

Cheltenham Borough Council
Cabinet – 13th July 2021
Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-23
Action Plan Update 2021

Accountable member	Councillor Mike Collins, Cabinet Member Housing
Accountable officer	Martin Stacy, Lead Commissioner – Housing Services
Ward(s) affected	All
Key Decision	No
Executive summary	<p>The council's Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-23 was approved by Cabinet in July 2018. This is a five year strategy that sets out both our vision and priorities in order to achieve our outcomes.</p> <p>This strategy is a living document. For this reason we are updating our action plan annually to reflect the challenges and opportunities that have arisen, and will continue to arise, since the strategy was published.</p> <p>Our updated action plan is at Appendix 2 of this report.</p>
Recommendations	<p>That Cabinet:</p> <p>1. Approves the Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan Update for 2021</p>

Financial implications	None as a direct result of this report. Contact officer: Andy Taylor, andrew.taylor@cheltenham.gov.uk, 01242 264186
Legal implications	The applicable legislation is the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, Housing Act 1996 - Homelessness Act 2002. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 places an emphasis on early intervention and the prevention of homelessness. Authorities must provide structured advice and assistance to everyone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness, not just those who are considered to be vulnerable and in “priority need”. The Council is required to have a strategy in place and ensure that this complies with the relevant legislation. The Council should also have regard to the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998 when applying their strategy. Contact officer: vikki.fennell@onelegal.org.uk, 01684 272015
HR implications (including learning and organisational development)	None as a direct result of this report.
Key risks	Please see Risk Register – Appendix 1
Corporate and community plan Implications	This action plan update supports the council’s corporate priority: ‘Increasing the supply of housing and investing to build resilient communities’, as well as the council’s place vision: ‘Cheltenham is a place where people and communities thrive’.
Environmental and climate change implications	None as a direct result of this report
Property/Asset Implications	None as a direct result of this report Contact officer: Dominic Stead, Dominic.Stead@cheltenham.gov.uk, 01242 264151

1. Background

- 1.1** The Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-23 was approved by Cabinet in July 2018. This is a five year strategy that sets out both our vision and priorities in order to achieve our outcomes.
- 1.2** This strategy is a living document. For this reason we will continue to update our action plan annually to reflect the challenges and opportunities that have arisen, and will continue to arise, since the strategy was published. Our updated action plan is at Appendix 2 of this report.
- 1.3** Whilst we must look forward, this report also provides us with an opportunity to look back at some of our most notable achievements during the third year of our strategy. These are summarised below:

2. Progress against our Housing & Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2018/23

2.1 Outcome 1 – Increasing the provision of affordable housing.

- 80 new affordable homes were provided during 2020/21, of which 75 homes (i.e. 94%) were delivered over and above what would have been delivered through market forces alone. This ‘additionality’ – a key aim of our housing strategy - is made up of 34 (out of 37) new council (CBC) homes delivered via Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH), along with a further 41 (out of 43) new affordable homes provided by Bromford, with the help of Homes England grant funding.
- Significant progress has also been made over the last 12 months to identify a wide range of sites for the potential delivery of CBC-owned affordable housing across the Borough. We now have a current pipeline of c.371 affordable homes to be delivered within 5 years from April 2021. This includes schemes in contract, committed sites, our acquisitions programme and sites with a higher probability of progressing, and does not include any further speculative sites which we are also continuing to progress.
- During the first few months of this new financial year alone, CBC has already delivered, via CBH, a further 27 new affordable homes at Radford Court, Hesters Way. This is in addition to land recently acquired at Monkscroft school (potentially delivering 70 affordable homes) and the recent acquisition of land at Swindon Road (subject to planning permission being awarded), which has the potential to provide a further 24 affordable homes. At present, we are expecting to invest approximately £89m from the Housing Revenue Account on new affordable homes over the 3 years to March 2024.
- This is in addition to the exciting new opportunities currently underway in West Cheltenham’s proposed Cyber Park/Golden Valley development, which will see the provision of up to 3,700 new homes alongside a new cyber innovation hub. Please see the following link for more information:
<https://www.goldenvalleyuk.com/>
- Our plans to significantly increase the delivery of affordable housing in the Borough are part of a wider £180m CBC housing investment plan that will see the provision of both private rented and market homes throughout the town. CBH have already taken the first steps to providing 13 high quality homes in the private rented sector later in the year, following their acquisition of a site for refurbishment at St George’s Place in the town centre.

2.2 Outcome 2 – Making best use of existing housing and improving our

neighbourhoods

- During the last 12 months, nearly 300 homes in the private sector in Cheltenham have been made safer. 13 long term empty homes have also been brought back into use as a result of direct action taken by CBC's Enforcement Team. In addition, the county-wide, jointly commissioned Warm & Well scheme undertook 86 energy efficiency measures, leading to an estimated annual carbon saving of 205.8 tonnes, and generating estimated annual savings of over £10,000 for households for the Borough.
- In addition, CBH have now completed a fire door renewal programme, installing over 6,000 new doors across our properties over the last 5 years. It is also anticipated that the window replacement and boiler programme will be completed during 2021/22. These improvement programmes have so far contributed to a further uplift in the SAP (energy efficiency) rating of our homes (now 72.96, compared with 72.02 in 2019).
- Following a funding bid to the government's Decarbonisation Fund Demonstrator Project, CBC (again, via CBH) has been successful in securing a £40k grant, which will go towards financing the transformation of two low energy performing homes through a 'deep retrofit' pilot. It is envisaged this will be implemented during 2021/22.
- Supporting households to downsize from large CBC homes is a key part of our housing strategy, as this helps to release these homes for larger families. Over the last 12 months, CBH have enabled 25 households to downsize from family-sized CBC accommodation, via Cheltenham's Help to Move Scheme. (This scheme provides practical support and assistance to enable older people to move home.) Of the 25 homes that became available for re-letting, four were 4 bedroom properties and one was a 5 bedroom home. In total, 34 unused bedrooms were freed-up for larger families under this initiative.

2.3 Outcome 3 – Tackling Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

- COVID-19 meant that 2020/21 was a challenging year generally, but perhaps most challenging of all has been our work in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping, particularly in the first national lockdown when housing pathways were significantly reduced. During the year, CBC and CBH responded positively to the government's 'everyone in' message by making 125 placements into emergency, hotel accommodation for those who were either rough sleeping or at imminent risk of rough sleeping. We have also collaborated with our partners across the county to bid for funding for the provision of accommodation and the joint commissioning of services for rough sleepers. A summary of some of our key successful funding bids during 2020/21 is provided below:
 - £3.8m county-wide funding from the government's Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP). This funding is going towards providing approximately 50 additional new homes in the county for rough sleepers, along with specialist support services to help with tenancy sustainment. The funding also includes £24,000 to furnish 6 CBC homes to be made available specifically for rough sleepers with highly complex needs.
 - £868k funding from the government's Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI4). This funding will enable key services for rough sleepers to continue to be commissioned across the county to cover the period July 2021 to March 2022. Specifically, it will ensure that we are able to maintain our existing Somewhere Safe to Stay Hubs in Gloucester and Cheltenham, and to

continue operating a larger Assertive Outreach Team. The funding includes a new Adult Social Work position within the Navigator Service operating from the hubs so that any care needs can be more easily assessed. There will also be a Hospital In-Reach worker to ensure rough sleepers going into hospital are not discharged onto the streets. In addition, this funding includes a £112,000 Enhanced Placement Fund (which incorporates funding for Winter 21/22, provided as a separate “Cold Weather Fund” in previous years) to ensure that rough sleepers have an off the street accommodation offer.

- Finally, CBC was successful in securing a small pot of Protect Plus Funding (c.£6k) from MHCLG to fund a short-term, part-time link worker post, employed by P3. This post is being used to pilot a new approach to engaging with our most entrenched rough sleepers in Cheltenham – a handful of individuals who are consistently unwilling to engage with services. Our aim is to enable more time to be spent with these households to build trust, with a view to then finding bespoke solutions and pathways.
- In addition to funding received via MHCLG, district authorities agreed to jointly fund and commission P3 (a charity) to secure 50 homes across the county within the private rented sector for rough sleepers with lower support needs (i.e. for those whose needs can more easily be met through Housing Benefit’s Intensive Housing Management payments). We are currently at the start of this initiative, so we will be closely monitoring outcomes to identify early successes and any lessons learned.
- Following COVID, we have reviewed our county-wide housing partnerships. CBC is now chairing a new Programme Management Group on behalf of districts and representatives from other relevant organisations such as Gloucestershire County Council, Health, and the Police and Crime Commission. This group will be responsible for coordinating and bidding for new funding opportunities, commissioning services, and monitoring and reviewing outcomes across the county.
- Throughout these last 12 months, CBH’s Housing Options Service has continued to remain effective in preventing and relieving homelessness across the Borough. In 20/21 there were 362 households whose homelessness was either prevented or relieved. This compares with 145 households during 2017/18 (prior to the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act and CBC’s Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy).
- Following an earlier successful countywide bid for funding, a Private Rented Sector Access Fund was established a couple of years ago to increase access to the private rented sector for homeless households (through the payment of deposits). The scheme ended earlier this year, with Cheltenham securing 85 of approximately 200 private rented properties secured across the county.
- Cheltenham’s Housing Options Service is one of the few homelessness services that also includes a much valued Benefits and Money Adviser. During the last 12 months alone, our Adviser has generated an additional £2.3m income for low-income households as a direct result of her involvement in supporting residents to resolve their benefits issues. This is an increase from £1.5m achieved the previous year, and reflects the increased financial support that has been made available generally during the pandemic, which our Benefits and Money Adviser has been able to tap into for her clients.

2.4 Outcome 4 – Improving the health and wellbeing of our communities

A lot of work has been undertaken by CBC and our partners, including CBH, to help improve the health and wellbeing of our communities and to support independent living. Here are a few highlights:

- CBC led on a comprehensive review of our Preferred Provider arrangements on behalf of the Joint Core Strategy Affordable Housing Partnership (which is made up of Cheltenham Borough Council, Gloucester City Council and Tewkesbury Borough Council). Of the Registered Providers that applied for Preferred Provider status, six were successful, and they have since joined the new Affordable Housing Partnership. The six successful Preferred Providers are: Aster, Bromford, Cheltenham Borough Homes, Cottsway Housing, Rooftop and Two Rivers. All were able to demonstrate a strong alignment with each district's housing and homelessness strategies, with a particular focus on reducing homelessness, increasing the provision of affordable housing, and creating sustainable and cohesive communities. We look forward to working with these Preferred Providers on our Strategic Allocation Sites, situated at West Cheltenham and North West Cheltenham, in the near future.
- CBH have continued to do well in tackling antisocial behaviour (ASB) – with all 132 cases being successfully resolved. In addition, CBH's Employment Initiatives Service has enabled 68 people to access training locally, and helped a further 41 people into work.
- Whilst opportunities to deliver initiatives in the community have been challenging during the pandemic, a range of online community activities have been implemented, which have enabled social contact to continue throughout these difficult times. Wellbeing calls have also allowed CBH to maintain contact with residents, and to help understand any vulnerability issues. Planning is now underway to restart the community and wellbeing initiatives in the summer (assuming restrictions are, and remain, lifted at the end of July 2021).
- Working with our partners in Health and Social Care, we have been supportive of the implementation of a new Home-Sharing Scheme. This Scheme brings together older people who have spare rooms, with people who need affordable accommodation and who are happy to chat and lend a hand if needed. The scheme is still at its early stages, but initial feedback remains very positive, with 15 households matched across the county as a whole, 5 of which have been in Cheltenham since the initiative began in 2019/20.
- Partners also remain committed to investing in improvements to the Borough's park homes. Through the use of the county-wide Better Care Fund, Health and Social Care partners have enabled 74 park homes across the county to be insulated this year, 9 of which were in Cheltenham. Of those benefiting from the insulation, 89% stated they felt happier in their home and 87% stated the improvements has a positive impact on their day-to-day life.
- Earlier this year, CBH (on behalf of CBC) was successful in securing £70,000 from the county-wide Better Care Fund. This funding will be used to support the creation of two new community hubs in our sheltered schemes at Coopers Court, Charlton Kings, and at Popes Close near the town centre, building on the two hubs that already exist at Wallace House, Hatherley, and at Lynworth Court, Prestbury. It is envisaged these community hubs will be delivered during 2021/22, and will improve social interaction and reduce social isolation within these local communities.
- CBC's Lifeline Alarm service has carried out 193 new installations over the last 12 months, with a further 84 key safes being fitted to allow for ease of access to both care and emergency services,

all of which contribute to our collective aims of supporting independent living.

- CBC has also continued to work collaboratively with our partners across the county to develop greater consistency in the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) services. 44 major DFG adaptations were delivered this year, enabling disabled or frail people to remain in their homes.
- Finally, CBC is proud to be a town of sanctuary for refugees and asylum seekers. We are continuing to work with partners to increase the provision of homes for asylum seekers and refugees within the Borough. In November 2020, CBC took the decision to increase the number of homes that will be sourced by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) as part of the Asylum Dispersal Scheme to accommodate approximately 50 people, and procurement for additional properties is currently underway. We will review our position again after 12 months.

3. Next steps for the year ahead

3.1 Appendix 2 of this report provides a detailed breakdown of the range of activities that will be undertaken during 2021/22 and beyond in order to support our strategy. Highlights include:

- Creation of an overarching CBC Housing Investment Strategy (incorporating private rented sector and market homes delivery to help support our regeneration aspirations and carbon neutral agenda);
- Continued focus on firming up our pipeline of up to 500 affordable homes over the next five years;
- West Cheltenham/Cyber Park – progression with the Golden Valley project that will lead to the creation of a new cyber innovation hub and potentially 3,700 new homes;
- A review of the affordable housing (and associated) policies within the JCS, as part of the JCS review – and to create a new Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document to support CBC’s policy position;
- Via CBH, develop a Carbon Reduction Action Plan to support CBC’s declared climate emergency;
- Jointly commissioning a county-wide housing condition survey to ensure we are up to date on the condition of homes in the private sector. This will then help to inform CBC’s future priorities in this area;
- Recommission CBC’s Advice & Inclusion Service (covering, debt, benefits, financial inclusion and housing rights advice), subject to securing relevant approvals;
- Further investment in the Housing Options Service, utilising MHCLG homelessness prevention grant funding, to create a deeper, more resilient service that will enable continued emphasis on tackling rough sleeping, as well as supporting people more generally to be able to stay in their homes;
- A review of rough sleeper pathways and the commissioning of services following successful funding bids to MHCLG, along with preparation of further service provision requirements ahead of any future funding opportunities;

- Implementation of the new Domestic Abuse Act. This will involve establishing new county-wide partnership arrangements, which will be responsible for supporting the county council in the assessment of needs, strategy development and the commissioning of services.

4. Reasons for recommendations

4.1 It is important that our strategy remains a living document by way of annual updates to our action plan. Issues around housing, both nationally and locally, will continue to emerge; and so the activities that support these outcomes need to be responsive and flexible to meet new challenges and embrace emerging opportunities as they arise. For instance, nationally, a number of key announcements have been made over the last 12 months. These include:

- Publication of the government's Social Housing White Paper. This sets out a 'charter for social housing residents' and aims to deliver the improvements in transparency and accountability in the social housing sector, with a view to raising standards throughout the country. Critically the role of the Social Housing Regulator is set to change, with triggers for intervention likely to be more frequent, once the current 'serious detriment test' is removed. Primary legislation is required for much of the proposals within the white paper, and we are currently working with CBH to ensure CBC continues to remain compliant with the Consumer Standards ahead of any changes.
- The government's launch of its 'First Homes' programme. This discount market housing is now set to become a requirement within s.106 affordable housing schemes. The Ministerial Statement of 24th May 2021 means that, following a transitional period, 25% of affordable housing on s106 schemes will need to be First Homes. A minimum discount of 30% will be available (more, i.e. 40% or 50%, if local authorities can evidence the need). First Homes will replace other forms of affordable housing tenure, notably Shared Ownership and potentially Affordable Rented homes. LAs will also be required to identify the resources needed to administer the delivery of First Homes (e.g. assessing home-buyers on their eligibility for the product).
- The government have now set out a new national model for Shared Ownership properties delivered under the government's Affordable Homes Programme 2021-26, bringing down the initial stake that households can purchase from 25% of the value of the home to 10%. In addition, for homes delivered under the programme, owners will be able to increase their share of their home in 1% tranches rather than the current 10%. As part of these new measures, Shared Ownership leaseholders will not be responsible for the essential repairs and maintenance for the first 10 years of ownership on new build homes.
- On 27th January 2021, the government published its response on the Future Homes Standard following early public consultation on proposed changes to the Building Regulations. The response sets out how, within four years, new housing must produce 75%-80% fewer carbon emissions than permitted under the current regulations. A full technical specification for the Future Homes Standard will be consulted on in 2023, with the necessary legislation introduced in 2024, ahead of implementation in 2025.
- During the pandemic, the government placed a temporary ban on eviction hearings and extended the notice period that landlords are required to give to their tenants if they wish to end the tenancy. The ban on evictions came to an end on 31st May 2021, with the first evictions taking place from mid-June. Tenants will still continue to benefit from longer

notice periods, though these are now gradually being reduced from 6 months back to 2 months, from 1st August 2021.

4.2 The above examples illustrate the complexity and breadth of ‘housing’ – sometimes a decision taken in one area can have unintended consequences in another. As such, national policy will continue to evolve.

5. Alternative options considered

5.1 To agree not to update the Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2018-23 action plan. It is proposed this option is rejected for the reasons given above. Our action plan needs to remain responsive to changes nationally and locally, and as illustrated above, ‘housing’ is a fast-changing world.

6. How this initiative contributes to the corporate plan

6.1 CBC recognises the importance of increasing the supply of housing and the need to build strong, resilient communities – indeed it is one of our top 5 priorities within our corporate plan. Our updated action plan supports this priority.

7. Consultation and feedback

7.1 This action plan has been updated in collaboration with key officers within CBC, CBH and our other partners. It has also been circulated for feedback to a range of organisations within our Housing & Support Forum, and updated accordingly.

8. Performance management –monitoring and review

8.1 Progress against our action plan will be reviewed and updated annually and brought to Cabinet for approval.

Report author	Martin Stacy, martin.stacy@cheltenham.gov.uk, 01242 264171
Appendices	1. Risk Assessment 2. Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan Update 2021
Background information	

The risk				Original risk score (impact x likelihood)			Managing risk				
Risk ref.	Risk description	Risk Owner	Date raised	Impact 1-5	Likelihood 1-6	Score	Control	Action	Deadline	Responsible officer	Transferred to risk register
	If the council does not regularly monitor progress against the activities and outcomes identified within the Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-23, then the effectiveness of the strategy will be unclear, and the opportunity to review activities in light of any emerging issues could be missed.	Martin Stacy	24.5.21	3	4	12	Reduce	Ongoing annual review and monitoring of the Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy, as approved by Cabinet.	13.7.21	Martin Stacy	
Explanatory notes											
<p>Impact – an assessment of the impact if the risk occurs on a scale of 1-5 (1 being least impact and 5 being major or critical)</p> <p>Likelihood – how likely is it that the risk will occur on a scale of 1-6 (1 being almost impossible, 2 is very low, 3 is low, 4 significant, 5 high and 6 a very high probability)</p> <p>Control - Either: Reduce / Accept / Transfer to 3rd party / Close</p>											