

OPEN

Economy and Growth Committee

3rd June 2025

Interim Housing Strategy 2025-2028

Report of: Phil Cresswell – Executive Director - Place

Report Reference No: EG/09/25-26

Ward(s) Affected: All Wards

For Decision or Scrutiny: Decision

Purpose of Report

- 1 On 12th November, the Economy and Growth Committee approved consultation on the Interim Housing Strategy 2025-2028.
- 2 Consultation took place for a period of 12 weeks ending on 25th February 2025. This report provides a summary of the responses and presents the findings.
- 3 The Strategy contributes towards a number of commitments within the new Corporate Plan (2025-2029) including unlocking prosperity for all and improving health and wellbeing.

Executive Summary

- 4 The Economy and Growth Committee in November were advised that 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 change in Government, who are progressing a number of policy changes and the move towards the revision of the Local Plan, we have focused on the development of a three year Interim Housing Strategy, which sets out what our priority areas of work will be during this time frame.
- 5 This provides time to develop a long-term Housing Strategy which will draw on the evidence due to be commissioned for the development of a

new Local Plan and we will have a clearer position in relation to the introduction of new Government Legislation.

- 6 The Interim Housing Strategy went out for a period of public consultation between 25th November 2024 and 25th February 2025, the aim of which was to seek views on the strategy and the outlined priorities. There were a number of questions which were circulated to Committee Members prior to the start of the consultation and are also provided in Appendix one.
- 7 At the close of the consultation 229 responses had been received, a summary of which is outlined in Appendix two
- 8 The summary outlines where changes are to be made to the Interim Housing Strategy as a result of the responses and these have been incorporated into the final version Appendix three.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Economy and Growth Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the consultation responses and amendments made to the Interim Housing Strategy 2025–2028
2. To approve and adopt the final version of the Interim Housing Strategy 2025-2028
3. Delegate authority to the Director of Growth and Enterprise to approve any further updates to the Interim Housing Strategy Action Plan up and to 2028.

Background

- 9 Housing plays a crucial role in peoples' quality of life, health, and wellbeing. The Interim Housing Strategy 2025-2028 supports the Council's aims and objectives for housing in the Borough, to improve the choice, quality, and supply of housing for a diverse population, support people to buy or rent their own home, prevent homelessness, improve options for older people and protect the most vulnerable.
- 10 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.

- 11 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 are however working in a fast-changing environment.
- 12 The Government are progressing a number of policy changes, which will bring forward new requirements. We continue to work 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 at this stage would be at risk of those plans then being subject to further change.
- 13 The Housing Services have therefore focused on developing an Interim Housing strategy to cover the period 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 housing priorities and the development of a long-term Housing Strategy.
- 14 The Interim Housing Strategy focuses on a number of key strategic priorities which include:
 - Improving access to affordable housing
 - Meeting Peoples specialist housing needs
 - Preventing homelessness and rough sleeping
 - Improving housing standards
 - Enabling independent living
- 15 The Councils Transformation Programme recognises a number of projects associated with assets and good asset management. Housing being one of those core plans at the heart of the Councils corporate responsibilities, and our statutory duties around housing. This is sometimes called the “front door.”
- 16 There are clear links to the Council’s Transformation agenda, service areas across the Council have been identified within the Strategy where Strategic Housing will work closely with them to understand the accommodation needs, formulate an Accommodation Strategy and identify mechanisms in which to bring forward the required accommodation. These will be incorporated within future iterations of the Strategy, which will be updated.

- 17 The Interim Housing Strategy was publicly consulted on for a 12-week period and a summary of the consultation responses can be found in Appendix two. A number of changes have been made to the strategy following consultation and these are outlined in the Consultation and Engagement section below.

Consultation and Engagement

- 18 Following approval, the draft Interim Housing strategy was subject to a period of 12-week consultation, which ran from 25th November 2024 to 25th February 2025. Consultation took the form of:
- 19 Online questionnaire and survey seeking views of residents and stakeholders via the Cheshire East Council website
- 20 Presentations to encourage participation in the consultation
- 21 Social media and website campaign to advise local residents of the consultation
- 22 Hard copies along with questionnaires placed in libraries to allow response by people without access to computer or smart 'phone.
- 23 The responses to the consultation were collated by the Research and Intelligence Team and the results provided to enable the further development of the final strategy.
- 24 In total, there were 229 responses received via the online questionnaire/survey, and these have been collated into a Summary, outlined in Appendix two.
- 25 The responses ranged from general comments about the strategy, feedback on the proposed actions and some specific comments regarding key areas. The amendments to the strategy included:
- 26 A definition of 'cost of living crisis', as this much used term was in need of a focus; text concerning 'future proofing' of new homes, recognising the importance of suitable homes for older and disabled people; reference to access to green space and public transport; text on the Armed Forces Covenant; comments on Registered Providers of social housing and Private Developers.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 27 The Housing Strategy is a significant contributor to achieving the aims and objectives of the Corporate Plan including "Unlocking prosperity for

all and improving health and wellbeing". It also contributes to the delivery of the vision of the current Local Plan Strategy.

- 28 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

- 29 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.
- 30 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.
- 31 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 focus 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.
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Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 32 The committee's remit set out in the Constitution includes 'determination of policies and making of decisions in relation to housing management and delivery.' Approval of the housing strategy is therefore within its remit.
- 33 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.
- 34 The proposed amendments to the strategy have been out to public consultation and the outcomes of consultation have been taken into account which demonstrates informed decision making taking into account relevant considerations.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 35 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.
- 36 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.
- 37 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; if this happens the actions associated with this funding will be reviewed.
- 38 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

- 39 The Interim Housing Strategy will contribute towards the vision and commitments outlined within the new Corporate Plan 2025-2029 including unlocking prosperity for all and improving health and wellbeing.
- 40 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

- 41 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been carried out. Concern was raised about the lack of data regarding disabled households. This has been addressed with data now included. Reference was made to exclusion of Roma, and a change was made to Gypsies Roma and Travellers.
- 42 Attention was drawn to the reference to supporting our care leavers to ensure they have the skills to prepare for and sustain their tenancy, which is now included.
- 43 Concern was raised about accommodation provision for young people, and about the lack of data regarding disabled households, now included. Mention of sensory disability has been included. It was suggested that age is not a contributing factor to deprivation. Age is a Protected Characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. Old people in rural areas have more difficulty in accessing services which are further away, and this is reflected in the Strategy.

Human Resources

- 44 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

- 45 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, and 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.

- 46 A number of actions within the strategy will involve collaborating 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.
- 47 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

- 48 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.
- 49 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)

- 50 We recognise the need to deliver a range of housing and housing support options appropriate to the needs and preferences of young people. One of the priority areas of work 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

- 51 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.
- 52 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

- 53 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.
- 54 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 home's energy efficiency.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Karen Carsberg Karen.carsberg@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix One – Consultation questions Appendix Two – Consultation Results Appendix Three – Housing Strategy 25-28
Background Papers:	<Provide a list of the background papers/information relevant to this report and/or recommendations>