

OPEN

Economy and Growth Committee

12th November 2024

Housing Strategy 2025-2028

Report of: Peter Skates – Acting Executive Director – Place and Director of Growth and Enterprise

Report Reference No: EG/17/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: All Wards

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report presents the 2025 – 2028 draft Interim Housing Strategy.
- 2 The Economy and Growth Committee are asked to consider the draft Strategy and approve it for public consultation.
- 3 The Strategy contributes towards a number of objectives within the Corporate Plan (2021-2025) including enabling access to well designed, affordable and safe homes for all our residents, to be a carbon neutral Council, reduce health inequalities and the regeneration of our towns.

Executive Summary

- 4 Housing is a vital element of developing the 'place', assisting in the creation of sustainable communities and our ambition for economic growth. It is a fundamental part of everyone's life and is essential to our health, children's educational achievement, economic wellbeing and to social inclusion.
- 5 There is a clear relationship between the growth of the economy and the need for an expanded and a more diverse housing supply. This supply needs to encourage an inflow of younger, economically active workers into the area as well as providing suitable provision for an ageing population and those most vulnerable of our residents, whilst not placing a financial burden upon the authority. Housing therefore cuts across a number of agendas and links into a variety of key priorities.

- 6 Whilst not a statutory requirement to publish a Housing Strategy it is deemed to be best practice to set out the Council's vision and priorities for housing over a prescribed period of time. The previous Housing Strategy 2018-2023 has now ended and the Housing Team have been developing a revised strategy.
- 7 Due to the challenges that we have faced over the last few years, including the impact of the pandemic and war in Ukraine on the global economy, a recent change in Government, who are proposing a number of policy changes and the move towards to the revision of the Local Plan, we have focused on the development of a three year interim strategy, which sets out what our priority areas of work will be during this time frame.
- 8 We are seeking approval from the Economy and Growth Committee to publicly consult on the Interim strategy for a period of 12 weeks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Economy and Growth Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve public consultation on the draft Interim Housing Strategy 2025-2028 to be followed by
2. Presentation of the final version of the Interim Housing Strategy 2025-2028 to a future Economy and Growth Committee to seek approval to adopt.

Background

- 9 In 2018, the former Cabinet approved the 2018-2023 Housing Strategy which set out the vision for the future of Housing in the Borough and the aims and objectives.
- 10 The strategy provided a clear vision for our key partners who develop, own and manage existing or new housing to meet a diverse housing need.
- 11 The strategy ended in 2023 and during the lifetime of the strategy the Housing Team and our partners have delivered a number of initiatives and assisted some of our most vulnerable residents. These have also contributed towards the delivery of the Corporate Plan objectives and include:
 - 2,349 new affordable homes provided, through partnership working between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2022, exceeding the Local Plan target by 929.

- Housing Development Framework established to help bring forward the development of mixed tenure affordable housing on Council owned land.
 - The Housing Supplementary Planning document was adopted in 2022.
 - 5,555 households prevented or relieved from becoming homeless between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2022.
 - Secured £838,857 of external funding for a Rough Sleeper Initiative to provide additional single homelessness interventions until 2025, including specialist homelessness roles to address substance misuse, mental health and social care needs.
 - Established a permanent Rough Sleeper Team within the Housing Options service in 2020, to help provide a responsive outreach and support service to vulnerable rough sleepers in the borough.
 - Through grant funding, commissioned two services to provide 14 units of self-contained supported accommodation for people with a history of homelessness and multiple, complex needs.
 - 1,348 households helped to improve their living conditions between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2022.
 - Secured £7.9 million of funding for a domestic energy efficiency project to provide home insulation and low carbon heating for vulnerable residents.
 - 3,067 households helped to achieve affordable warmth between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2022.
 - 1,831 households helped to live independently by adapting their home between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2022.
- 12 These achievements and more took place whilst services were responding to the pandemic, bringing everyone off the streets, assisting those fleeing the war in Ukraine and responding to the cost of living crisis.
- 13 Since the end of the previous strategy the services have continued to explore new opportunities and continue to provide essential services to our residents. We have also been reviewing the current evidence to inform our future direction, in what is a fast changing environment.
- 14 We now have a new Government who are proposing a number of policy changes, we are working in a challenging financial climate and there is a review of the Local Plan on the horizon, which will bring forward further

housing needs evidence and policy changes. It is considered that to undertake any longer term planning would be at risk of those plans then being subject to change.

- 15 The Housing Services have therefore focused on developing a strategy which will cover the next three years 2025-2028 and outlines our priority areas of work, specifying the actions we will undertake during this timeframe. This will help inform our partners of our strategic direction and so help inform their own plans. It will provide a period when we can also respond more readily to the changing environment, collating evidence to inform our longer term housing priorities.
- 16 Our vision continues to be “All residents in Cheshire East are able to access affordable, appropriate, and decent homes”
- 17 The draft strategy outlines the priorities which include:
 - Improving access to affordable housing
 - Meeting Peoples’ specialist housing needs
 - Preventing homelessness and rough sleeping
 - Improving housing standards
 - Enabling independent living
- 18 We are seeking approval to consult with our residents and partners on the proposed priorities and actions.

Consultation and Engagement

- 19 The Interim Housing Strategy sets out the priority areas of work from 2025 to 2028, based on the evidence collated prior to the development of the strategy. It is good practice to consult with individuals and agencies, providing them with the opportunity to comment on priorities and actions which inform our strategic direction. By publicly consulting on the draft strategy, the Council mitigates the risk of implementing a strategic direction that does not take into account the range of needs and views within the Borough, ensuring it is representative.
- 20 A wide range of organisations will be consulted on the draft strategy including but not exclusively:
 - Internal Council Services including Adult and Childrens Services
 - Local Registered Housing Providers
 - Health
 - Communities

- Supported Accommodation Providers
 - Local charities and support groups
- 21 We are proposing to commence consultation on 25th November 2024 for a period of 12 weeks, ending on 17th February 2025
- 22 The consultation will take place through a number of mechanisms including:
- On line questionnaire
 - Briefing sessions
- 23 And it will be promoted through social media channels and press releases.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 24 The Housing Strategy is a significant contributor to achieving the aims and objectives of the Corporate Plan including “A Council which empowers and cares about people” and “a thriving and sustainable place”. It also contributes to the delivery of the vision of the Local Plan Strategy.
- 25 The strategy outlines the priorities which the Housing Services will concentrate on over the next three years to inform our partners of our strategic direction, which has the potential to influence their own plans and strategies. The lack of a strategy and strategic direction can lead to uncertainty not only for our partners, but Housing staff and other service areas.

Other Options Considered

- 26 Due to the changing environment we are currently working in, the decision has been taken to develop an Interim Housing Strategy which focuses on a three year period, instead of the longer term strategies usually developed.
- 27 We have the option to produce a longer term strategy (5 to 10 years), but the likelihood it that this would need to be changed, within a shorter period of time to reflect new Government policies, new evidence commissioned to support the new Local Plan and new Corporate Plan priorities.
- 28 With the challenges that the current financial position presents, services and priorities could change within the near future and therefore having a short term plan, provides services with focus until future decisions are taken.

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	No strategic direction to inform services and external partners.	Services on areas which may not be a strategic priority for the Council.
Implement a short term three year strategy	Provides strategic direction, explains our vision and priorities for focus, also providing an opportunity to plan for a longer term strategy.	Requires planning to start on the revision of the strategy within a year of adoption and resources may not be available.
Develop a longer term strategy (5 to 10 years)	The intelligence/evidence is not available to plan for a long term strategy	Due to the fast changing environment, the risk is that the strategy will be out of date within a shorter period of time. Further intelligence could influence a change in priorities and require a review of the strategy.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 29 The Deregulation Act 2015 Section 29 removed the legal requirement for a local authority to have a housing strategy. However, preparation of such a strategy is deemed as good practice. The proposal to consult on a three year strategy is therefore both possible and prudent given the current climate of change.
- 30 In conducting a public consultation exercise the Council should have regard to settled legal principles (known as the Gunning principles) to ensure that as the consultation is lawful and to mitigate challenge:
- 1) proposals are still at a formative stage - A final decision has not yet been made, or predetermined, by the decision makers.

2) there is sufficient information to give 'intelligent consideration' -The information provided must relate to the matters being consulted on and must be available, accessible, and easily interpretable for consultees to provide an informed response.

3) there is adequate time for consideration and response- There must be sufficient opportunity for consultees to participate in the consultation.

4) 'conscientious consideration' must be given to the consultation responses when reaching a final decision.

The proposal to go out to consult on a draft strategy, in a timeframe sufficient to allow consideration and in doing so to provide sufficient information and return to Committee with a revised strategy that takes into account the consultation responses will meet these principles.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 31 The development of an Interim strategy has been undertaken taking into consideration the Medium Term Financial Position and the resources available to the Housing Services currently. A number of actions will require partnership working and do not place a financial pressure on the Council.
- 32 Any reduction in funding and resources has the potential to impact on the ability to deliver all the actions outlined within the strategy and therefore the action plan will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it is still deliverable.
- 33 Some actions will be funded through external funding for example the Homelessness Prevention Fund. These grants have been in place for a number of years but could be reduced or cut and if this happens the actions associated with this funding will be reviewed.
- 34 All major projects for example the review of temporary accommodation will be subject to detailed business cases and if not supported will not proceed.

Policy

- 35 The Interim Housing Strategy will contribute towards the vision of the Corporate Plan 2021-2025 to be an open, fair and green Council and help to deliver the priority to be a Council which empowers and cares about people and is a thriving and sustainable place.

- 36 The strategy identifies a number of strategies in which there are strategic links including the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Carbon Neutrality Action Plan, Local Plan Strategy and the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 37 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has being completed for the Interim Housing Strategy and will be submitted for approval to the Council's Equality and Diversity Officer.

Human Resources

- 38 It is not anticipated that there will be any additional staff resources required to enact the actions in the strategy, and any resulting tasks and workgroups will be facilitated and completed within existing staff resources.

Risk Management

- 39 Priorities are derived from a strong evidence base which have taken consideration of resident requirements, as well as other local authority departmental ambitions. We are however working in a very fast changing environment which may result in other Government requirements being placed on services, this would have the potential to impact on our ability to deliver the outlined actions. We would therefore have to review the deliverability of the actions and reprofile time frames.
- 40 A number of actions within the strategy will involve working with external partners, stakeholders and other CEC departments. They may also be impacted by future financial pressures and changes. We will try and mitigate this risk via regular communication and monitoring.
- 41 There is a risk that delivery of actions within the strategy may be delayed due to staff resources and availability. This will be monitored and the action plan reviewed on a regular basis.

Rural Communities

- 42 The Interim Housing Strategy outlines the rural housing challenges including high house prices, ageing demographics, low wages and access to services. It emphasises that central to addressing deprivation in rural areas is making sure rural housing markets work for their resident populations by providing affordable accommodation across a range of tenures and types of home.
- 43 The strategy highlights the need to continue to engage with Parish councils and residents to address identified housing needs.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 44 The need to deliver a range of housing and housing support options appropriate to the needs and preferences of young people is recognised. One of the priority areas of work is identified within the Interim Housing Strategy is providing specialist housing and there are a number of actions which have been highlighted to support the creation of housing options and pathways for our Care Leavers.

Public Health

- 45 Housing is a key social determinant for a person's mental and physical health. Furthermore, people who experience homelessness are significantly more likely to suffer mental and physical health issues. Poor housing conditions can result in health issues, with cold and damp homes increasing the risk of cardiovascular, respiratory and rheumatoid diseases, as well as hypothermia and poor mental wellbeing. Young children, older people and people with an illness or disability are more likely to suffer the effects of cold and damp housing.
- 46 The priorities and actions set out within the Interim Housing Strategy will help to reduce the prevalence of homelessness, make better quality housing more accessible to residents and improve housing standards. This will, in turn, deliver direct and indirect health and wellbeing benefits to Cheshire East residents.

Climate Change

- 47 Energy use in homes accounts for 28% of carbon emissions in Cheshire East. The Council has committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2027 and to encourage all businesses, residents and organisations in Cheshire East to reduce their carbon footprint. The Council made a further pledge to make Cheshire East a carbon neutral borough by 2045.
- 48 The interim Housing Strategy contributes towards the delivery of this ambition through the priority of Improving Housing Standards, where we will continue to enable and advise vulnerable households how to improve their homes energy efficiency.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Karen Carsberg – Head of Housing Karen.carsberg@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Draft Interim Housing Strategy
Background Papers:	N/A