

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet – Tuesday 11th July 2023

Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy

Accountable member:

Councillor Victoria Atherstone – Cabinet Member for Housing

Accountable officer:

Martin Stacy – Housing Strategy & Partnership's Manager

Ward(s) affected:

All

Key Decision: Yes

Executive summary:

This Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out how we intend to meet the housing needs of our communities within Cheltenham over the next five years. Our vision is for everyone to have a decent home that is safe and suitable, and for our communities to be resilient.

We will seek to achieve this by focusing on the following five priorities:

1. Increasing the provision of quality, sustainable and affordable housing;
2. Making best use of existing housing, improving the quality of homes and reducing carbon emission;
3. Tackling homelessness and the causes of homelessness;
4. Preventing rough sleeping, and when it occurs, ensuring that it is rare and non-recurring;
5. Investing in our communities to help make them safer, stronger and healthier.

Beneath each of these priorities sit a number of goals, which in turn are supported by a wide range of activities, many of which will require significant partnership working and collaboration in order to bring about their delivery.

For more details about the range of activities that we will undertake to support this strategy, please refer to our Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy at Appendix 2 of this report, and our action plan at Appendix 3. This action plan will be updated annually to reflect progress made, and also to

consider new initiatives in light of any changes to national policy and/or local needs.

In addition, Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) has reviewed its position on lifetime tenancies, and considers these tenancies remain preferable over fixed term tenancies in social housing. Our rationale for this is set out in the Tenancy Strategy at Appendix 4.

Recommendations: That Cabinet approves our:

- 1. Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28, and**
 - 2. Tenancy Strategy 2023-28**
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1. Implications

1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. Any priorities and initiatives identified within this report that have a financial bearing will require the usual approvals in accordance with CBC's Financial Rules.

Signed off by: Gemma Bell, Director of Finance and Assets (Deputy Section 151 Officer)

gemma.bell@cheltenham.gov.uk.

1.2 Legal implications

Pursuant to section 2 of the Homelessness Act 2002, local housing authorities have a duty to review homelessness in their district and formulate and publish a strategy based on the results of the review. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 requires local housing authorities to take "reasonable steps" to either maintain or secure accommodation for eligible applicants threatened with homelessness, known as the prevention and relief duties. In addition, pursuant to section 182 of the Housing Act 1996, local authorities are bound to have regard to the Secretary of State's Homelessness Code of Guidance. Failure to have an updated Homelessness Strategy may impact CBC's ability to defend challenges to decisions made under the Housing Act 1996 as amended by Homelessness.

Signed off by: Vikki Fennell, Senior Lawyer, Vikki.fennell@onelegal.org.uk

1.3 Environmental and climate change implications

The Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is a key strategy, which supports CBC's ambition to reduce Cheltenham's carbon emissions to net zero by 2030. This ambition runs as a golden thread through some of the key priorities of this strategy.

A Climate Impact Assessment has been completed detailing the impact the delivery of the plan will have on emissions. Please see Appendix 5 of this report. In addition, any specific projects and initiatives that are developed as a result of HRA Business Plan will, where applicable, be evaluated using our Climate Impact Assessment toolkit.

Signed off by: Laura Tapping Climate Emergency Programme Officer;

Laura.tapping@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities

This report contributes to the following Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Making Cheltenham the Cyber Capital of the UK
- Working with residents, communities and businesses to help make Cheltenham #netzero by 2030
- Increasing the number of affordable homes through our £180m housing investment plan
- Ensuring residents, communities and businesses benefit from Cheltenham's future growth and prosperity
- Being a more modern, efficient and financially sustainable council

1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

Key projects and initiatives taken forward from the Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy will be subject to equality impact assessments (where applicable) to ensure decision makers fully understand the impact of any decisions made. A high level impact assessment is provided at Appendix 6 which concludes that our proposed strategy will not discriminate, either directly or indirectly.

1.6 Performance management – monitoring and review

Our Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy is supported by an action plan (please see Appendix 3). This action plan sets out in more detail how and when key activities will be delivered. Performance against our action plan will be monitored regularly and reported to Cabinet annually, as part of our yearly update of this plan.

2 Background

2.1 Our new Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is set against a backdrop of considerable change, both at a local and national level, creating a range of opportunities and challenges. Our strategy aims to capitalise on these opportunities, whilst navigating through the challenges.

2.2 For example, in terms of opportunities:

- 2.2.1 Nationally, the government have recently introduced the Renter's Reform Bill. This looks set to improve standards in the private rented sector and to end 'no fault' evictions, providing opportunities for more settled and safer accommodation for more private renters, particularly those on lower incomes.
- 2.2.2 Locally, CBC has an ambitious £180m Housing Investment Plan to deliver more affordable homes across the Borough, with a target to deliver 450 affordable homes over the next 5 years. This is coupled with [The Golden Valley Development](#) which includes 45 hectares of CBC-owned land. This could see around 1,000 new homes being delivered, and up to 35% of these will be affordable homes.
- 2.2.3 Thanks to our effective partnership working with district authorities across the county and other key organisation, CBC is also well placed to make collaborative bids and to access government

grant funding opportunities as they arise. For instance, we have secured over £3m of government decarbonisation grant funding through the [Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund \(SHDF\)](#) to support our £7.4m retrofit programme across over 250 CBC-owned homes, which will support our aspirations to be net zero carbon by 2030.

- 2.3 Alongside these opportunities, exist a number of challenges. For instance, owing to potential changes to the national planning policy, there continues to be uncertainty over future affordable housing delivery, via private developers, through their s.106 affordable housing obligations. In addition, more landlords are selling their homes, which in turn is having an inflationary impact on the private rental market. These challenges are set against a backdrop of a national cost of living crisis, coupled with increasing global displacement arising from wars in Ukraine, Afghanistan and civil conflict elsewhere, all of which contribute to an increase in housing pressures generally.
- 2.4 We have developed our Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy with these opportunities and challenges in mind. Ultimately our aim is to alleviate housing need. We will seek to do this by focussing on the following 5 priorities:
- 2.4.1 Increasing the provision of quality, sustainable and affordable housing;
 - 2.4.2 Making best use of our existing housing, improving the quality of homes and reducing carbon emissions;
 - 2.4.3 Tackling homelessness and its causes;
 - 2.4.4 Preventing rough sleeping, and when it occurs, to ensure that it is rare and non-recurring; and
 - 2.4.5 Investing in our communities to help make them safer, stronger and healthier.
- 2.5 Beneath each of these priorities sit a range of activities and initiatives which will help drive our strategy forward, coupled with a detailed action plan to help monitor progress.
- 2.6 Crucially, our strategy will only be successful through effective collaboration with our partners. We will continue to work closely with CBH, with Registered Providers, our voluntary sector, and with other organisations such as the county council and our partners in health services, as well as with our neighbouring district authorities. Moreover, we will continue to build on these partnerships to ensure we are as effective as we can be in delivering against our priorities.
- 2.7 For more detailed information on our proposals within the Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy, please refer to Appendix 2 of this report, and to Appendix 3 for our action plan.

3 Reasons for recommendations

- 3.1 Our Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out CBC's approach to how we will alleviate housing need in our Borough. It supports our Corporate Plan 2023-27 and is aligned with our HRA Business Plan 2023-28. It also builds on our achievements from our 2018-23 strategy, whilst taking into account new, emerging challenges and opportunities. Furthermore, it sets out clearly what we are committing to do. This will enable us to celebrate successes but also hold ourselves to account, when needed.
- 3.2 CBC will commit to updating our action plan every year, taking account of the external operating

environment as it continues shape local housing need.

4 Alternative options considered

4.1 There is no longer a statutory requirement to develop and publish a housing strategy; however, there does remain a statutory requirement to produce a homelessness strategy every five years. Given the importance we consider housing is to the borough, it is sensible for CBC to have a wider housing strategy that clearly sets out its overall priorities and goals for the future – not least because many of these initiatives will have an impact on tackling homelessness.

5 CBC's Tenancy Strategy

5.1 CBC intends to continue to provide lifetime tenancies for our social housing tenants. Our rationale for this is detailed within our Tenancy Strategy (Appendix 4 of this report).

5.2 Registered Providers with housing stock within Cheltenham must have regard to our Tenancy Strategy when formulating their own Tenancy Policies; although they are currently free to implement fixed-term tenancies if they wish to. CBC has therefore set out guidelines for Registered Providers to consider when they are seeking to end a tenancy for a resident in Cheltenham. These guidelines are there to minimise any risk of homelessness.

6 Consultation and feedback

6.1 In December 2022, officers consulted with key partners within our Housing and Support Forum. This forum is made up of charities working with the homeless, advice agencies, supported housing providers, Registered Providers and other statutory agencies. Feedback from this forum helped shaped the priorities as set out in our Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy.

6.2 Early drafts of this strategy have been shared for feedback and input from key officers within CBC across a range of areas, such as Property Services, Development and Regeneration, Revenues and Benefits, Community Engagement, Planning Policy, Development Management, Public Protection, and Private Sector Housing, as well as with Heads of Services and Directors within Cheltenham Borough Homes. All these teams will have a role to play in supporting the delivery of this strategy.

6.3 We have also consulted on our draft strategies with a wide range of external organisations, including Registered Providers, the voluntary sector, colleagues in health and social care, Cheltenham BID, Cheltenham Chamber of Commerce, and also with the public at large.

6.4 Proposals for our housing, homelessness & rough sleeping strategy have been positively received, with 100% of those providing comments supporting all of our key priorities. There was a more mixed response for CBC's proposals to continue with tenancies for life. Of the 12 who responded, 6 were not supportive, citing potential improvement in households' financial circumstances and under-occupation as key reasons for supporting fixed term tenancies instead. CBC has already considered these points within our proposed tenancy strategy, and on balance we consider tenancies for life remain preferable. Our rationale is set out in our proposed strategy.

7 Key risks

7.1 Please see Appendix 1 of this report.

Report author:

Martin Stacy, Housing Strategy & Partnerships Manager

Martin.stacy@cheltenham.gov.uk

Appendices:

- i. Risk Assessment
- ii. Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28
- iii. Action Plan
- iv. Tenancy Strategy 2023-28
- v. Climate Change Impact Assessment
- vi. Equality Impact Assessment

Background information:

N/A

Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
	If the council does not publish a homelessness strategy at least every 5 years, then it will fail to meet its statutory obligations.	Martin Stacy	3	6	18	Reduce	Cabinet approves the adoption of our Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28	Martin Stacy	July 2023
	If the council produces a strategy that focuses only on tackling homelessness, then we will fail to develop a clear and cohesive approach to delivering against our wider housing priorities	Martin Stacy	3	4	12	Reduce	As above	Martin Stacy	July 2023