

# Cheltenham Borough Council

## Cabinet – 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2024

### Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 23-28

#### Action Plan Update 2024

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**Accountable member:**

Councillor Flo Clucas, Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services

**Accountable officer:**

Martin Stacy, Housing Strategy and Partnerships Manager

**Ward(s) affected:**

All

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**Key Decision:** No

**Executive summary:**

The Council's Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 was approved by Cabinet in July 2023. This is a five-year strategy that focusses on delivering against the following priorities:

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

It is important that we keep this strategy as a live 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.

Our updated action plan is at Appendix 3 of this report.

## **Recommendations: That Cabinet:**

- **approves the Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan update for 2024.**
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### **1. Implications**

#### **1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications**

None as a direct result of this report.

**Signed off by:** Ela Jankowska, Finance Business Partner, [ela.jankowska@cheltenham.gov.uk](mailto:ela.jankowska@cheltenham.gov.uk)

#### **1.2 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.

**Signed off by:** One Legal, [legalservices@onelegal.org.uk](mailto:legalservices@onelegal.org.uk)

#### **1.3 Environmental and climate change implications**

A climate change impact assessment was carried out to inform the Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-25, and was published, along with the strategy and report to Cabinet, in July 2023. A link to our assessment can be found [here](#). The Climate Change SPD metrics have been incorporated into this strategy and the checklist will be given as guidance to developers which will help ensure dwellings developed as a result of this strategy are low carbon.

**Signed off by:** Maizy McCann, Climate Emergency Officer, [Maizy.McGann@cheltenham.gov.uk](mailto:Maizy.McGann@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 net zero 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**

Please find a completed equality impact screening assessment at Appendix 2 of this report.

## **1.6 Performance management – monitoring and review**

Progress against our Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy action plan will continue to be reviewed and updated annually and brought to Cabinet for approval.

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## **2 Background**

**2.1** The Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 was approved by Cabinet in July 2023. This is a five-year strategy that sets out our key priorities over this period. It is important that we keep this strategy as a live 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 3 of this report.

**2.2** Whilst we must look forward, this report also provides us with an opportunity to reflect on some of our most notable achievements during the first year of our strategy. These are summarised below.

## **3 Progress against our Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan 2023-28**

### **3.1 Priority 1: Increasing the provision of quality, sustainable and affordable housing.**

**3.1.1** 103 new affordable homes were delivered during 2023/24, of which 49 are now owned and managed by CBC, with the remainder under the ownership of Bromford (50 homes) and Heylo Housing (4 homes).

**3.1.2** A key aim of our housing strategy is to maximise opportunities for additionality where appropriate (By additionality, we mean the delivery of affordable homes over and above that which would otherwise have been delivered through market forces alone.) Over the 12 months to end March 2024, a total of 73 affordable homes were delivered in this way, representing 71% of our overall affordable housing delivery. Moreover, of the 49 CBC-owned homes, 35 of these homes were delivered as additionality – 21 of which were delivered as part of the government's Local Authority Housing Fund initiative. This initiative attracted £2.36 million grant funding to support our Housing Revenue Account and helped provide homes to families who have fled Ukraine.

**3.1.3** Looking ahead, we are continuing to identify new site opportunities for the provision of more CBC-owned affordable housing across the borough to help meet our aspirations to provide 450 affordable homes over the 5 years to March 2028. In addition to the 49 CBC-owned homes already provided in year 1, CBC currently has a firm pipeline of a further 264 affordable homes. This is made up of: 24 homes at 320 Swindon Road, 70 homes at

Manor Farm (a section 106 site), approximately 70 homes at our Monkscroft School site, and a target acquisition of around 100 additional affordable homes converted from the open market. This is in addition to the new opportunities currently underway in West Cheltenham's proposed [Cyber Park/Golden Valley Development](#), which will see the provision of over 1,000 new homes (of which we anticipate 35% will be affordable homes) alongside a new cyber innovation hub. An outline planning permission was submitted for this site in October 2023 and, at the time of writing this report, is awaiting determination.

### **3.2 Priority 2: Making best use of existing housing, improving the quality of homes and reducing carbon emissions**

- 3.2.1 During the 12 months to end of March 2024, CBC's Private Sector Housing Team have improved the safety of over 888 households in the private sector in Cheltenham. Direct intervention by CBC to reduce the number of long-term empty homes has however been more problematic, with zero homes being brought back into use by CBC's Private Sector Housing Team. This is due to ongoing resource pressures arising from increased property inspections in the private sector, including our support of the government's Homes for Ukraine initiative, which has meant that this team has had to divert resources.
- 3.2.2 CBC are joint commissioners of a county-wide Warm and Well Scheme. This provides free, impartial home energy efficiency advice to fight fuel poverty throughout Gloucestershire. During 2023/24 this service undertook 52 energy efficiency measures across 36 properties in Cheltenham, leading to estimated lifetime savings of 688 tonnes of carbon.
- 3.2.3 In addition, under the Government's £3.8bn Decarbonisation fund, the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ), then known as the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS), released a competition for £160m grant funding through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) Wave 1. CBC secured approximately £800,000 grant funding from BEIS to support carbon reduction measures to 59 CBC-owned homes in order to make them more energy efficient and to reduce energy demand. These works are now successfully complete, raising their energy performance to EPC C (i.e. a SAP rating of between 69 and 80). These works have contributed towards an overall increase in our average SAP rating of our CBC-owned homes to 74.02, exceeding our target of 73.5 for 2023/24. (N.B. A SAP rating is a way of comparing energy performance of different homes, with figures ranging from 1 - this being the least energy efficient - to 100.)
- 3.2.4 Following another successful bid for grant funding, this time to DESNZ's Wave 2.1 Social Housing Decarbonisation Funding, CBC secured a further £2.2 million in grant provision. Programmes are now being developed to improve the energy performance of approximately 200 of our CBC-owned homes to at least EPC C, with an expectation that these will be completed by Autumn 2025. Looking ahead, CBC anticipates submitting further grant funding applications as opportunities arise. (It should be noted that Wave 3

of DESNZ's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund will be announced during the Summer 2024.)

3.2.5 Enabling households to downsize from large CBC homes is another key part of our housing strategy, as this helps to release these homes for larger families. Over the 12 months to end of March 2024, Cheltenham's housing services team have enabled 17 households to downsize from family-sized CBC accommodation via our Help to Move Scheme. (This scheme provides practical support and assistance to enable older people to move home.) Of the 17 homes that became available for re-letting, 9 were either 3 or 4 bedroom family homes. In total, 23 unused bedrooms were freed-up for larger families under this initiative.

### **3.3 Priority 3: Tackling homelessness and the causes of homelessness**

3.3.1 2023/24 has been a particularly challenging year for tackling homelessness in Cheltenham, which is reflective of experiences by local housing authorities nationally. High rents in the private rented sector, and landlords leaving the private rented market, have meant that lower-income households have been increasingly squeezed out of this sector. As a result, homelessness applications have increased by 32% compared with the previous year (704 homelessness applications in 23/24 compared with 532 in 22/23). In addition, placements into emergency accommodation have increased by 41% (from 88 placements during 2022/23 to 124 placements over the same period in 2023/24). Despite these challenges, our Housing Options Service has been successful in keeping down the average length of stay in emergency accommodation. This means that the number of households occupying emergency accommodation at any given time remains relatively low. (8 households were living in emergency accommodation as at end March 2024: 7 single people and 1 family.) This success is largely due to our ability to secure positive outcomes for homeless households, despite these challenging times. (435 households had their homelessness prevented/relieved, compared with 290 households during the previous year.)

3.3.2 Cheltenham has also continued to feel the impact of international affairs, from Ukraine and elsewhere. For instance, 29 refugees approached our Housing Options Service as homeless during 2023/24, up from 2 refugees the previous year. Risks also remain that there will be increased homelessness arising from breakdown in relationships between Hosts and Ukrainian Guests in the government's Ukrainian Sponsorship Scheme – however, we have now reached a period of relative stability, with 74 host families in Cheltenham continuing to accommodate a total of 115 guests (as of 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2024). Cheltenham is proud to be a town of sanctuary, and we continue to work with the Home Office, Gloucestershire County Council, GARAS and Cheltenham Welcomes Refugees to ensure that we are doing what we can to help displaced households feel welcomed and settled in their new homes and communities.

## **4 Priority 4: Preventing rough sleeping; and when it occurs, ensuring that it is rare and non-recurring**

4.1 Tackling rough sleeping continues to be a key priority of our housing strategy. The measures

needed to end rough sleeping are complex and require significant collaboration with a range of partners. We are now in the final year of our 3-year joint commissioning arrangements between district housing authorities across the county, Gloucestershire County Council, Heath Services, and the Police & Crime Commission, thanks to our successful bid for approximately £1 million/year funding from the government's Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) 2022-25. These services ensure that:

- We can maintain an immediate off the street offer for rough sleepers via our Somewhere Safe to Stay Hub in Cheltenham. This is often a first step to engagement and is therefore a critical part of our pathway to supporting rough sleepers into independent accommodation.
- Assertive Outreach services are there to provide help to rough sleepers, with a view to them taking up offers of accommodation and accessing relevant support services.
- We continue to provide Enhanced Housing Support services to help deliver our Housing-led Initiative. This service provides support for some of our most complex and entrenched rough sleepers living in up to 12 of our CBC-owned homes, and more elsewhere across the county. This service also complements CBC's ACE-led, trauma-informed post (i.e. based upon Adverse Childhood Experience principles), and our Intensive Tenancy Management post, both of which are part-funded by RSI 2022-25, and in combination help to bring about better outcomes for some of our most vulnerable tenants.
- The new Multiple Disadvantage Team, hosted by the County Council, and made up of specialist officers with expertise in Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol services and Adult Social Care, is there to support rough sleepers residing in our hub, our housing-led accommodation, and other forms of temporary accommodation across the county. Their purpose is to provide professional/clinical support services with a view to promoting tenancy sustainment and independent living, whilst also referring clients into mainstream services where appropriate.

**4.2** Our RSI 22-25 funding ends in March 2025. At present, there is no information from the government on future bidding opportunities for funding post March 2025; however, a key part of our work during 2024/25 will be to develop plans setting out our commissioning requirements for rough sleeping services, in the event that funding becomes available.

## **5 Priority 5: Investing in our communities to help make them safer, stronger and healthier**

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

**5.1** As the cost of living crisis has continued to have an impact on residents and communities, our Employment Initiatives Service has assisted over 320 people with either developing skills, entering into training or finding work. This has been bolstered by our successful bid for

£85,000 funding from Levelling Up Together, which enabled the development of a new [Skills Hub](#) for people living in St Marks. We have also worked closely with Severn Wye and Severn Trent to assist households with energy and water bills; and our Benefit Take-Up team have helped those on low incomes to claim over £1.2m of benefits. In addition, through our [Help2 initiative](#), we have been able to support tenants overcome hardship by providing white goods, decorate their homes and reduce food poverty. We have also reviewed our commissioning arrangements with Citizens' Advice over their provision of debt, benefits and housing rights advice, varying the value of the contract so that they can direct more resources to firm-up this important area.

5.2 To support independent living, Cheltenham's Lifeline Alarm service has carried out 227 new installations over the 12 months to end of March 2024, taking the total number of customers who depend on the lifeline service to 1004 across Cheltenham and the surrounding area. In addition, we have worked collaboratively with our partners across the county to develop greater consistency in the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) services. 69 major DFG adaptations were delivered this year in Cheltenham, plus a further 14 discretionary grants, enabling disabled or frail people to remain in their homes.

5.3 Finally, we have continued to focus on supporting those experiencing antisocial behaviour (ASB), with all 58 cases raised by our tenants being successfully resolved by Cheltenham's housing management service during 2023/24. We work collaboratively with a range of partners from across the borough, including Solace, to help reduce ASB. Notably, our housing management service have received recognition from the Office of Gloucestershire's Police and Crime Commissioner for best practice in tackling ASB and have been asked to advise other social landlords. Going forward, our housing management service will be developing a project to support our work in this area, by seeking to improve perceptions in our neighbourhoods about how we respond to these issues.

## **6 Next steps for the year ahead**

6.1 Appendix 3 of this report provides a detailed breakdown of the range of activities that will be undertaken during 2024/25, and beyond, to support our housing strategy. Highlights include:

- Providing 33 CBC-owned affordable homes during 2024/25, as part of an overall target of 115 new affordable homes which are expected to be delivered across the borough during this year. CBC will also continue to focus on firming up our pipeline of new affordable housing opportunities to help meet our delivery target of up to 450 affordable homes by March 2028.
- Continuing to make progress with our Golden Valley project, which will ultimately lead to the creation of a new cyber innovation hub and over 1,000 new homes, by bringing land to the market for development.
- Reviewing our affordable housing (and associated) policies within the current Joint Core Strategy, as part of our development of a new Local and Strategic Plan. We will also create a new affordable housing technical advice note to support our current affordable housing policy position.

- Developing a First Homes technical advice note to provide greater clarity to developers on our expectations concerning this new affordable housing product, ahead of the first delivery of these homes which is expected in Cheltenham during 2025/26.
- Reviewing our local letting plans to ensure that we are best able to help meet our local housing need, whilst also ensuring that we have sustainable communities.
- Continuing with our implementation of Wave 2.1 of the government's Social Housing Decarbonisation initiative, by improving the energy efficiency of approximately 200 CBC-owned homes by Autumn 2025. We will also explore the potential for further funding opportunities via the government's Wave 3 initiative, which is anticipated to be announced this summer.
- Reviewing the findings of a recently completed county-wide housing condition survey on the condition of homes in the private sector, with a view to informing Cheltenham's future priorities in this area.
- Implementing the final year of a 3-year government funded programme (RSI 2022-25) to tackle rough sleeping; and ensuring that we are prepared for potential future government funding and commissioning opportunities following the end of the current programme in March 2025.
- Working with partners across the county to support the delivery of county council's Domestic Abuse Strategy. This will include increasing the provision of places of safety from 12 places to 24 across the county; as well as the joint recommissioning of a target hardening service to enable households at risk of domestic abuse to feel safer so that they can remain in their homes.

## **7 Reasons for recommendations**

7.1 Issues around housing, both nationally and locally, will continue to evolve as new government policies are developed in light of emerging issues. It is therefore important that our strategy remains alert to these developments, adapting to new challenges, embracing opportunities as they arise, and capturing them by way of an annual update to our action plan.

## **8 Alternative options considered**

8.1 To not update the Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2018-23 action plan. It is proposed this option is rejected for the reasons set out in section 7 above. Our action plan needs to remain responsive to changes nationally and to emerging local needs.

## **9 Consultation and feedback**

9.1 This action plan has been updated in collaboration with key officers within CBC and our key partners.



## 10 Key risks

10.1 As set out in Appendix 1, and above. It is important that we refresh our action plan annually for the reasons already stated.

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### Report author:

Martin Stacy, Housing Strategy & Partnerships Manager, [martin.stacy@cheltenham.gov.uk](mailto:martin.stacy@cheltenham.gov.uk)

### Appendices:

- i. Risk Assessment
- ii. Equality Impact Assessment – Screening (to be included in all Cabinet and Council reports)
- iii. Action Plan update 2024

### Background information:

[CBC's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28](#)

## 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 CBC does not regularly monitor progress against the priorities as set out within our Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28, then the effectiveness of this strategy will be unclear, and the opportunity to review activities in light of any emerging issues could be missed.	Martin Stacy	3	4	12	Reduce	Ongoing annual review and monitoring of the Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy, as approved by Cabinet.	Martin Stacy	23 <sup>rd</sup> July 2024 (Date of cabinet)

## Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment (Screening)

### 1. Identify the policy, project, function or service change

#### a. Person responsible for this Equality Impact Assessment

Officer responsible: Martin Stacy	Service Area: Finance, Assets & Regeneration
Title: Housing Strategy & Partnerships Manager	3 <sup>rd</sup> May 2024
Signature:	

#### b. Is this a policy, function, strategy, service change or project?

Other

If other, please specify: This is an action plan update to our Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28.

#### c. Name of the policy, function, strategy, service change or project

Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 Action Plan update 2024.

Is this new or existing?

**Already exists and is being reviewed**

#### Please specify reason for change or development of policy, function, strategy, service change or project

This is an update to our action plan to reflect progress made over the last 12 months, and to highlight any new initiatives that support the priorities within our Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28.

#### d. What are the aims, objectives and intended outcomes and who is likely to benefit from it?

Aims: Ultimately, we are aiming to reduce housing need, and in particular reduce homelessness and rough sleeping.

We are seeking to do this by focussing on the following 5 priorities:  
1) Increasing the provision of affordable housing.

Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2) Making best use of existing housing stock.</li> <li>3) Preventing homelessness</li> <li>4) Tackling rough sleeping</li> <li>5) Investing in our communities so that they are safe, strong and healthy</li> </ul>
Outcomes:	<p>By focussing on these priorities, we expect to see:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) More affordable housing</li> <li>2) Better use of existing housing and better quality homes</li> <li>3) Less homelessness and rough sleeping</li> <li>4) Stronger, healthier communities where more households can remain in their homes</li> </ul>
Benefits:	<p>Households will be more settled in their homes and in their communities.</p>

**e. What are the expected impacts?**

Are there any aspects, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could have an impact on the lives of people, including employees and customers.	<b>Yes</b>
Do you expect the impacts to be positive or negative?	<b>Positive</b>

Please provide an explanation for your answer:

Our Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 focusses on supporting households in housing need and strengthening communities so that they can remain in their homes. An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the development of this strategy, and it was concluded that the strategy does not negatively impact, either directly or indirectly, households with protected characteristics. Moreover, it found that services are designed to ensure that vulnerable people are able to engage, and are supported to engage, where needed. For instance, our rough sleeping services focus on building relationships with individuals who can have complex needs, with a view to helping them to engage with housing and support services. Our commissioned advice service also helps individuals in housing need to explore their housing rights, and to represent them where appropriate when issues need to be taken further, for example with their landlord. Our Housing Options Services also has a number of Interventions Officers, whose focus is on engaging with individuals that might otherwise not engage fully with services.

An action plan accompanies our strategy, and this is updated annually to take account of progress made over the previous 12 months. This action plan sets out new initiatives that

support the key priorities as set out within our strategy. Any key projects and initiatives that emerge from this strategy will be subject to their own individual equality impact assessment, as appropriate, prior to implementation.

**If your answer to question e identified potential positive or negative impacts, or you are unsure about the impact, then you should carry out a Stage Two Equality Impact Assessment.**

<b>f. Identify next steps as appropriate</b>	
Stage Two required	<b>No</b>
Owner of Stage Two assessment	
Completion date for Stage Two assessment	

**Please move on to Stage 2 if required ([intranet link](#)). Not required in view of the comments as set out in response to question e.**