needs and enables them to live healthy, positive lives in a sustainable and cohesive environment. Working with partners to achieve this is essential.
- 3.2 The adopted Housing Strategy 2019-24 set out the following overarching priorities, which continue to be relevant:

PRIORITY 1: Increase the supply and diversity of affordable housing to ensure the right types of housing are available in the right places

PRIORITY 2: Improve the quality and sustainability of our homes and build thriving, healthy communities

PRIORITY 3: Enhance opportunities for residents to access suitable homes and have housing choices

- 3.3 The Strategy Action Plan 2019/2020 expands on the activities that need to be undertaken to contribute towards delivery of these priorities over the first year of the strategy. Appendix 1 sets out the action plan and the progress against each activity up to February 2020. In general good progress has been made in delivering the

agreed actions, but some activities have either been delayed or have not been started due to the limited staff and financial resources available, and since March 2020 may have been delayed further due to the impact of covid-19. Progress against each action has been rated as follows:

Rating	Description
Red	In February, these actions had either not been started or were expected to be delivered by March 2020 i.e. one year after adoption of the Housing Strategy. Some actions will have been delayed or not started due to work priorities changing in March 2020 in response to the Covid-19 lockdown arrangements.
Amber	In February, these actions had been started but not significantly progressed and at risk of not meeting the target date.
Green	These are completed activities or those underway and progressing well.

3.4 The housing market is generally dynamic and is affected by national policy, changes in the economy and national changes such as Brexit or more recently the pandemic. Therefore, it is essential that we keep the current action plan under review and adapt our plans when such factors affect the local housing situation.

3.5 The priority actions over the next 12 months of the strategy will be to:

- Deliver affordable housing including securing delivery of more social rented units and Year 3 Growth Deal targets. Targets will have to be revised downward because of the impact of the pandemic on the construction industry and the resulting delay in the delivery of some affordable housing.
- Work in partnership with the County Council and other agencies to enable delivery of housing to meet the needs of people with learning disabilities, people with autism and people with physical disabilities as well as Extra Care Housing for older people.
- Review the Council's Allocations Scheme and update ICT and lean systems to deliver an enhanced housing service to customers. This includes equality impact assessing the scheme and how it works for diverse communities.
- Work in partnership with the County Council to review and commission improved housing pathways, outreach support and debt and money advice services to support financial inclusion and assist the most vulnerable clients, prevent homelessness and deliver value for money services.
- Raise standards in rented housing through landlord and tenant engagement, awareness-raising and enforcement.
- Raise the energy performance of homes in the district and help to reduce fuel-poverty through reactive and proactive interventions and partnership work.
- Develop strategies and secure delivery of a range of services to reduce the number of people who sleep rough in Cherwell and across the county. This includes an urgent response to the challenge of helping 40 rough sleepers and single homeless people move on from the emergency accommodation provided during the pandemic.
- Contribute to improving the health of homeless households, particularly those in temporary/supported accommodation and those in cold/energy inefficient homes.

- Deliver adaptations and Home Improvement Agency services to vulnerable and disabled residents to maximise the number of people that can stay at home safely and maintain independence.
- Contribute to the development of Cherwell Local Plan policies and arrangements for meeting an apportionment of Oxford's unmet housing need.

3.6 These actions are set out in a draft updated action plan for 2020/21 provided as Appendix 2. The proposed action plan takes in to account discussions with internal stakeholders. The input of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is sought before final adoption of the action plan. Where needed, an Equality Impact Assessment will be revised to take into account the objectives set out in the updated strategy action plan.

4.0 Conclusions and reasons for recommendation

4.1 The Housing Strategy is an important document in setting out the council's Housing ambitions and priorities. It contributes to the delivery of innovative and effective housing schemes which is a corporate business plan priority for Cherwell District Council.

4.2 Progress in delivering the Housing Strategy action plan for 2019/2020 within available resources has been largely successful. The progress is reported in detail in Appendix 1. There are some outstanding actions which will need to roll forward for delivery in 2020/21 and some new actions to be delivered. The draft updated action plan is set out in Appendix 2. Implementation runs from 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021. However, we have to take account of the impact of coronavirus on our priorities and on our partners, particularly registered providers that have had to postpone developments, furlough staff and redirect resources in to supporting vulnerable tenants. The updated action plan still aims to support delivery of affordable housing, prevention of homelessness and the creation of healthy and sustainable communities.

5.0 Consultation

There was extensive consultation with external and internal stakeholders to support the development of the Housing Strategy. There has not been consultation on this progress reporting which has been collated by the Housing Team. However all actions rely on partnership working to deliver them.

We have consulted internally on the draft action plan for 2020/21 e.g. with Planning and Build! colleagues. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members are part of this consultation.

6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejections

Not to report back annually on progress against the Strategy and not to revise the action plan for implementation - this option is rejected on the grounds that it is good practice to report back on progress against a Council Strategy and to review and revise the action plan annually in the light of a) progress to date; and b) changing national and local context. It is important that we learn from what has worked and not worked to date and use this to inform future action planning.

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 Delivery of the Housing Strategy and associated action plan requires significant investment of time and resource by the council.
- 7.2 Decisions about specific projects and developments will need to be made, depending on the business case, throughout the lifetime of the Strategy. Ongoing actions within the Housing Strategy Action Plan will be delivered within existing resources and in accordance with the council's Medium-Term Financial Plan.

Comments checked by:

Adele Taylor, Interim Executive Director of Finance (to 24/2/20)
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Legal Implications

- 7.3 The Housing Strategy is not a statutory requirement but takes account of the relevant legislation regarding housing. Where an outstanding or new project cannot be dealt with under delegated authority to the Officer, approval will need to be sought from the Executive Committee in line with Cherwell District Council's legal and constitutional requirements.

Comments checked by:

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Risks and Other Implications

- 7.4 Risks, including any Equality Impact, to the delivery of individual actions and projects outlined in Appendix 2 will need to be assessed as part of the individual project delivery plans.

Comments checked by:

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8.0 Decision Information

N/a

Wards Affected

All

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

Housing that Meets Your Needs

Lead Councillor

Cllr John Donaldson – Lead Member for Housing

Document Information

Appendix 1	Progress made towards delivery of the Annual Action Plan 2019-20.
Appendix 2	Proposed revised housing strategy action plan for 2020/21
Background Papers	
None	
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