



Appendix 3 Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement Consultation Report

September 2021

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Executive Summary	3
3. Methodology	4
4. Responses and feedback	5

1. Introduction

This report sets out the key findings from Cherwell District Council's draft Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement 2021 consultation, which was carried out between 3 August 2021 and 14 September 2021.

The purpose of the consultation was:

- i. To inform the defined audience of the draft Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement – the reason for it being produced, the context and the rationale for the content supported by research.
- ii. To gather feedback on the draft strategy (its identified vision, aims and principles) and to use this to inform decision-making.

Consultation was targeted at Registered Providers of social housing, social housing tenants, key stakeholders, service users and providers, as well as Cherwell residents and other interested parties.

Feedback and comments received during the consultation have been considered and used to influence the final strategy which is due for adoption by Cherwell District Council in November 2021.

2. Executive Summary

In total, the council actively engaged with people on 99 occasions (it's possible that some individuals may have engaged more than once via the survey and the workshops throughout the consultation period). Eighty-two people completed the online survey (the main focus of this report) and 17 Registered Provider representatives attended consultation workshops. In addition, details of the consultation were proactively sent by officers to a range of statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations and faith groups within the Homeless Network as well as 54 Registered Provider contacts. The consultation and online survey were also promoted to the general public via press releases and social media posts, and to housing register applicants via the council's Cherwell HomeChoice website.

The survey responses highlighted that there is strong overall support for the draft strategy's vision and aims. There is also strong support for housing to be genuinely affordable for local people and provided to a good quality standard. A variety of comments have been provided through the survey and these are highlighted in this report, along with officer responses. Officer responses also highlight how corresponding amendments to the strategy will be made where needed.

Whilst it has not been possible, within the scope of the draft Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement, to address all comments received, it is important to note that the Housing Strategy 2019-2024 and associated Action Plan; the Housing Allocation Scheme and the Local Plan policies can, and in most cases already do, address the issues raised during this consultation.

In response to the consultation feedback, minor changes have been made to the draft Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement to make sure that the council's

expectations of registered providers are clear in terms of the provision of genuinely affordable social rented housing that is delivered and maintained to a good standard. The changes also acknowledge the impact of social rent on scheme viability and how viability issues will be taken into consideration to ensure continued deliverability of affordable housing in the district. Amendments to the strategy document include text to support that registered providers will have transaction and ancillary costs when disposing of a social housing property and therefore will not be able to recycle the full receipt from the sale back into accommodation within Cherwell district as was initially suggested in the strategy document.

3. Methodology

Between 3 August 2021 and 14 September 2021, Cherwell District Council invited comments on its draft Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement (2021).

Feedback was primarily sought using an online survey hosted on Cherwell District Council's website alongside copies of the draft strategy and equality and climate impact assessment for background information.

The consultation was actively promoted to a wide range of audiences using multiple channels, including email, website, media press releases and social media posts on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. The social media 'reach' was to a total of 16,361 people. 158 people clicked on the link to visit the online survey from the Facebook post. Website analytics has helped to identify that most activity on this consultation has occurred around the time of the launch of the consultation and during periods when: emails have been sent; when press releases have been published; or when social media messages have been posted, thereby acting as a 'nudge' to people to take part. A link to the consultation pages on the council's website was also highlighted on the Cherwell HomeChoice website in order to raise awareness to housing register applicants.

In line with legislative requirements, at the launch of the consultation an email and a copy of the draft strategy and suite of consultation documents was sent to registered providers in Cherwell District. The information was also posted on the council's website on the Housing pages and also on the consultations page 'Have Your Say'.

Press releases, social media posts and emails were sent between 26 August 2021 and 13 September 2021 to further promote the consultation opportunity as the August holiday period was coming to an end. An email was sent to the Homeless Network which includes representatives of statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations, service providers, councils, Health, Police and Social Care, asking for their feedback on the strategy and to support service users to take part in the consultation wherever possible.

On request, hard copies of the documents (and copies in other accessible formats) would have been made available to anyone requiring them however no requests were received during the consultation period.

A consultation workshop was held on 6 September, attended by three Registered Provider representatives and another workshop was held on 13 September, attended by 14 Registered Provider representatives. The feedback has been incorporated in this report.

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted how we deliver public engagement and consultation. Whilst it would be usual practice to run a public consultation event or attend service-user group meetings, the continued social distancing measures and potential risk of increasing Covid cases, has required a more web-based presence and form of consultation. This methodology does not appear to have adversely impacted the volume or quality of responses received as over 50% of survey responses were received from members of the public and from current or former Cherwell tenants.

4. Responses and feedback

In total, 82 people completed the online survey. Whilst 26 respondents declined to comment, a further 23 identified themselves as being a member of the public and 25 respondents identified themselves as a current or former tenant in Cherwell District Council. Other respondents to the survey (5) were professionals representing a service provider, voluntary or community sector view. A further three respondents identified themselves as an employee or elected member of a council.

Not everyone answered each question (as was permitted) and this report focuses on the total number of people who answered each question on the survey. As is good practice, we have reported in numbers.

This report will be used as a background document to inform decision-making. Some of the qualitative feedback is quite nuanced, which has made thematic reporting challenging. Where commonality in responses has been identified this has been noted.

The feedback from the consultation workshops with Registered Providers has been captured separately in this report. The following paragraphs focus on the responses from those who completed the online consultation survey.

Views on Our Vision

Our Vision is: To create places that thrive; to support mixed, vibrant communities and provide housing that meets identified needs. We want residents to feel settled in their homes and for those homes to be good quality, safe, secure and able to withstand the challenges we face.

Sixty-seven (approximately 82%) of the 82 respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the vision as set out. However, comments from some of those respondents and others who either disagreed/strongly disagreed (8) or did not state a preference (7), identified that homes needed to be affordable as well as being maintained to good standards. Another respondent raised that the vision was good but impractical. Other

comments provided conflicting views i.e. there were not enough houses being built or there were too many estates being built in the town and it was growing too big. The scale and number of new developments in the area is not within the scope of this strategy, however it is covered in the Housing Strategy 2019-2024. In response to the feedback from survey respondents, a minor amendment has been made to paragraph 1.3 in respect of quality standards and also an amendment to the vision set out in the Tenancy Strategy at paragraph 2.1 to include that homes should be affordable as well as good quality, safe, secure and able to withstand challenges.

Views on the strategy aims

When respondents were asked to consider if the strategy adequately met the four aims set out in the document, 48 of the seventy responses received to this question agreed or strongly agreed. Just 13 respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed and seven respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. There were 22 comments provided, the majority of which (14) raised that housing rents/costs in Cherwell are not affordable, especially for low or middle-income earners. Others raised the issue of housing quality standards. Individual comments also raised that homes should have their own garden and no shared areas; sustainable social housing offers are not always met; need to build more 2-bed bungalows; people want to live near to where they grew up but there are no new houses being built; Council housing should be reinstated.

In response, to the feedback received, amendments have been made to the draft Tenancy Strategy (paragraph 1.3 and 2.2) to emphasise the need to deliver quality standards. The affordability issue has already been addressed throughout the document with emphasis on delivery of more social rent homes. The delivery of housing, property types and sizes has been addressed within the Housing Strategy and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. It is also part of planning policy which will be reviewed as part of the development of policies in the new Local Plan for Cherwell.

Views on the priority to protect and increase the supply of social rent housing in the district.

43 out of the 63 people who responded to the question agreed or strongly agreed that the priority is to protect and increase the supply of social rented housing. A total of 16 respondents disagreed (9) or strongly disagreed (7) with this position. Four people neither agreed nor disagreed. There were 19 comments provided of which half commented on the affordability of housing in the district, particularly the high cost of rents on new-build developments. There were also other comments more specifically:

- This is an affluent area. There's only so much you can do to force the market.
- More should be done to shift the affordability of market rents which has largely been caused by historic undersupply of housing. Need to look at planning policy to facilitate increased supply of housing to tackle the market rent issue

rather than ignoring the market rent issue and simply "handcuffing" with social rents.

- Too many houses in Banbury as it is time to stop
- House pricing is going up for everyone why should everyone else have to scrimp and save yet people on benefits don't have to.
- Developers are profiting from their development and they impact on the local area, not all positive.
- There are over 5000 empty properties - they should be offered to people even if they need modernisation.
- Are people in my age bracket and financial circumstances ever going to get an opportunity to rent one of these properties? This policy is discriminatory. People of my age don't get a look in and never have. You have always had a housing policy that discriminates against people like me.
- I think if people had the option to be able to buy affordable housing, they would rather do this than rent properties. The prices are too high for low-income earners and those that work as keyworkers.

In response, the Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement aims to meet the needs of those households who cannot afford to rent or buy on the open market. Housing supply, empty homes, influencing market rents and access/allocation of affordable homes for rent are not within the scope of this strategy and indeed are addressed within other documents such as the Allocation Scheme, Housing Strategy and Local Plan. The focus on provision of more social rent homes remains unchanged within the new Tenancy Strategy as it contributes towards addressing the local affordability concerns.

Views on lifetime tenancies as the default tenancy offered by Registered Providers.

46 (75%) of the 61 respondents to this survey question either agreed (17) or strongly agreed (29) with lifetime tenancies being the default tenancy. 11 respondents disagreed (6) or strongly disagreed (5) to this position. There were 19 additional comments provided, the majority of which support that lifetime tenancies will provide security and stability. However, other comments in disagreement with the provision of lifetime tenancies, set out that:

- The length of tenancy should be dependent upon the behaviour and conduct of the tenant. There are some lovely new properties handed to social housing tenants that very quickly become an eyesore to the estate and community where they are sited, with no sanction or incentive to discourage this.
- Lifetime tenancies are rarely the best option for people in today's fast-moving world. People rarely have jobs for life or even relationships for life. Medium/long term (e.g. 6 years) ASTs I feel better responds to this need and ensures people do not feel "locked into" a lifetime tenancy.
- Social housing should be there to help those in need, not as a home for life any more than private renting is. People who earn more than a set amount should pay full market value to remain or move to private rented so other families that need help can receive it.
- Landlords shouldn't be put in a position to have occupants they cannot easily remove, especially if they are [challenging] tenants. There should be a tier

system for tenancy agreements, with a full review of the tenant after 6 months, then extend the agreement to a year, then 2 years, then 5 years. It protects the landlord and their property but also gives an incentive to the tenant to live appropriately and look after the property.

- Social housing should be a temporary solution for an immediate problem. Not long term. There are obviously exceptions to this but for the majority this should be the case.
- You should not penalise tenants for having a spare room. HA's and councils should be doing more to help tenants move to larger properties or smaller properties based on need.
- Lifetime tenancies must come with the caveat that if the number in household reduces then the tenant must move to a smaller property.
- If a single elderly person needs care to stay in a 3-bedroom house and a family of 5 is stuck in a 2-bed flat, there should be a mechanism to ensure a move happens. Young people (not just those with children but all, including those working but not able to afford private rent) also need to be able to rent small 1 or 2-bedroom flats and be able to move easily into larger accommodation if needed.
- People are now having to save hard for retirement now and if they are able to buy a property that is affordable, then they will be better off when they retire.

In response, Section 5 of the Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement already provides for circumstances where a Registered Provider may want or need to offer a fixed term or introductory tenancy. The expectation is that wherever possible, lifetime tenancies will be offered as the default position. If more lifetime tenancies are offered, this should facilitate moves through social housing as tenants will be offered a 'like for like' tenancy regardless of the property they need to move from/to. No changes are proposed to the draft strategy document as a result of this feedback.

Views on the expectation of Registered Providers to offer social rent as the default rent.

46 (74%) of the 62 people who responded to this consultation survey question, either agreed (21) or strongly agreed (25) with the council's expectation of registered providers to offer social rent as the default rent level. Five disagreed and a further seven strongly disagreed. The remainder of respondents replied to say they neither agreed nor disagreed or were unsure.

A total of 20 additional comments were received from respondents, of which 14 mentioned the issue of unaffordability of local rent (including market rent and Affordable Rent). Social rent would allow people on low income to afford accommodation and save should they aspire to purchase in the future. Other comments raised that there should be some consideration of incomes when allocating accommodation at social rent levels i.e. people earning more but paying less rent in social rent homes than tenants earning less and paying more rent in Affordable Rent homes. Three of the comments specifically raised the issue of securing social rent homes when this may negatively impact on scheme viability. This was also an issue raised by some Registered Providers in the consultation workshops.

In response to the feedback received, the issue of financial assessment of tenants prior to allocation of a social housing dwelling is part of the suitability of accommodation test within the Allocation Scheme. However, a minor amendment has been made to paragraph 6.3 of the draft Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement to make clear that consideration should be given to tenant incomes. On the final point about scheme viability, this is covered to some degree in paragraph 3.6, but additional wording has been added to strengthen the point of the financial and other support that can be enabled in recognition of scheme viability issues.

Views on the council's expectation of registered providers to enable the full receipt from sale of stock in the district to be reinvested back into Cherwell district.

49 (79%) of the 62 people who responded to this question agreed (15) or strongly agreed (34) that the full gain from stock disposals should be reinvested back into the district. 10 other people responded to say they neither agreed nor disagreed. Only one respondent disagreed. Most of the respondents commented that social housing should not be sold off. Others commented that the sale promoted an opportunity for people to buy a home they have lived in for some time. A concern raised by registered provider landlords in the workshops and also picked up in the online survey responses, is that the ability to reinvest partial receipts would enable the registered provider to cover transaction costs, promote home ownership and promote additional housing supply through partial re-investment.

Whilst the draft strategy sets out that the council does not generally support the disposal of stock, given that there have been practical issues raised by registered providers to this consultation question, a minor amendment has been made to paragraph 7.1 to account for transaction and ancillary costs where stock disposal is necessary.

Views on the council's expectation of registered providers to enable suitable moves in social housing stock to support the recruitment and retention of essential key workers, health and support workers in the Cherwell area, and other Reasonable Preference Groups, as set out in the council's Allocation Scheme.

56 out of the 62 survey respondents agreed in full or in part that this was a reasonable expectation. Just 6 respondents did not agree.

There were 10 additional comments from respondents. Three of which raised that they did not think this was happening in practice. Other comments raised concerns that some people would be given priority over others. Support was expressed for those households who genuinely needed to move to receive support to do so.

In response, no changes have been made to the draft Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement as the stated Reasonable Preference Groups and priority for key workers is already recognised within the council's Allocation Scheme. Further monitoring with registered providers through the performance review meetings will enable us to check if the ambition to enable mobility is being implemented.

Views on the council's expectations that all registered providers will identify and assist tenants who are under-occupying their homes to downsize should they wish to do so.

59 out of the 62 survey respondents expressed agreement that this was a reasonable expectation. Just three respondents disagreed. There were 15 additional comments provided, most of which emphasised that agreement was on the basis that this was with the agreement of the tenant who wished to move and who would not be 'forced out' of their home. The draft Tenancy Strategy already sets out in paragraph 8.2 that this would be the case for those wanting to downsize. Registered providers should be proactive in those conversations to help the tenant explore housing options without any pressure placed on them to move if they don't want to and can afford to remain living in their home.

No change required to the draft Tenancy Strategy.

Views on suggested exempt properties from Voluntary Right to Buy

The draft Strategy sets out that where Registered Providers must offer the opportunity for tenants to purchase their homes, the following criteria should be considered to create an exemption for specific properties:

- Properties in rural locations, which have less than 3000 population
- Designated elderly person accommodation where there is a shortfall of such accommodation
- Specialist or supported housing
- Disabled adapted properties secured through planning obligations
- Shared accommodation

When asked to what extent survey respondents agreed or disagreed that the suggested exemptions are the right ones for Cherwell district, 36 (61%) of the 59 people who responded strongly agreed (15) or agreed (31). However, nine people strongly disagreed, and five people disagreed. There were a further nine people who neither agreed nor disagreed or were not sure. Given the mixed response it is important to consider the 13 additional comments that were provided. These included:

- Some registered providers don't offer voluntary right to buy.
- Many homes are in rural areas, perhaps the threshold for exemption should be lower at circa 1000 population.

- Disabled adapted specialist housing for those who have longevity, it may be helpful to the individual having access to private ownership.
- I don't believe social housing should be sold at a reduced rate. The tenants have benefitted from reduced rent, they should pay full market value for the property. This discriminates against private renters on low income.
- As with other members of society, purchasing of homes should be done privately and not off the government. Social housing should be provided to those that need it. When someone is in a position to buy, they should move out of social housing and look at renting elsewhere or purchasing non-social housing.
- Don't allow the right to buy for tenants as often social housing ends up in private landlord ownership and rented out for extortionate rent way above social housing tariffs. Maybe encourage tenants' incentives like deposit schemes to buy a private property elsewhere instead of giving huge discounts based on length of their tenancies.
- Why shouldn't a disabled person be able to buy their bungalow if they can? If I can buy mine, so should someone with additional needs. Providers should have to invest in more.
- This is unfair to e.g. shared ownership buyers who aren't eligible for social rent but can't afford to buy on the open market either, discriminated against by having to buy shared ownership mortgages at higher levels than the open market and then disadvantaged as they don't get the chance to buy cheaply from the council
- Social housing should no longer be part of "right to buy". If a tenant is in a position to get a mortgage and purchase a property, they should go on to open market. Social housing should only be for those who are unable to rent privately. Right to buy has decimated Social housing and put tax papers cash into the pockets of landlords and developers. That has to stop.
- No housing stock should be sold off.

In response, section 11 of the Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement sets out that the criteria should be given consideration. There is no intention to discriminate i.e. the exemption to dispose of disabled adapted properties secured through planning conditions. Such disabled adapted properties are difficult to secure through developer contributions, they are more costly to develop and not easily replaced with the same value for future tenants if sold through Voluntary Right to Buy (VRTB). In practice, the pilot scheme for VRTB was run in the Midlands and a date has not yet been agreed for roll-out of VRTB in wider areas. The issue of VRTB is included in the draft Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement in the event that an announcement is made to extend a pilot scheme or roll out the scheme nationally. Therefore, no changes have been made to Section 11 of the draft strategy on the basis that these are 'considerations' for the registered provider when setting their own policies and procedures. Government guidance with any national roll out of the scheme may identify which units should be exempt. It will be a registered provider's decision to operate a VRTB scheme and which properties would be exempt or not from the scheme.

Views on whether it is reasonable to use 40% of net (take home) income as a measure of affordability to pay rent costs.

The survey responses evidenced a split view on this point. Whilst 19 (33%) of the 58 responses received did think it was reasonable to expect 40% of net income to be spent on rent costs, and 14 (24%) were partially in agreement with this position, there were 20 respondents (34%) who did not agree and five respondents who were unsure.

Fourteen additional comments were provided in response to this survey question. Some respondents who agreed that 40% of income was a reasonable expectation, also expressed opinion that a lower proportion of 30% or 33% would be better. Overall, the responses revealed that 40% was too high, with 30% being more reasonable and one respondent suggesting that "25% seems more appropriate especially in light of the condition of some of these properties". Respondents' concerns included that 40% of income did not account for household bills, service charges, travel costs to employment or consider the "spiralling utility costs which generally take over 10% of income". Other comments raised that the average 40% of income did not take account of those households earning lower than average incomes in the district.

Other comments included:

- There is pressure on the upcoming generations to pay more towards their personal pensions to fund their own retirement, bringing rents down will facilitate a possible increase in disposable income which would enable this.
- Should not use average income, as those on higher end can easily afford, but most jobs in Cherwell are minimum wage and 40% is a huge chunk.
- Many house buyers would love to be in a position of only paying 40% of their take home pay as mortgage payments. Within reason, rents should reflect the costs involved.
- This should be increased to 50-60% to ensure that bills can be paid off too as often tenants may be able to pay rent, but default on bills, and then end up defaulting on rent.
- Do you really think its fair rents are almost half of your weekly income? Does it give quality of life to residents beyond working, paying bills and dying. How much impact do you think the financial burden of rent places on mental health and best outcomes? What impact on social prescribing and the NHS because of stress related conditions? How does it effect homelessness and child poverty?
- I think there should be a minimum threshold below which you agree a fixed value as some on very low incomes could be left with very little after paying their rent.

In response, Appendix 2 has been reviewed. Paragraph A2.4 explains that in order to keep household costs affordable, it is estimated that around one third of gross annual income is spent on rent or mortgage however realistically this is around 40-50% of net 'take home' monthly pay. The tables A1, A2 and A3 set out how, using

40% of net income, the rent charges are unaffordable for various property types across the private and social housing sector. If the threshold was lowered to 30% of net 'take home' pay, clearly this would mean fewer properties would be affordable based on current rents and it supports the position set out in the strategy that social rent is the most affordable rent for most property types in the district if a household income is around the median for the area. It is not necessary to change the tables or calculations in the document but for clarity, additional text has been added to paragraph A2.6.

Views on other impacts we should consider in addition to those set out in the Social and Community Impact Assessment.

There were 18 responses to this question of which, four stated 'none'. Other responses included:

- Would the prospective new tenant be respectful of the area? Are they willing to give to the community in some way, even if just by litter-picking or looking after a communal space etc?
- Banbury is getting too overloaded. Stop building and stop bringing people into the town.
- People who are private renting who aren't entitled to social housing and can't afford the rent should get more help.
- Consider the increased rate of relationship breakdown, blended families, joint custody arrangement which require flexibility in housing use.
- This may not be right document, but I see nothing for travelling communities whether on land or water. Think about giving tenancies applicable to sites for these communities whilst you may not be providing the bricks and mortar so to speak. You could provide designated areas where people use the land or water as their tenancy. This would allow people to live their life with proper access to services.
- Tenants made aware of their responsibilities in maintaining a pleasant environment for themselves and their neighbours.
- Social housing tenants should be integrated within society with regular check-ups to ensure they are not littering or creating unnecessary noise for surrounding neighbours. With regard to climate change, all new developments should be fitted with solar panels to reduce carbon emissions through non-renewable energy.
- Help people in Banbury not outside first.
- There is no equality when it comes to the local environment. Very poor access for disabled people on these housing estates no pavements, having to walk on the roads.
- Housing shouldn't be about profit.
- Public transport access. New houses being built in small villages with social housing but no or limited transport causes other economic issues, such as access to cheaper food.
- Try providing homes, rather than profit for investors.
- I would like to see some consideration for those people who are working and paying private landlords who won't be able to afford to continue in the private rented property when they retire. I believe there will be a wave of these

people approaching social housing providers in the coming years and yet this group are not identified as a needing to be accommodated.

Many of the issues raised are already addressed in the Housing Strategy 2019-2024 and Local Plan planning policies i.e. large scale development in Banbury, transport, housing in rural areas, accessibility of housing, energy efficiency in new-development, and provision of sites/pitches with tenancies for Travellers.

Issues such as the allocation of housing and consideration of who is eligible or flexibility of use of social housing (i.e. relationship breakdown, blended families, joint custody etc.) is generally addressed within the council's adopted Housing Allocation Scheme which has its own Equality and Climate Impact Assessment and is monitored separately. Tenant responsibilities and behaviour are part of the registered provider's responsibility to undertake good housing management and provide the necessary support for tenants to thrive in their homes. This is addressed within the draft Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement in paragraph 5.1 and in section six (paragraphs 6.2 to 6.8). However, for clarity of purpose minor amendments have been made to paragraph 6.7. Given this, no further change is required to the Equality and Climate Change Impact assessment for this Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement.

Other comments on the draft Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement.

47 out of the 54 people who responded to this question in the survey declined to offer any other comments on the draft Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement. Seven people provided comments as follows:

- As in the old days of social housing (i.e. council houses), tenants should be required to maintain their property and gardens in an appropriate manner or face sanctions if they don't.
- Sell Castle Quay Projects and focus budgets on Housing, Emergency Services and High Street development.
- In general, a good document. Like the focus on longer tenancies Feel this should not be an option but a necessity and if providers cannot meet that then look for other providers. I would also like to see rent control in there. Rent costs not based on average in area but what a person actually earns.
- Yes, start providing homes for young people who cannot afford to buy.
- If you have to leave a property for health reasons, then you should be able to re-register.
- I would like a secured tenancy. Never likely to get one though. I don't feel part of this community, and I'm never likely to until I have some where I can actually call home.
- Mobility in Social Housing – I'm not sure about including the word "social" in employment, social or welfare reasons. Does this mean I can expect to be moved because I want to live closer to my friend?

It is not possible to address some of these comments within the scope of the draft Tenancy Strategy and Affordability Statement. Many are already addressed within other published strategies or Schemes. However, to address the issue raised

regarding rent control based on incomes, an amendment has been made to paragraph 6.3, and to clarify the last bullet point above, paragraph 8.1 has been amended.

Data on survey respondents

An average of 57 people responded to customer profile questions in the online consultation survey. Of these:

- 41 were female and 15 were male, others preferred not to say.
- Age: Four people were aged 18-24; 13 people were aged 25-34; 11 people were aged 35-44; 13 people were aged 45-54; Nine people were aged 55-64; Five people were aged 65-74 and one person was aged 75-84. Two people preferred not to say.
- Ethnicity – 49 people were White British, Irish, Scottish or other white background. 2 people were Asian or Asian British; one person was of Mixed ethnicity and others preferred not to say.
- The majority (37) had no long-standing illness or disability; 11 people had some form of long-term illness or disability; others preferred not to say.

Consultation Workshops with Registered Providers

During the consultation period, registered providers who own, let, or manage social housing stock in Cherwell District were invited to attend consultation workshops. Three registered providers attended the workshop on 6 September and fourteen attended the workshop on 13 September 2021. The workshops included a presentation on the strategy which set out the reasons for the strategy being refreshed, the legislative requirements, the local context and key issues for Cherwell district. The presentation was followed by group discussions guided by four key questions. The questions and feedback are set out below:

What are your opinions of the Vision and Strategy aims?

- Vision - is mutually/widely agreed. One concern raised was that setting secure tenancies as the default could result in difficulties managing problematic tenants.
- Aims – There are good points around the tenancy reviews.
- Fixed Term Tenancies – tenancy reviews are now part of everyday arrangements for registered providers (RPs). Most RPs are offering secure tenancies as the general rule, but some circumstances require fixed term tenancies or licenses, therefore RPs will continue to issue those in the right circumstances.
- Agreed that fixed terms tenancies are undesirable because of administrative impact.

Have we considered all necessary and important housing factors in formulating this strategy?

- Demographic changes have resulted in changing housing circumstances and increased demands for different housing types/tenures etc. We now need to take account of the need of these changing households i.e. newly forming single households as a result of relationship breakdown or people needing independent accommodation from families, single homeless, people needing to downsize or move to a larger home, blended households etc. We need to think about how we facilitate flexibility within social housing to accommodate changing household needs. If we offer lifetime tenancies, will that facilitate circulation in housing stock as a result of re-lets and voids?
- Increased supply of housing generally and the right kind of housing to meet identified needs will support flexibility within social housing stock to happen.
- Management transfers – If RPs are to make best use of existing stock to help tenants to downsize then there should be further guidance on when management transfers can be used. This is a matter dealt with in the Housing Allocation Scheme.
- Impact of housing market – information on the local housing market helps RPs set out a clear case for investment when reporting to their Boards.
- Succession – RPs get a lot of challenges and queries about succession rights to tenancies. This may be something for the Allocations Scheme to focus on.
- RPs do not have a large amount of fluid stock so it is often easier to advise people to reapply for housing in order to have access to a wider pool of properties however, it is acknowledged that this practice could create false demand.

What barriers might Cherwell DC face in delivering the new Tenancy Strategy?

- There should be no issues with provision of long-term tenancies. It is in the interest of the tenants to deliver more genuinely affordable, sustainable housing.
- Not sure that provision of social rents would reduce the number of voids in social housing stock. There would still be a 'take-up' if delivered at affordable rent levels.
- 4-bed houses – larger households may need 'top-ups' if affected by benefit cap and paying Affordable Rents. Whilst social rent may be more affordable for tenants in 4-bed homes, the commercial viability of delivering 4-bed at social rent is an issue for RPs and possibly developers.
- In negotiating S.106 planning obligations it is possible to secure social rent but in doing this there may be other compromises in terms of the developer obligations.
- There may be issues of aligning expectations that are not planning policy.
- Getting developers to agree to Social Rent and securing this in S.106 Agreements.

What barriers might RPs face in working to deliver the expectations set out in this new Tenancy Strategy?

- Issues of scheme viability if rents are at social rent. Developers need RPs to take on the affordable homes, but RPs need to make it work financially. This would be easier if grant funding could support social rent delivery and plug the financial gap on S.106 units.
- Small sites – some RPs are developing on small former garage sites but this does not present an opportunity to achieve economies of scale. Social rent may not be financially achievable on smaller or complex sites.
- Viability – may also impact on housing supply. Can the market rent issue be tackled? If planning policy allowed more housing development, this would increase supply and possibly lower market rents.
- Some RPs are national organisations – ability to flex processes to meet local issues/needs can be challenging when the organisation works at a national level.
- Affordable housing development – the cost of delivering social rent is an issue and viability is a consideration. CDC need to consider the practicality of implementation through S.106 Agreements.
- Although there is a willingness by RPs to deliver social rents, the finance and planning issues may not make social rent viable.

During the consultation workshops, registered providers were encouraged to also respond individually to the online consultation survey and to encourage tenants wherever possible to take part in the consultation.

In the discussions with RPs, officers acknowledged that some of these issues could only be dealt with via changes to planning policy, testing of viability on development sites and support for grant funding. Housing Strategy officers will work with and support the planning team to deliver policies and developments that can secure social rent tenure wherever viable (see paragraph 3.4). In addition, officers will enable discussions with Homes England and RPs around the funding for more social rent accommodation in Cherwell, particularly for larger family homes where benefit caps are likely to impact on household affordability (see paragraphs 3.6; 6.1; 6.3 and 6.4).

Frances Evans
Housing Strategy and Development Team Leader

Housing Strategy & Development Team
23 September 2021