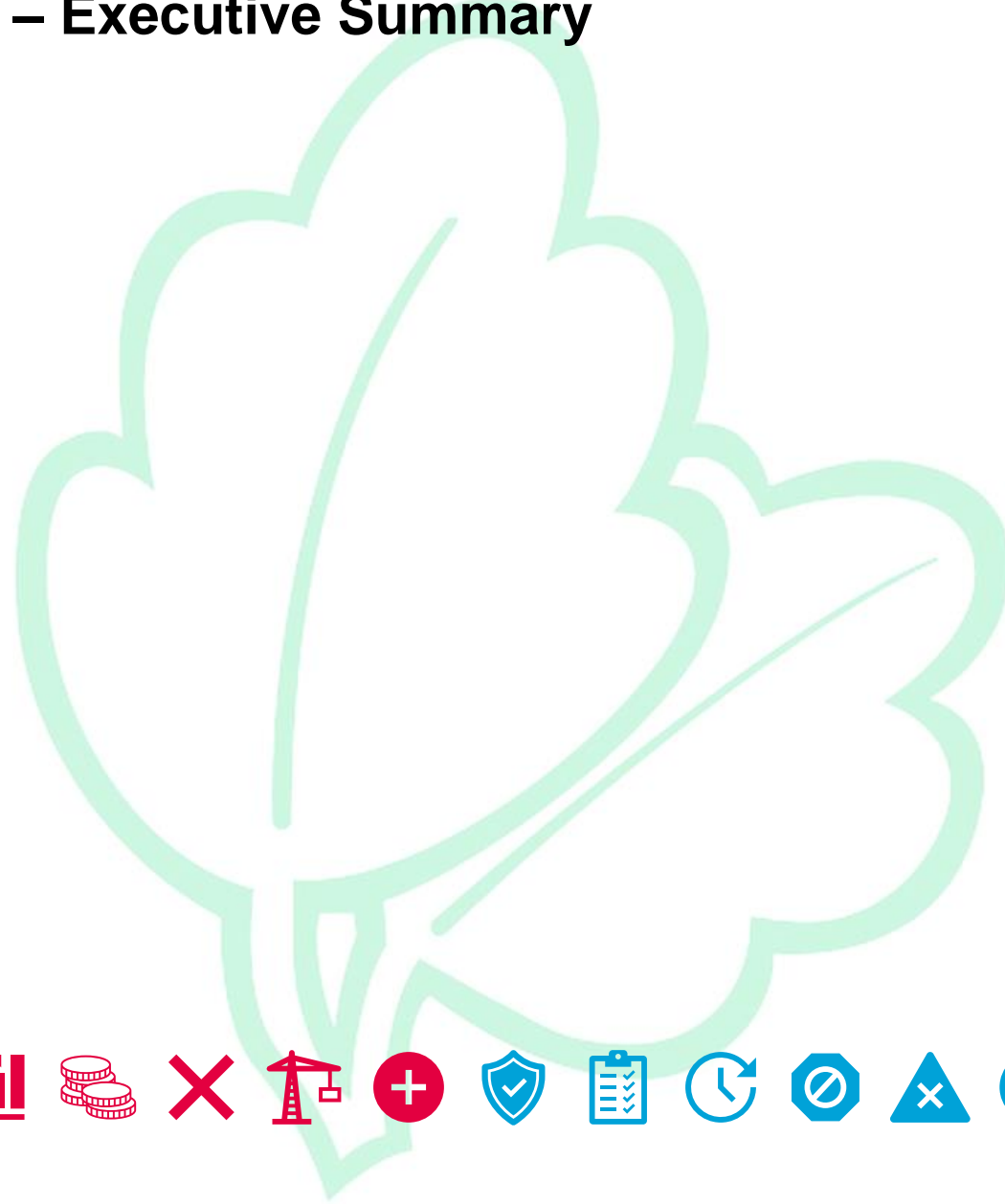


# Housing Strategy – Executive Summary

2022-2027

Thurrock Council



# Contents

Foreword .....	3	Deliver Housing Support and Services .....	19
Introduction.....	4	Meet Housing Need.....	21
Corporate Context .....	5	Protect Resident Safety.....	28
Vision and overview of corporate priorities .....	5	Strengthen Community Engagement and Empowerment.....	36
Strategic Context.....	6	Recent Achievements and Action to Date .....	39
Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026.....	7	Delivering Housing Support and Services.....	39
Vision, Principles, Aims and Objectives.....	8	Meeting Housing Need .....	40
Housing Vision.....	8	Protecting Resident Safety.....	42
Housing Core Principles .....	9	Strengthening community engagement and empowerment.....	45
Housing Aims and Objectives .....	10	Monitoring and Review .....	46
Legislative and Regulatory Framework .....	11	Acknowledgements .....	46
Legislation.....	11		
Regulation.....	12		
National Context.....	13		
Local Context .....	16		





# Foreword

Everyone should have access to a safe, stable, secure and suitable home.

This Housing Strategy sets Thurrock Council's direction and ambitions for housing support and services for the next five years. Through this strategy, the council aims to provide a housing service that not only delivers on its targets but does so in the most human and empathetic way.

Crucially, this strategy delivers a new vision and key principles that truly place residents at the centre of all that we do. It aims to minimise bureaucracy, increase flexibility and focus more on what matters to residents.

Thurrock Council is on your side.

The council will work over the next five years and into the future to deliver housing support and services that are fit for purpose for families and individuals in the borough.

We are committed to effectively ending the need for any Thurrock resident to experience rough sleeping in our borough and will see to understand the true need for accommodation for Thurrock residents, delivering homes that people will be proud of accordingly.

We will prioritise and protect residents' safety in their homes and neighbourhoods, whether they live in a council-owned home or in the private sector, and we will work hard to ensure that all residents are empowered to have their voices heard through meaningful engagement.

I'm delighted with what our teams have managed to achieve over the past two years, despite the challenges faced.

119 new council-owned homes have been handed over and let, the number of families in out-of-borough temporary accommodation placements is at its lowest in over three years and ever-closer work between the housing service and other council departments means that more support and positive outcomes are being delivered for those who are most vulnerable in our communities.

The actions put forward in this strategy present an opportunity to go even further, with scope for major estate regeneration to provide more genuinely affordable council-owned homes, end out-of-borough placements entirely unless for safeguarding reasons or through choice, and deliver new integrated operating models in housing and with other partners to better focus on delivering the things that matter to residents in their different localities.

I look forward to seeing the successful delivery of the aims and objectives of this strategy as those within the council work closely with residents and partners across the public, private and third sectors.

Together, we can work to ensure that every Thurrock resident will have a home that meets their needs and aspirations, serving as a foundation to support their health and wellbeing and their springboard to achieve their vision of a 'good life'.



**Cllr Luke Spillman**  
Cabinet Member for Housing





## Introduction

It is important that Thurrock Council has a document that shares the aims and ambitions of the organisation regarding housing in the borough.

The council adopted its previous Housing Strategy in 2015.

It required renewal, considering changes in legislation and regulation, market trends, the impact of recent welfare reforms, and new opportunities for meeting the housing needs of Thurrock's residents.

Unlike the previous strategy, it is necessary that this document also reflects the turbulence and uncertainty that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Housing Strategy addresses the range of tenures available in Thurrock - social housing, owner-occupiers, and the private rental sector. It is important to note that this strategy will consider housing need and services in the borough and the barriers residents may face with accessing safe and secure accommodation. The Housing Strategy does not analyse options or sites for housing provision.





# Corporate Context

## Vision and overview of corporate priorities

The Housing Strategy is underpinned by Thurrock Council's vision and corporate priorities, adopted in January 2018. The council's vision is for Thurrock to be **an ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future**. Sitting alongside the vision are the three corporate priorities of People, Place and Prosperity.

### People

**A borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay.**

High quality, consistent and accessible public services which are right first time

Build on our partnerships with statutory, community, voluntary and faith groups to work together to improve health and wellbeing

Communities are empowered to make choices and be safer and stronger together

The Housing Strategy must appropriately address and meet the challenges set within this priority. Resilient partnerships across sectors and empowered communities are integral to any Housing Strategy's meaningful development and success. They will ensure that services consistently meet and reflect those who use them.

### Place

**A heritage-rich borough which is ambitious for its future.**

Roads, houses and public spaces that connect people and places

Clean environments that everyone has reason to take pride in

Fewer public buildings with better services

While the housing service has specific responsibility for maintaining and developing homes and neighbourhoods managed by the council, this strategy goes further to consider all tenure types. This strategy will improve understanding of strengths and needs across the borough, identifying the requirements for homes and infrastructure to support current and future Thurrock residents.

### Prosperity

**A borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations.**

Attractive opportunities for businesses and investors to enhance the local economy

Vocational and academic education, skills and job opportunities for all

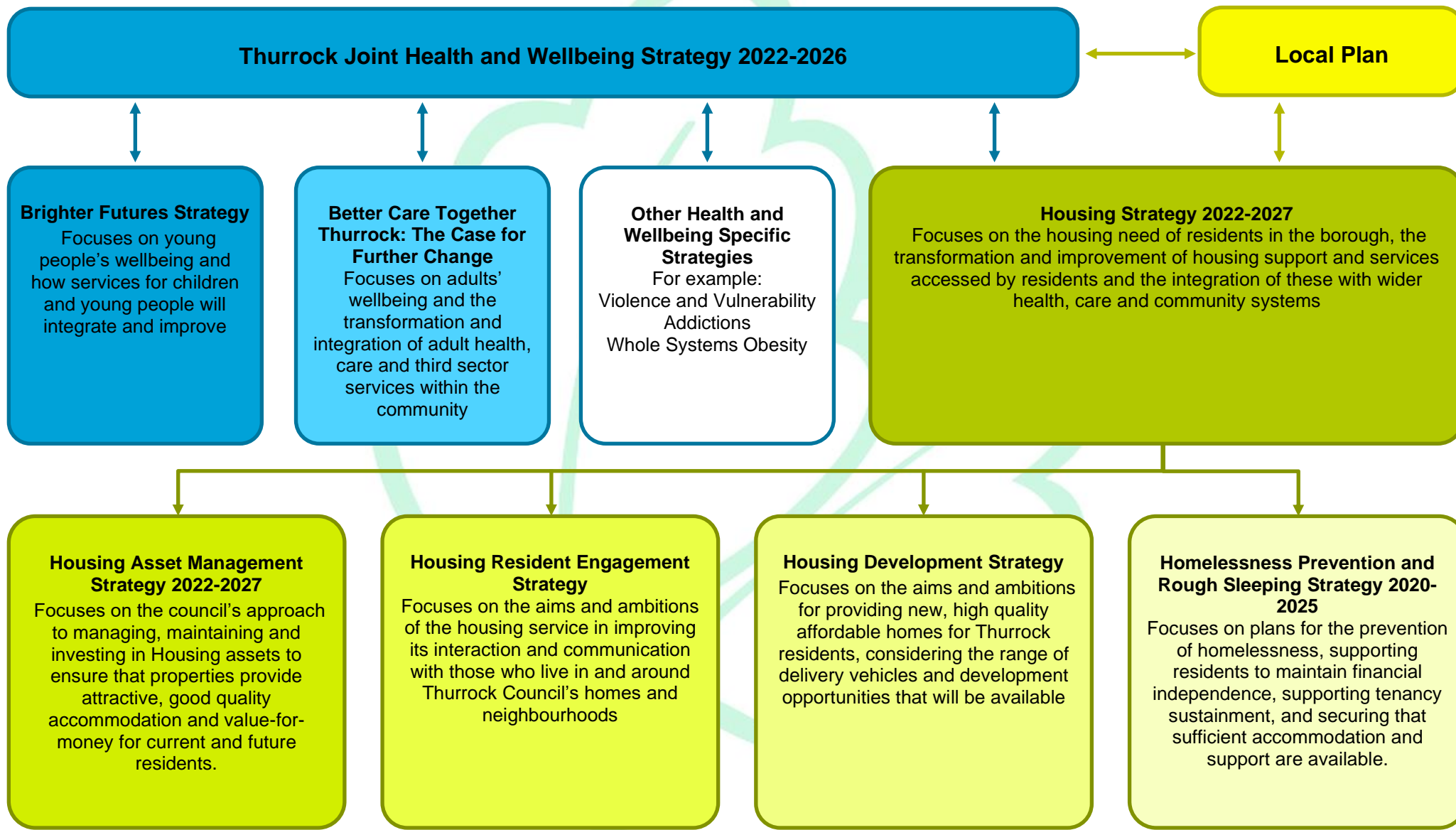
Commercial, entrepreneurial and connected public services

The Housing Strategy aims to deliver opportunities for residents to achieve their aspirations, including accessing skills training with partner organisations. The strategy also seeks to expand relationships with other housing providers to increase affordable housing levels in the borough.





# Strategic Context





# Strategic Context

## Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026

The Thurrock Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026 is the highest-level strategic document that describes our collective plans to improve the health and wellbeing of residents. The theme of the strategy is *Levelling the Playing Field*, and the strategy sets out high level actions to address health inequalities across six domains.

- Healthier for Longer including mental health
- Building Strong and Cohesive Communities
- Person Led Health and Care
- Opportunity For All
- Housing and the Environment
- Community Safety

As housing and the environment features as a domain of health inequality in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, there is a strong link with the aims and objectives of this Housing Strategy. Both documents will drive forward positive improvements for the health and wellbeing of Thurrock residents.

The local plan sets a vision and framework for the future development of Thurrock, drawn up by the local planning authority with wider engagement and consultation with the community.

## Better Care Together Thurrock: The Case for Further Change

The *Case for Further Change* strategy sets out a collective plan to transform, improve and integrate health, care and third sector

services aimed at the borough’s adults and older people to improve their wellbeing. It has been developed and agreed by the Thurrock Integrated Care Alliance (TICA) and its partner organisations. Partners across Thurrock have a long history of working together to agree and deliver shared outcomes.

The *Case for Further Change* proposes a transformation from the current system architecture and ways of working to move instead towards integrated locality teams. It intends to create a single Integrated Locality Network of professionals who will be able to collaborate more easily and effectively with each other, and with residents. The overall aim is to embed the maximum amount of care and support at locality and neighbourhood level within a multi-disciplinary network of staff who can collaborate to design integrated solutions with residents rather than make onward referrals.

## Local Plan

The local plan addresses many issues affecting local people. There are policies that cover development issues in relation to education, health, community safety and sustainable development. It also contains policies on more traditional, but important, planning activity such as housing, employment, leisure and sport, natural and historic environment, and community facilities.

Where the Housing Strategy sets strategic aims and objectives regarding housing need, the local plan supports the practicalities of providing new homes, through the identification for sites and areas where development is permitted and the creation of planning policy that meets priorities in the borough. The housing strategy will feed into the development of the new local plan, ensuring alignment.





# Vision, Principles, Aims and Objectives

## Housing Vision

**Every Thurrock resident will have access to a safe, secure, suitable, and affordable home that meets their needs and aspirations, serving as a foundation to support their health and wellbeing.**

**Residents will be supported at home and in their local area through connected services, neighbourhoods, localities, and communities to achieve their vision of a 'good life'.**

Housing and health are intrinsically linked. Access to a safe, secure, stable, warm, and affordable home will provide people with a solid foundation upon which they can better protect their health and support their wellbeing. If a home is lacking any of these factors, it will have a detrimental impact on the physical health, mental health, and general wellbeing of all those in the household.

A safe home can mean many things, such as being hazard free, or maintained in line with compliancy measures such as gas servicing and electrical testing. A safe home goes beyond physical maintenance and bricks and mortar; it can also relate to a resident's perception of safety in their home and in the neighbourhood or estate in which it is located.

A secure home can refer to the security of tenure, giving residents peace of mind and stability by having that solid foundation to build their vision of a good life, or it can again be considered in like with the perception of safety within the home from any outside harms.

The factors that determine a suitable home are wide ranging and tailored to the housing needs of each household. It can relate to the size, type, location, and accessibility of a property, but can also refer to the standard in which the property is kept, ensuring good quality accommodation is provided and that it remains well maintained.

The definition for an affordable home is also aligned with the specific needs and commitments of every household. Affordability of home is linked with many wider consequences, such as fuel poverty and impacts on physical and mental wellbeing

Health and wellbeing run through every aspect of this strategy. This document's strategic aims and objects are rooted in the fundamental aim of tackling health inequalities through housing to support Thurrock residents to live healthy lives.

The vision for the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 is aligned with the aims of Domain 5 – Housing and the Environment within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026, outlined below:

**Fewer people will be at risk of homelessness, and everyone will have access to high quality affordable homes that meet the needs of Thurrock residents.**

**Homes and places in Thurrock will provide environments where everyone feels safe, healthy, connected and proud.**







# Vision, Principles, Aims and Objectives

## Housing Core Principles

This Housing Strategy has been developed in part to set the basis for a new way of working for housing support and services in Thurrock. This strategy and the new way of working follow the below eight principles:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We work in partnership with residents to understand the things that matter to them in the context of their lives and the neighbourhoods in which they live.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We work to provide people with services that are high quality, easy to access, and offer appropriate support.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We will relentlessly focus on reducing health inequality. We will ensure that resources are distributed in a way that accounts for variation in need at neighbourhood level.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The amount of resource we spend on bureaucracy is kept to a minimum ensuring maximum resources are available to provide people with the solutions they require.</li></ul>
What is important to you? <b>1</b>	Right time, right place and high quality <b>2</b>	Supports health and wellbeing <b>3</b>	Minimises bureaucracy <b>4</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Our solutions look to use the assets within neighbourhoods and do not consist only of the services we provide.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We empower resident facing staff to make decisions in the context of each resident they serve rather than being constrained by thresholds and <i>one size fits all</i> service specifications.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We are flexible enough to respond and adapt delivery to changes in individual, neighbourhood and place circumstances</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Responsibility for housing is shared between individuals, neighbourhoods, our workforce and partners. We do <i>'with'</i>, not <i>'to'</i>. We constantly co-design and co-produce.</li></ul>
Local, strength based solutions <b>5</b>	Doesn't break the law and meets statutory duties <b>6</b>	Flexible and adaptable <b>7</b>	Partnership working and collaborations <b>8</b>





# Vision, Principles, Aims and Objectives

## Housing Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives set out in this strategy will support the council in achieving its housing vision. They also align with and support the work and actions identified within the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy as well as the Better Care Together Thurrock: The Case for Further Change strategy.

### Deliver Housing Support and Services

- Embed a person-centred approach to housing support and services
- Develop locality and neighbourhood models for integrated housing services



### Meet Housing Need

- Identify and provide the right homes for Thurrock based on household need
- Address the housing affordability crisis in Thurrock
- Prevent homelessness and end rough sleeping in Thurrock
- Deliver sustainable estate and housing regeneration
- Review the model of Sheltered Housing provision



### Protect Resident Safety

- Improve warmth, safety, and standards in private sector homes
- Invest in and maintain quality council-owned homes
- Strengthen community safety and prevent anti-social behaviour
- Tackle domestic and sexual abuse and violence
- Support vulnerable adults and children
- Improve estate standards



### Strengthen Community Engagement and Empowerment

- Improve resident satisfaction and access to information
- Strengthen, integrate and diversify community and resident engagement





# Legislative and Regulatory Framework

The Housing Strategy has been developed within and reflects current legislation and regulation.

## Legislation

Thurrock Council has many housing duties and responsibilities, with only some of these relating to its role as a social housing provider. The council has duties towards homelessness prevention and relief, enforcing property standards and licensing in the private rental sector, and strategic assessments of the borough's current and future housing needs.

At the time of writing this strategy, there a number of new acts and proposed bills that will affect the way that housing support and services are provided during the expected lifetime of this strategy.

### Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The Domestic Abuse Act aims to raise awareness and understanding about the impact of domestic abuse on victims and their families. It intends to further improve the effectiveness of the justice system in providing protection for victims of domestic abuse and bringing perpetrators to justice. It also aims to strengthen the support for victims of abuse by statutory agencies.

### Fire Safety Act 2021

The Fire Safety Act places additional duties on responsible persons for multi-occupancy residential buildings, with the legal responsibility of proactively identifying potentially dangerous external wall systems and other structural issues and putting in place measures to deal with them. Responsible persons must make sure that they are up to date with government guidance regarding dealing with dangerous external

wall systems and, where necessary, that they engage with competent fire safety professionals to make sure the steps they are taking are suitable and sufficient to deal with the risks posed.

### Building Safety Bill

The objective of the Building Safety Bill is to strengthen the overall regulatory system for building safety. It aims to establish a comprehensive new building safety regime concerning the design, construction, and occupation of higher-risk buildings. It aims to achieve this by ensuring there is greater accountability and responsibility for the design and construction of buildings, as well as throughout the lifecycle of buildings.

### Social Housing Regulation Bill

The Social Housing Regulation Bill aims to deliver against the commitments made in the social housing white paper for those who live in poor quality social housing. It makes provision for residents to be given performance information so landlords can be held to account and aims to ensure that when residents make a complaint, landlords take quick and effective action to put things right.

In general, new legislation, and in particular new regulation, bring new duties, responsibilities, and burdens on the council. This can pose a risk due to the need to understand and implement measures correctly. Such activity can cause confusion and distraction from service delivery during initial rollout and embedding, and new reporting requirements can be cumbersome and resource intensive. The effective use of technology and analytics applications can go a long way to reducing the level of manual effort required in such circumstances.



The full impact of new regulation and legislation cannot be completely understood until sometime after implementation.

However, changing legislation and regulation also provide opportunities to better meet the needs of residents, and in the longer term should improve the level of service and support offered. New legislation can tackle long-standing issues that prevent positive outcomes for residents, as evidenced through the changes introduced by the Domestic Abuse Act.

The list below is not exhaustive; however, it indicates other significant legislation that set the council's housing responsibilities.

- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- Housing Act 1985
- Housing Act 1996
- Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996
- Local Government Act 2000
- Homelessness Act 2002
- Housing Act 2004
- Equality Act 2006
- Housing and Regeneration Act 2008
- Localism Act 2011
- Welfare Reform Act 2012
- Housing and Planning Act 2016
- Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Homes Fit for Human Habitation Act 2018

## Regulation

At present, the Regulator of Social Housing has set four consumer standards and will intervene where failure to adhere to the standards has caused or would risk causing serious harm to tenants. As a social housing provider, the council must adhere to these standards.

The four consumer standards are:

- Homes Standard
- Neighbourhood and Community Standard
- Tenancy Standard
- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

The Regulator of Social Housing has also set three economic standards. However only the rent standard is currently applicable to the council as a local authority. This standard establishes the maximum weekly social and affordable rents that social landlords can charge.

There are current proposals to introduce a Social Housing Regulation Bill, which would deliver changes to the consumer regulation of social housing. It would strengthen the accountability of landlords for providing safe homes, quality services and treating residents with respect. It would also implement some specific changes to the economic regulation of social housing. These are likely to be introduced during the lifetime of the Housing Strategy 2022-2027.





## National Context

The housing landscape is ever-changing, impacted by alterations to government policy, periods of economic change, noteworthy events in the housing sector and other national influences.

Whilst Thurrock does have localised challenges, some of which are outlined in the next section, the strategic approach towards housing in the borough is equally affected by the national context.



## The Charter for Social Housing Residents

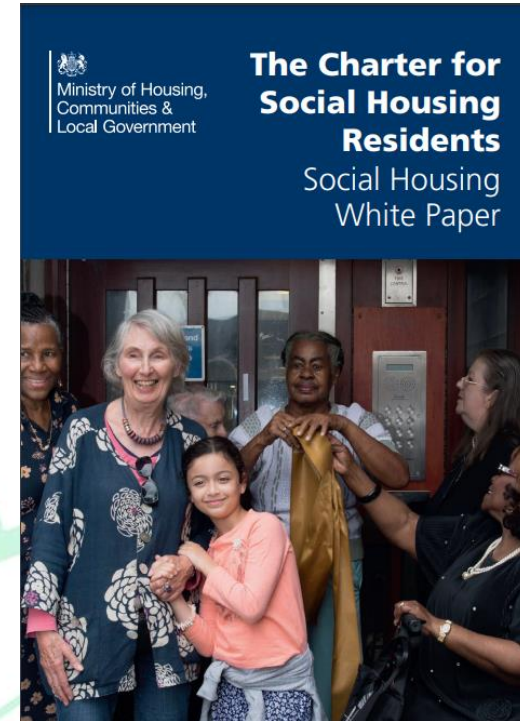
In late 2020 the Government published its social housing white paper, The Charter for Social Housing Residents. Within this document, the Government set out its intentions to ensure that residents in social housing are safe, listened to, live in good quality homes, and have access to redress when required.

The charter outlines the following seven elements that every social housing resident should be able to expect:

- to be safe in your home
- to know how your landlord is performing
- to have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly
- to be treated with respect
- to have your voice heard by your landlord
- to have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in
- to be supported to take your first step into ownership

Further to establishing these aspects, the Government announced plans to strengthen the Regulator of Social Housing. It aims to empower the regulator to be proactive in monitoring and enforcing the consumer standards that social housing landlords are held to, and requiring landlords to:

- be transparent about their performance and decision-making so that tenants and the regulator can hold them to account
- put things right when they go wrong
- listen to tenants through effective engagement



## Building and Fire Safety

The Grenfell Tower Fire brought both fire and building safety into sharp focus for housing providers, building managers and residents of high-rise properties across the country. The tragedy triggered a wave of activity, such as the commissioning of a review of building regulations and fire safety led by Dame Judith Hackitt.

Published in May 2018, *Building a Safer Future: Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety* set out over 50 recommendations for government.

The report drew particular attention to the importance of engaging with residents, strategies for engagement, and ensuring that residents had access to information and involvement in decision making.



The council's duties and obligations relating to building and fire safety are likely to be broadened in the coming months and years due to the progression of the Building Safety Bill and the commencement of the Fire Safety Act 2021. As such, the Housing Strategy must respond to these and flex with any newly introduced duties or responsibilities.

## Climate Change and Sustainability

The Climate Change Act 2008 set a target in legislation to reduce UK emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses to net-zero by 2050. More recently, measures have been introduced to support this aim, such as the intention to phase out gas-fired boilers in new properties by 2035 and increase the use of electric vehicles across the country by mandating that all new homes must have charging points provided.

In October 2019, Thurrock Council passed a motion whereby it declared a climate emergency and set out to take urgent action to reduce its carbon emissions to net-zero by 2030. Initial plans are being developed to respond to the climate crisis by ensuring that council operations are carbon-neutral by this time. As a social housing provider with around 10,000 properties in its stock, to achieve net-zero by 2050, many significant financial and logistical challenges will need to be addressed.

## COVID-19 and Housing

Concerns remain across the Housing sector that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on housing and homelessness has not yet fully emerged.

Initiatives such as 'Everyone In' and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, and legislation to temporarily ban evictions and extend eviction notice periods, provided some stability and security to

households during significant uncertainty throughout much of 2020 and 2021, but these were not permanent resolutions.

With these temporary protections now removed and considering growing inflation levels and household costs, there are fears of a surge of households experiencing financial hardship and, therefore, at risk of homelessness. The full extent of the impacts on the private rental sector and the broader housing market in Thurrock is uncertain; however, the Housing Strategy aims to consider these factors to adapt and respond in the event of any such spike.

## Levelling Up White Paper

The Levelling Up White Paper outlines 12 'missions across four broad areas with the aim to reduce inequality and transform the UK by spreading opportunity and prosperity. These areas are:

- boosting productivity and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging
- spreading opportunities and improving public services, especially in those areas where they are weakest
- restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost
- empowering local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency.

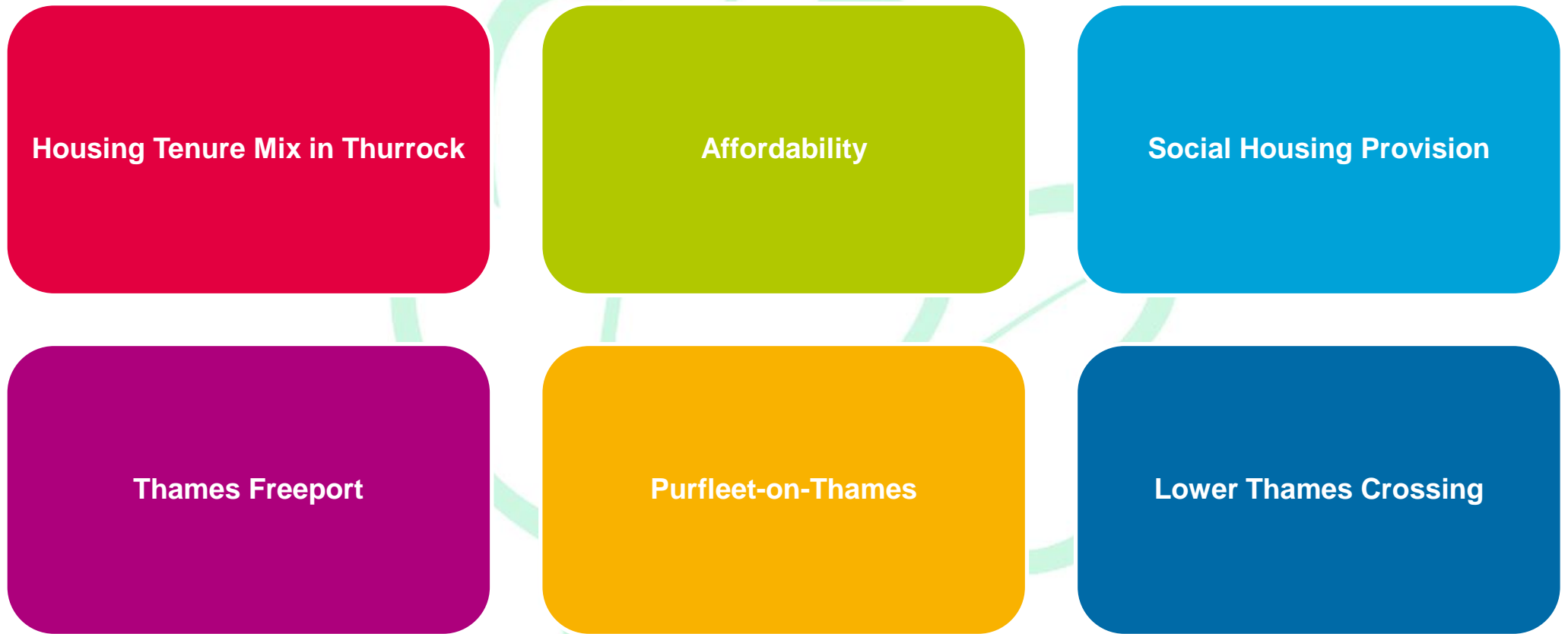
It also sets an aim under mission 10 that by 2030, renters will have a secure path to ownership with the number of first-time buyers increasing in all areas and an ambition for the number of non-decent rented homes to have fallen by 50%, with the biggest improvements in the lowest-performing areas.





## Local Context

There are a number of factors that specifically impact upon housing within Thurrock. These factors relate closely to the affordability of housing in the local area, and is determined in part by the mix, supply and availability of different tenure types. The factors set out in this section can be seen below.

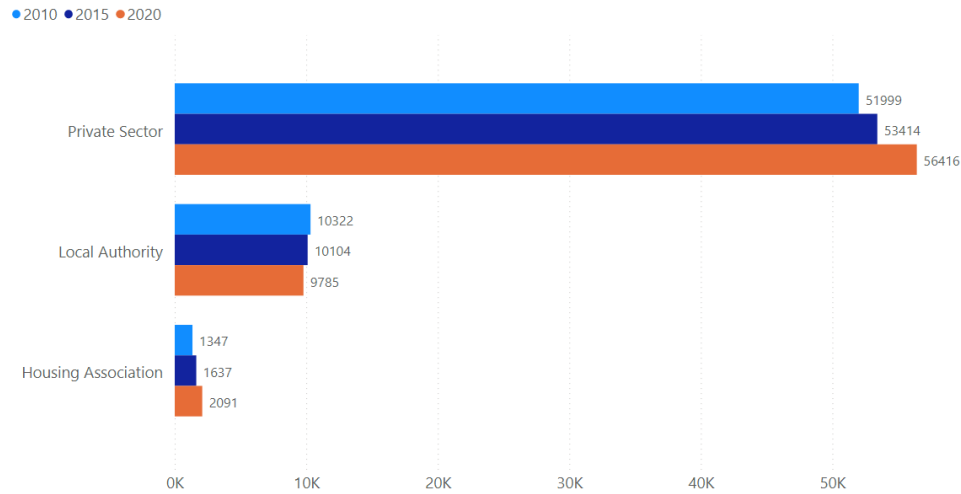




## Housing Tenure Mix in Thurrock

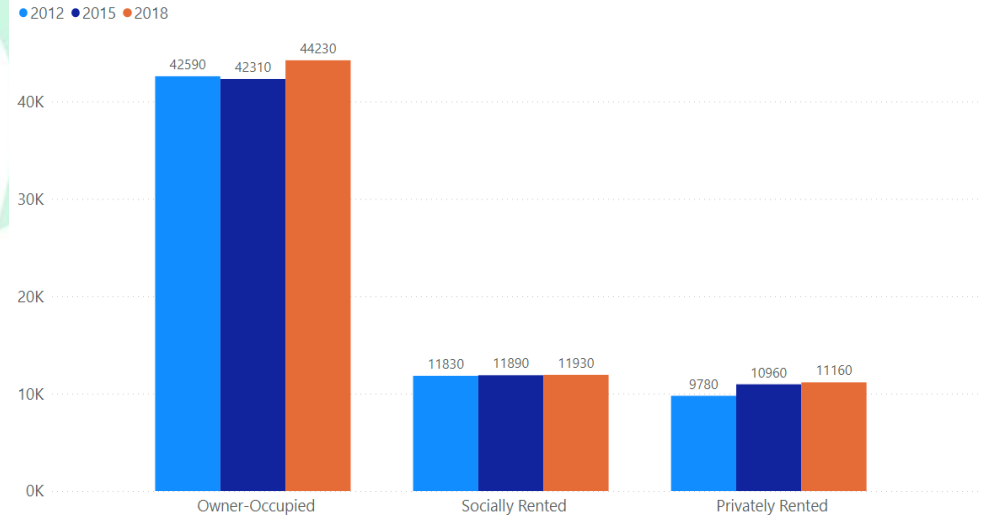
The chart below provides estimates of the number of dwellings in Thurrock, broken down by ownership type.

Number of Dwellings by Ownership Type



Alternative estimates by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) indicate the split between privately rented properties and those occupied by the owner. It should be noted that these are not official statistics, but they do provide an illustrative figure for comparison. In this chart, socially rented refers to the combined number of dwellings owned by the local authority and those owned by housing associations.

ONS Estimated Number of Dwellings by Tenure



## Affordability and Social Housing Provision

Affordability of accommodation in Thurrock is an ongoing challenge, both in the private rental sector and for those aiming to purchase properties.

In Thurrock, the council is the primary provider of social housing. Based on data published by MHCLG (now DLUHC), as of 31 March 2020, it was estimated that 14.3% of dwellings in Thurrock were owned by the council, with other registered providers of social housing owning less than 3.1% of homes in the borough.

The impact of these figures means that for every 47 council-owned dwellings, there were 10 registered provider-owned dwellings, representing the fifth-lowest ratio for stock-retaining local authorities in England at the time of writing.

Although the number of registered provider-owned dwellings has been increasing over time, this imbalance has led to additional pressure and demand on Thurrock Council from households as it is seen to be the primary provider of affordable accommodation in the borough.

## Thames Freeport

It was announced in October 2021 that the Thames Freeport, one of eight announced in the UK, would be able to commence operations. It is anticipated to deliver transformational change across the entire borough, creating thousands of new jobs and attracting substantial investment into Thurrock over the next 25 years.

The successful delivery of the Thames Freeport in Thurrock is expected to contribute significantly to achieving wider place agenda ambitions. It will bring together physical, economic, social, and environmental renewal to improve the wellbeing of communities, provide opportunities and help ensure places are fit for the future.

The expected creation of jobs is likely to impact housing need in the local area. As the Thames Freeport develops and progress on the Local Plan continues, it is expected that this impact can be quantified, and measures identified to address housing need.

## Purfleet-on-Thames

Purfleet Centre Regeneration Limited is a joint venture between Urban Catalyst and Swan Housing in partnership with Thurrock Council to regenerate over 140 acres to create Purfleet-on-Thames.

Developed on healthy town principles, Purfleet-on-Thames will create a new waterfront destination on the River Thames; an international creative hub and high quality new residential with place making at its core. The vision for Purfleet-on-Thames includes:

- A state-of-the-art film and TV studio facility and related creative industry hub
- Attractive new waterfront commercial and retail space
- Up to 2,850 new homes, including significant health and education facilities
- Community facilities, leisure uses and upgraded and additional public transport facilities

## Lower Thames Crossing

National Highways proposes building a new Lower Thames Crossing that will include a major highway through Thurrock. Project proposals include two new 2.5-mile tunnels under the River Thames, 14.5 miles of new road and the construction and alteration of structures, including bridges, buildings, utilities, and tunnels.

The proposals for the Lower Thames Crossing have been assessed as directly and substantially compromising the ability to meet the need for new housing in Thurrock in a sustainable manner. It would lead to the direct loss of approximately 20 existing dwellings, and it is estimated that 1,400 homes would be affected by blight.

The impact on local housing would not only be affected upon completion of the project. During the construction phases of the Lower Thames Crossing, there will be the need for accommodation for over 900 workers involved with the construction of the northern parts of the project in Thurrock. It is expected that this need would be met through a combination of rented properties visitor accommodation such as hotels and owner-occupied homes. This would significantly increase demand and may negatively impact affordability and supply for Thurrock residents and may be a matter of significant concern should the Lower Thames Crossing construction project be awarded a Development Consent Order.



# Deliver Housing Support and Services



This chapter proposes a reframing of the approach taken to support households interacting with the council. Instead of viewing a set of ‘problems’ requiring resolution by disconnected teams, the Housing Strategy encourages a strengths-based ‘whole person’ approach, connected within a wider system that includes adult social care, children’s services, public health, NHS partners, the wider community, voluntary and faith sector, and existing assets within the community, that can all positively support people to live healthily and well.

## Embed a person-centred approach to housing support and services

Thurrock residents approach and interact with council services, delivery partners and other organisations regarding a range of housing-related matters every day. Whilst all will aim to help within their defined remit, the current approach can create barriers to success as few challenges can be appropriately addressed by any one party in isolation.

Homelessness, for example, cannot be addressed in Thurrock solely by the housing service of the council – it requires far greater collaboration and partnership, and all those working alongside individuals and households to see ‘whole human beings’ with their strengths.

This strength-based ‘whole person’ approach should be embraced and adopted by those working with residents in the borough.

Rather than responding to people approaching the council as a collection of fragmented teams and services, each trying to tackle their own ‘problem’, it is intended that we move in a direction where parties are connected and operating within a wider system beyond traditional organisational boundaries. Housing forms one part of this, alongside others such as adult social care, children’s services, public health, NHS partners, the wider community, voluntary and faith sector, and existing assets within the community.

When viewing an individual or household through the lens of a wider system, greater opportunities are available for the coordination of more holistic approaches to support relating to their housing need and other personal circumstances, which also complement their strengths.

As teams and services operate within this broader system, every interaction with a resident or household will present an opportunity for continuous engagement, learning, and improvement. This can be in the context of supporting those individuals by learning about the barriers preventing positive outcomes and designing ways to overcome them, or by identifying systemic issues through shared experience and practice that would require wider resolution.

### What will we do?

We will embed the housing core principles and person-centred approach to housing services in service provision in order to provide tailored and bespoke support to residents

We will reduce bureaucracy in order to deliver outcomes that matter to residents at pace

We will adopt a whole system approach to supporting residents in order to reduce fragmentation and duplication of services





## Develop locality and neighbourhood models for integrated housing services

Housing support, much like public services more broadly, is often fragmented into specific areas that each focus on resolving single 'problems'. However, people want to be recognised and supported by a system that views them as a complex individual aiming to achieve their vision of a good life.

Thresholds and eligibility criteria exist across the public sector, and housing support and services are no exception. Support may only be provided to those identified as 'eligible', and that support is often standardised and focussed solely on one single need, determined on a borough-wide level.

People are likely to have multiple interconnected needs that would benefit from the support of multiple teams or organisations, but the current approach to obtaining that support is often lengthy, fragmented and features with elements of duplication. Support is often provided through formal services when community organisations and assets may already exist to be able to meet these needs.

During the time that an individual attempts to navigate referral pathways and evidence their eligibility, it is highly likely that the need for housing support will become greater. This in turn will exacerbate any other connected or related support need, driving the individual towards crisis rather than prevention or early intervention.

This way of working increases rather than manages demand. It increases bureaucracy, costs, delays and wasted resource and has negative impacts on those seeking and providing support.

The *Better Care Together Thurrock: Case for Further Change* strategic document seeks to address this issue, primarily from a health and care perspective, however it combines this with a broader

view to also include other areas that can affect (or can be affected) by these needs. One such area relates to housing.

The *Case for Further Change* proposes a transformation from the current system architecture and ways of working to move instead towards integrated locality teams. It intends to create a single Integrated Locality Network of professionals who will be able to collaborate more easily and effectively with each other, and with residents. The overall aim is to embed the maximum amount of care and support at locality and neighbourhood level within a multi-disciplinary network of staff who can collaborate to design integrated solutions with residents rather than make onward referrals.

The *Case for Further Change* suggests the incorporation of specific housing services into these Integrated Locality Networks, and the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 supports this intention.

### What will we do?

We will develop a neighbourhood model for housing services in order to better focus on delivering what matters to residents in different localities

We will expand housing locality working into the Integrated Locality Network in order to collaborate more effectively with residents and other professionals

We will expand the knowledge and skills of housing staff in order to better support residents

We will create new Community Case worker 'blended roles' able to co-design integrated, bespoke solutions with residents





## Meet Housing Need

Identifying and understanding housing need can be complex, and any unmet need can have a significant and lasting impact on the health and wellbeing of people. This chapter sets an approach to use a range of information sources to build an accurate understanding of current and future housing need, creating the evidence base for directing housing development.

This chapter considers how the council can explore, understand, and address the diverse housing needs of the borough's population. It also shares residents' priorities regarding the standard of homes in Thurrock and how homes can be developed and improved in the borough.

The development and quality of homes have direct relationships with the health and wellbeing of individuals. The adherence to suitable space standards, ample provision of affordable housing and the inclusion of appropriate green and open space in new developments will positively affect the lives of residents who will live there

### Identify and provide the right homes for Thurrock based on household need

Every household has a housing need that is aligned to and reflective of their circumstances at that point in time

During the engagement and development of this strategy, many residents were concerned that the right types of accommodation were insufficiently available to meet their needs. Affordability was cited as one of the most significant barriers to securing accommodation within Thurrock with growing inflation, increasing household costs and the continuation of welfare reforms placing incomes under pressure. Residents also highlighted difficulties in accessing adapted or adaptable properties in the borough.

Based on the council's housing register data, the greatest demand is for two-bedroom properties, followed by one-bedroom properties.

The most recent Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) was produced in 2017. A SHMA is a technical study intended to help the council's planning and housing services to understand how many homes will be needed during the assessment period – in this case, between 2014 and 2037.

The 2017 assessment indicated an objectively assessed need of 1074 to 1381 properties per annum across all tenures for Thurrock between 2014 and 2037, identifying a net annual affordable housing need of 472 new dwellings. The proportions for the required property sizes identified through the SHMA are shared in the chart below.

There are significant variations between the proportions suggested by the existing SHMA and the data available for the council's housing register. It should be noted that the SHMA considers the housing need for the entire current and future population of Thurrock and recommends that the council continues to monitor the number of bedrooms required by households in priority need on the housing registers.

There is a clear need for good quality, sustainable and affordable housing to be provided in the borough. It is key to the wider growth agenda, enabling residents to live healthy and well lives and means that local residents are available to take up the new employment opportunities created by growth in the borough.



As a social housing provider, the council has a pipeline of future development projects aligned with identified local need.

Following the abolition of the HRA borrowing cap in October 2018 Thurrock Council, as a local authority with an HRA, is no longer constrained by government controls over borrowing for housebuilding. Instead, the council is now able to borrow against their expected rental income.

Additional flexibilities regarding the use of Right to Buy sales receipts mean that there will be wider scope to fund the development of new council-owned homes, and there is currently a pipeline of future projects aligned with identified local need that can now be taken forward.

Given the demand for smaller sized properties as evidenced within this strategy, much of the focus of council-owned developments in the near future is anticipated to primarily be one and two-bedroom homes; however, there will be a mix of homes including three and four-bedroom developments for growing families which can in turn make smaller homes available to be relet where the new occupiers are moving from an existing council-owned property.

Thurrock Regeneration Ltd (TRL) offers another route for the provision of new, high-quality housing across the borough. As a development company set-up and funded by loans from Thurrock Council, it can deliver properties for market sale, private rent, affordable rent and shared ownership, and then reinvest any profits into further housing development or to support services. TRL can support brownfield redevelopment and ensure that sites can be taken forward where other developers may be deterred by feasibility by accessing funding

via partners such as the local enterprise partnership, the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA), and Homes England.

However, the council cannot meet the needs of all households in Thurrock in isolation. As such, work is needed to encourage and attract other registered providers of social housing and housing developers to construct homes in the borough, either directly or through joint ventures with the council, to meet the needs evidenced through local analysis and in the strategic housing market assessment.

### What will we do?

We will use housing knowledge and data to influence and support the development of the Local Plan to ensure that future planning policy is representative of the needs of Thurrock residents

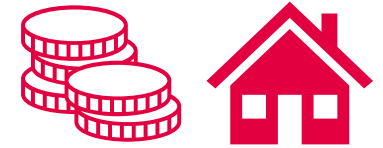
We will identify and understand housing need in Thurrock in order to deliver more social and affordable housing for households in the borough

We will build homes that can respond and adapt to changing housing needs throughout life in order to ensure individuals live independently in suitable accommodation for longer

We will examine and tackle the factors leading to discrimination in housing that limit and prevent access to accommodation and implement a plan to tackle these

We will deliver and refresh the council's housing development programme in order to identify new opportunities to provide more social homes for rent





## Address the housing affordability crisis in Thurrock

Nationally, housing affordability has worsened over the past 20 years, with London and the South East containing some of the country's most unaffordable areas. There has been a decline in the proportion of owner occupiers and an increase in the proportion of people in private rented accommodation.

While private rental has advantages such as greater flexibility to move home, currently the sector also contains the highest proportion of poor-quality homes, offers the least stability, and is the most expensive relative to the monthly cost of social rent and mortgages.

Although definitions and schemes exist to explain what affordable housing can be, there is no single methodology or model for determining what constitutes 'affordable' housing.

The revised National Planning Policy Framework, published in July 2021 goes into detail for four categories, referring to schemes and models such as shared ownership, equity loans, social rent, and affordable rent. However, many of these 'affordable' housing products would not be affordable to lower-income households.

There are a range of models for 'affordability', however the greatest challenge in defining affordability is that it is subjective and heavily influenced by each household's circumstances and housing needs. Determining what 'affordable' means based solely on market rents does not consider the disparity between the incomes of households, nor does it consider the source of those incomes.

Affordability concerns are prevalent for those wanting to buy in Thurrock. There is likely to be a considerable number of households for whom home ownership is not an option, in turn increasing the number of households looking to privately rent or socially rent. There is a need to ensure that these options are available and affordable for

these households. There is also a need to ensure that these options are of suitable quality and security to mitigate against potential poor health effects of unhealthy housing.

There is then the challenge of households living in properties that may be deemed affordable, but that comes at the cost of quality, standard of living and decency of accommodation.

Based on analysis, it was observed that single full-time workers appear to be more likely to find one-bedroom properties affordable within the private rental sector; however, for other property sizes, and for other worker types across property sizes affordability is significantly impacted.

Households with two earners where at least one is a full-time worker will find the private rental market more affordable. For households with no full-time earners, accessing properties with median market rents is extremely unaffordable.

### What will we do?

We will introduce and maintain a 'Thurrock Affordability Standard' in order to accurately inform service delivery, policy design and housing development

We will deliver at least 373 new council-owned homes by 2027

We will maximise the delivery of genuinely affordable housing in new developments in order to boost access and availability

We will support households to maximise their income in order to increase the range of affordable housing options

We will establish a social lettings agency for Thurrock in order to expand private housing options for residents





## Prevent homelessness and end rough sleeping in Thurrock

Homelessness is a complex societal issue. The impact on the lives of individuals and households, and the response required from public and third sector organisations is significant.

Homelessness detrimentally affects the physical and mental health and wellbeing of individuals, impacts their access to health and care services, is a factor in increased drug and alcohol misuse, and disrupts the work, education, and support networks of households.

The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018 saw the council experience an increase in the number of households approaching the organisation for assistance regarding homelessness.

A reduction in assessments can be observed after the end of the 2019/20 reporting year can be directly and primarily attributed to the impact of measures implemented by the Government to support people to remain in secure and settled accommodation during the COVID-19 pandemic. These measures included the extension of eviction notice periods, which returned to pre-pandemic lengths in October 2021, and the prevention of bailiff enforced evictions that was lifted in May 2021.

In 2018/19 and 2019/20, households approaching the council for a homelessness assessment were more likely to be owed the prevention duty as they were threatened with homelessness, rather than the prevention duty that would have been owed if they were experiencing homelessness.

In 2020/21 this balance reversed, with more households owed the relief duty than the prevention duty. As already outlined, during the COVID-19 pandemic support was in place to keep renters and homeowners in their settled homes, including mortgage payment

holidays, leading to fewer households facing homelessness due to the threat of eviction or repossession.

These reasons for homelessness tend to have advanced warning or notice, meaning that action can be taken to sustain tenancies; however, other reasons for the loss of accommodation require swifter support and action.

There was a sharp reduction after March 2020 in the proportion of households owed prevention or relief duties due to the end of a private rental sector tenancy. Family and friends no longer willing or able to accommodate remained the most prevalent reason for the actual or threat of loss of settled accommodation in Thurrock, with the proportion increasing noticeably in the 2020/21 financial year.

Correlating with the protections for private rental sector tenants, a reduction in the proportion of the loss of private rental sector accommodation can be seen from 2020/21 compared to previous years. Over the past two years, the largest proportion of those owed the prevention and relief duties were those living with family.

The proportion of single adult males and single adult females seeking assistance have generally increased over the past four years, and with single adult males accounting for more than two in every five household types owed the relief duty.

When submitting and progressing through a homelessness application, household support needs are identified. The proportion of households with support needs owed either the prevention or relief duties has generally been increasing over the past four years.

The most prevalent support need for applicants in Thurrock has consistently been where there has been a history of mental health





problems within the household, followed by those with physical ill health and disability and those at risk of or have experienced domestic abuse.

In general, where homelessness can be prevented or relieved, the most prevalent type of accommodation offered is in the private rental sector, and this has been the case for a number of years.

Action the local authority can take to prevent or relieve homelessness include helping households to secure accommodation found by the applicants (with and without financial payment), directly securing accommodation through the housing options services, negotiation, advocacy and mediation, and other financial payments, such as those to reduce arrears.

If accommodation cannot be sustained through the prevention duty or assistance to secure accommodation is not successful during through the relief duty, a further assessment is undertaken to understand if the household is owed the main housing duty. The main housing duty owed by a local authority to someone who is homeless, eligible, has a priority need and is not intentionally homeless.

A number of factors are considered to determine whether a homeless household has a priority need for housing. Some groups of people, such as pregnant women, households with dependent children and victims of domestic abuse must be accepted as in priority need.

Others, such as those with physical disabilities or mental health illnesses and disabilities may also be in priority need if they would be significantly more vulnerable than an ordinary person would be if they became homeless.

Although the proportion of households with dependent children within all those owed a main duty has seen a slight year-on-year reduction, it remains the most significant priority need in homeless households Thurrock. There has been a noticeable increase in the proportion of

households identified in priority need of housing as a result of mental health problems, with physical disability and ill health remaining a consistent factor for priority need.

Unlike accommodation secured through the prevention and relief duties, most of the accommodation offered to households owed the main housing duty was social housing, however the use of private rental sector properties has been increasing in recent years.

### What will we do?

We will effectively eliminate rough sleeping in Thurrock by providing appropriate and timely support, making an offer of accommodation to every verified rough sleeper, and sharing knowledge between partners to help identify those individuals

We will support residents experiencing hardship across all tenures in order to prevent homelessness and sustain their homes by adopting an approach across the wider system where concerns and early indicators are referred to the housing service for action

We will work in partnership across the system in order to improve access to health, care and support services for those at risk of or experiencing homelessness. We will bring together community and voluntary sector organisations, health partners and other support services in a physical location to directly support those who are at risk of or who are experiencing homelessness. We will co-design bespoke solutions with residents to address all the factors that may be contributing to their homelessness or risk of homelessness, such as addiction, mental health and debt

We will ensure that any households requiring temporary accommodation remain within the borough wherever possible and for as little time as possible through increasing the number of council-owned properties for use as temporary accommodation in the borough, and only looking to make out-of-borough placements where it is for safety reasons or in the best interests of the household





## Deliver sustainable estate regeneration

Estate regeneration provides the opportunity to enhance estates, address issues of health inequalities and deprivation whilst increasing the provision of housing on site. The council has identified key areas requiring significant investment that would benefit from wider regeneration to deliver new and better-quality housing.

Council investments in existing housing stock need to be continually reviewed to ensure that programmes achieve the best outcomes for residents and maximise the overall value of assets. Investments also need to be made to ensure that homes and neighbourhoods support the health and wellbeing of residents in the local area.

Much of the council's existing housing stock is considered maintainable in the long-term; however, the council recognises that some property archetypes present challenges in ongoing maintenance and the living environment.

It may be that an alternative use could be more appropriate, including using the land or assets to build additional homes of the type and quality needed and in areas where people want to live.

Several potential locations have already been identified to be taken forward for housing redevelopment and regeneration, such as the Blackshots high-rise tower blocks, blocks of flats at Teviot Avenue, and part of the Civic Offices site in Grays.

The high-rise blocks at Blackshots experience problems with damp and mould. There are interim plans to address some immediate issues at the Blackshots blocks; however, these will not address the overall design and layout of these properties which does not meet the needs of modern living.

Teviot Avenue, Aveley, contains 36 flats constructed of pre-cast reinforced concrete of the 'Cornish' type.

A survey was undertaken to assess the condition of the structures which identified several issues with the flats. A stock options appraisal was completed and initial engagement with residents demonstrated the preferred option is to redevelop the site and provide more homes.

The position on redeveloping Civic Offices 1 (CO1) for residential accommodation and the benefits of providing a new council facility in the Civic Office extension were agreed at Cabinet in September 2019. A scheme based on 100% council-owned social housing offers a financially sustainable model for developing the site.

It is anticipated that further regeneration possibilities will arise throughout the lifetime of this strategy.

What will we do?
We will establish and embed a clear vision and deliver against ambitious plans in order to direct future housing development and regeneration
We will deliver the major regeneration projects at Blackshots, CO1 and Teviot Avenue to provide modern, sustainable homes that are fit for the future
We will embed resident engagement in estate regeneration in order to deliver projects that meet local needs, working closely with our residents to understand their priorities, identify required estate improvements, and progress opportunities for new housing to transform and enhance neighbourhoods
We will target the regeneration approach in order to maximise the value of housing assets
We will embed active travel in new developments in order to encourage sustainable transport and improve wellbeing





## Review the model of Sheltered Housing provision

Housing providers throughout the country have recognised that the traditional approach to Sheltered Housing model may no longer be fit for purpose or match the lifestyles and aspirations of older people today. Sheltered housing stock and complexes can also appear dated.

The consequences of these factors combined leads to lower levels of demand, increased numbers of vacant properties, loss of rental income for housing providers as well as missed council tax revenue.

This challenge has been known and growing for some time nationally, with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation publishing housing research in December 1995 regarding the causes and consequences of difficulties letting sheltered housing properties.

Since 2020/21 there has been a significant increase in the average number of bidding cycles required for a successful offer of a sheltered housing property to be made to an applicant. Sometimes properties need to be readvertised if the shortlisted candidates refuse the property or withdraw from the allocation process, however sometimes the readvertisement is due to a lack of interest from applicants in that bidding cycle.

The increase in number of void days for 2020/21 cannot be explained by the choice-based lettings suspension entirely. Analysis suggests that the extended void periods were more likely a result of the lack of interest from an appropriate housing register applicant.

To better understand the drivers for increased void turnaround times and increased numbers of bidding cycles, lettings data can be broken down into property types. The successful letting of a first floor flat takes almost four times as many bidding cycles than needed for a ground

floor flat and void periods are on average 64.5% longer. Second floor flats, whilst requiring fewer bidding cycles than first floor flats, experience the longest void periods.

The relative difficulty in letting properties above the ground floor in sheltered housing may reflect concerns or preferences regarding accessibility of such properties for residents that meet the criteria for sheltered housing in Thurrock.

### What will we do?

We will implement a new delivery model for Sheltered Housing in order to ensure this type of supported provision meets resident needs

We will investigate options for the potential decommissioning of Sheltered Housing complexes which are underused or no longer fit for purpose and offer opportunities to redevelop into new housing that meet current and future needs in Thurrock

We will overhaul the approach to allocating Sheltered Housing properties, reassess the eligibility criteria within the Allocations Policy and introduce a new approach to 'sensitive lettings' to improve access to this form of supported accommodation

We will invest in Sheltered Housing complexes in order to improve the day-to-day experience of residents by investing to improve conditions through internal and external decorating programmes, and by developing new ways and opportunities for residents to engage and collaborate with the housing team, other council services and external partners by increasing the use of technology in complexes





## Protect Resident Safety

This chapter is focused on protecting people and working to prevent them from experiencing harm to their physical and mental health. It considers the physical environment relating to property conditions, fuel poverty, property accessibility and adaptations, and harm experienced from anti-social behaviour, crime, and domestic abuse. It also addresses and the general perception or feeling of safety in and around the home and neighbourhood.

The safety and security of residents in Thurrock are of paramount importance. They can be considered in two ways – the actions taken or required to protect physical safety and the actions taken or required to support people to feel safe. Although these are often aligned, it cannot be guaranteed that ensuring physical safety will result in a person feeling safe, and vice versa.

### Improve warmth, safety, and standards in private sector homes

A significant amount of feedback was provided by residents during the development of this strategy relating to standards in the private sector. Responses suggested that action was required to ensure that all HMOs and other privately rented properties in Thurrock operate appropriately and safely, and to support vulnerable homeowners to live in warm and safe homes.

#### Private sector conditions

In 2021 the council commissioned a study to gather intelligence on the private housing stock in the borough. Through this, the council gained insight on the tenures, property conditions, likely instances of fuel poverty and geographical distribution of properties.

In recent years, Thurrock has seen growth in the number of properties used in the private rental sector, both as dwellings let in their entirety and as houses of multiple occupation (HMOs). The 2021 study estimated that the size of the private rental sector in Thurrock had increased by 76.3% compared to the findings of the 2011 census.

The council uses a risk-based evaluation tool called the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) to help identify potential risks and hazards to health and safety from any deficiencies identified

in dwellings. The HHSRS is used to determine whether residential premises are safe to live in, or whether a hazard exists that may cause harm to the health and safety of a potential occupant.

The system assesses 29 types of housing hazard and provides a rating for each one. Those which score highly on the scale are called category 1 hazards and the council has a duty to take the appropriate enforcement action. Those that fall lower down the scale and pose a lesser risk are called category 2 hazards.

The data provided in the private sector stock condition survey estimated that 11% of properties in the private sector are estimated to have at least one category 1 hazard.

The private sector stock condition survey estimated that highest concentration of all HHSRS hazards is found in the wards of Grays Thurrock, Little Thurrock Rectory, and East Tilbury, with the highest concentration of properties experiencing excess cold located in East Tilbury, Orsett and Grays Thurrock.

The wards of Tilbury St Chads, Tilbury Riverside & Thurrock Park, and Belhus featured the highest concentrations of households of fuel poverty in Thurrock.



Fuel poverty is driven by three main factors: low household incomes, high energy costs, and poor property energy efficiency such as insufficient insulation or ineffective heating systems.

### Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

HMOs can present greater risks to the health, safety, and wellbeing of residents than comparable single occupancy homes. Risks such as dangerous gas appliances, faulty electrical systems and inadequate means of escape and other fire precautions are examples of some of the hazards that the private housing team investigate in Thurrock on a regular basis.

We estimate that there are 2501 HMOs in Thurrock. Grays Riverside ward has the highest number of HMOs, followed by West Thurrock & South Stifford, and Grays Thurrock.

Through the stock condition survey, we estimate that at least one category 1 hazard is present in 26% of HMOs in Grays Thurrock, 23% of HMOs in The Homesteads and 22% of HMOs in Little Thurrock Rectory. 12% of HMOs in Grays Thurrock are also estimated to be in disrepair.

The purpose of licensing, especially for HMOs, is to ensure that residential accommodation within the private rented sector is safe, well managed and of good quality with a particular focus on safety.

A licence is needed for all properties that are occupied by five or more people, living together as two or more households, with additional licensing rules for HMOs in certain areas in Thurrock until May 2024.

### Disabled Facilities Grants

Mandatory disabled facilities grants (DFGs) are available from local authorities to fund or part-fund the completion of a range of adaptations for disabled occupants. DFGs are issued for works that

are necessary and appropriate for the property to meet the needs of the disabled occupant, and that are reasonable and practicable to carry out.

In addition, DFGs must be approved for works to make the dwelling safe for the disabled occupant and other persons residing with them. The most prevalent harms removed in Thurrock properties between April 2019 and March 2021 as a result of disabled facilities grants were relating to personal hygiene, sanitation and drainage, falls with baths, and falls on stairs.

#### What will we do?

We will drive up the standards and quality of homes in the private sector in order to ensure greater availability of safe and suitable homes for Thurrock residents by developing targeted, data-driven interventions and working with private sector landlords to improve housing standards and living conditions and support vulnerable owner-occupiers to remove HHSRS hazards from their homes

We will tackle hazards in the private rental sector in order to improve resident safety by using the full extent of enforcement powers available to the council

We will encourage private sector residents to access available support in order to live independently in their homes for longer through Disabled Facilities Grant usage where appropriate as a method to removing hazards and improve the health and wellbeing of households in Thurrock

We will develop a strategic approach to reduce fuel poverty in Thurrock in order to address the harm this causes to residents, supporting improvements to the EPC ratings of private homes across the borough by designing and delivering initiatives targeted at poor energy efficiency and using technology, data, and predictive analytics to identify and proactively support households at greatest risk of experiencing fuel poverty





## Invest in and maintain quality council-owned homes that are fit for the future

The council's aims for its homes and estates are that they should be places where residents enjoy living and working, where they take pride in their homes and can enjoy being part of a thriving community. The aspiration is to invest in and maintain high-quality accommodation that demonstrates the benefits of the council's repairs and capital investment programmes and positively influences the health and wellbeing of our tenants and residents.

The council owns and manages just under 10,000 homes and its stock includes over 1,000 sheltered housing properties across the borough. Half of the council's general needs properties are three-bedroom homes, and the remaining majority comprise one and two-bedroom flats.

A 2017 stock condition survey demonstrated that the stock was in a fair to good condition with specific themes emerging such a need to prioritise work to property exteriors.

The council provides an effective and responsive day-to-day repairs and maintenance services that keep properties in good repair. The repairs service is delivered through third party contracts, providing a responsive repairs service to all housing tenants in line with government and locally set standards and timeframes.

Building and fire safety are matters of significant importance for any party or organisation involved in the management or maintenance of residential properties, and the responsibilities must not be taken lightly.

To meet its responsibilities, the council has a compliance regime to provide complete assurance to residents that their homes are well managed and meet required safety standards. Specific fire safety policies are in place to set how the housing service will manage and maintain its assets following the regulatory framework.

The housing service has begun to proactively develop an action plan to ensure that the council is in a strong position to meet and address the Social Housing White Paper proposals.

The housing service also stands ready to ensure compliance with the emerging Building Safety Bill, the implementation of recommendations made within the '*Building a Safer Future*' report following the Grenfell Tower fire, and any new duties or responsibilities introduced by the Fire Safety Act 2021. This aligns with the Charter for Social Housing Residents, as set out in the Social Housing White Paper.

Resident engagement is also crucial from the perspective of building management and safety. As part of the '*Building a safer future*' report published following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the introduction of a 'golden thread' was made. This golden thread aims to serve as a tool to manage buildings as holistic systems, allowing people to use information to design, construct and operate their buildings safely and effectively.

### Damp and mould

Damp and mould in social housing is an issue across the UK. It is widely recognised as one of the most challenging aspects for landlords and residents to prevent and manage. It is for this reason that the Housing Ombudsman undertook a thematic review and recently published a report on this subject, entitled '*Spotlight on damp and mould – It's not lifestyle*'.

Analysis of council repairs data between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2021 shows that damp and mould repairs are relatively uncommon as a proportion of all repairs. During this time, 2242 responsive damp and mould repairs were completed, representing 4.1% of the total repair demand.

During the reporting period, 2197 damp and mould related works orders were completed at 1,123 council-owned properties, reflecting 11.4% of the council's housing stock.

Further analysis of repairs data demonstrates that tenants of most of these properties only reported damp and mould once during the two-year period, with only 2% of those living in council's housing stock reporting damp and mould concerns more than once during this same period.

There are over five times as many damp and mould works orders completed in January compared to August and damp and mould issues are clearly positively associated with older stock which is less likely to be thermally well insulated. Findings suggest that the primary cause of damp is condensation, where warm humid air inside the property condenses on cold walls, more commonly occurring in older properties, during the winter months.

The 'Spotlight on damp and mould – It's not lifestyle' report produced 26 recommendations for landlords, including an ask of landlords to shift their approach to damp and mould.

### Decarbonisation

In October 2019, the council passed a motion to declare a climate emergency and to take urgent action to reduce its carbon emissions to net-zero by 2030. The council has committed to reducing its carbon footprint to zero. The council's initial plans to respond to the climate crisis is by making sure the council's operations are carbon neutral by 2030.

The council is committed to continually investing to improve the overall thermal efficiency of homes, whilst effectively supporting the borough's most vulnerable residents out of fuel poverty.

### What will we do?

We will listen to the views of residents and understand their priorities in order to design, develop and deliver stock improvement programmes that target the things that matter

We will invest in and embed new technology in order to effectively direct housing investment for maintenance and improvement

We will embed proactivity in the approach to maintaining council-owned homes in order to achieve a good standard and mitigate the need for reactive repairs by analysing detailed stock condition survey data to identify properties requiring investment over the next five to ten years. This information will inform plans for planned and cyclical maintenance programmes to ensure properties are safe and comply with legislative requirements

We will proactively share information relating to building and fire safety in order to support residents to feel safe in their homes

We will develop a holistic approach to damp and mould in council-owned properties in order to significantly reduce occurrences by delivering against an action plan based upon the *Spotlight on damp and mould* report and embedding technology, modelling and predictive analytics to identify properties likely to be experiencing such issues

We will support residents out of fuel poverty in order to improve health and wellbeing and quality of life by achieving EPC band C ratings across all housing stock by 2030 through direct investment in council homes from the housing revenue account and maximising the use of available funding streams

We will increase the use of sustainable and renewable technology in our stock in order to improve energy efficiency, reduce carbon emissions and support the council's green agenda





## Strengthen community safety and prevent anti-social behaviour

The council holds considerable responsibilities to protect its residents from crime and anti-social behaviour by providing strategy, policy, and frontline enforcement services.

Crime is a broad and complex issue, impacting upon the health and wellbeing of victims and survivors, and wider society.

Anti-social behaviour is any act that causes – or is likely to cause – harassment, alarm, or distress. It is also any act that can cause nuisance or annoyance related either to housing or the affected person's occupation of their home.

The quality of the local environment is impacted in part by anti-social behaviour in Thurrock. Examples include littering, nuisance vehicles, and drug dealing and use. These impact on perceptions among the community of safety and their ability to enjoy their local area.

The *Charter for Social Housing Residents* sets out that every social housing resident should have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in. In relation to anti-social behaviour, it outlines that social housing tenants have a right to feel safe in their homes, without the stress, fear, and tensions that anti-social behaviour and crime can cause and encourages landlords to develop practical solutions to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour.

The topic of anti-social behaviour featured heavily as a priority throughout the engagement for the development of this strategy, with concerns raised regarding the perception of feeling unsafe.

Certain groups are more likely to be the victims of crime, including women and girls, children and young people, the elderly and those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Thurrock's Community Safety Partnership brings together local organisations with the shared goals of reducing crime and the fear of crime, anti-social behaviour, alcohol and drug misuse and reducing re-offending.

### What will we do?

We will work in partnership to reduce local levels of crime and opportunities for crime to take place in order to make Thurrock a safer place to live, forming part of a new *Community Safety Service* for Thurrock and working across housing to support the priorities identified by Thurrock Community Safety Partnership annually

We will develop a multi-agency data monitoring tool to ensure all reports of anti-social behaviour to all community safety agencies, can be identified, enabling the identification of trends and analysis of data on repeat victims and perpetrators, including hate incidents and crimes to better inform to joint approach to tackling such issues

We will improve the local response to supporting victims/survivors of crimes to improve their health and wellbeing by fully adopting a person-centred and strength-based approach to such individuals

We will adopt new technology in order to better to record and monitor antisocial behaviour incidents and outcomes

We will communicate effectively about action taken to tackle anti-social behaviour in order to reassure residents by using direct, effective, and rapid responses to reports of anti-social behaviour and encouraging others to make reports of anti-social behaviour concerns as a result of evidence of positive outcomes

We will embed safety principles such as 'secure-by-design' and natural surveillance in new developments in order to reduce the likelihood of crime or anti-social behaviour in the future







## Tackle domestic and sexual abuse and violence

Domestic abuse and sexual abuse are still largely hidden crimes and measuring the true scale of the issue is complex. Domestic abuse and sexual abuse happen in all communities.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 was passed into law in April 2021. The Act provided a new statutory definition of domestic abuse, introduced new laws and changes to existing laws, and placed new duties on local authorities, the Government, and other public bodies, such:

- The provision of safe accommodation for all survivors of domestic abuse
- Ensuring that fleeing abuse does not result in the loss of right to lifetime or assured tenancies when these were in place
- Ensuring that homeless people identified as survivors of domestic abuse are given priority

Domestic abuse and sexual abuse disproportionately affect women. Often the abuse is perpetrated by men, and is more likely to happen to women who have a disability.

Information collected by Thurrock Refuge between April 2018 and March 2021 indicates that 295 victims of domestic abuse were provided with safe accommodation – 120 refuge clients with 175 children. The average age of domestic abuse victims in safe accommodation was 35, however the ages ranged from 21 to 71.

72% of those provided accommodation had children, and 7% were pregnant. 88% of Thurrock Refuge clients were British nationals, however 5% of clients had no recourse to public funds.

There is a strong association within some data sets and the deprivation levels across wards in Thurrock. On average, 52% of

residents in safe accommodation in Thurrock were unemployed while approximately 42% of residents' employment status was unrecorded in the same time frame, based on a three-year cohort.

The unemployment rate is high which could be for a range of reasons, such as mental health needs, or given that 5% of residents required an interpreter and 9% of residents' first language was not English these may also be potential barriers in accessing and navigating employment or being financially able to continue to alternative accommodation.

Individuals identifying themselves as having a disability was an emerging trend in the data. Although numerically small, there is limited understanding of these needs and therefore requires greater focus. Mental health support emerged as the largest need for residents, corroborated by the understanding that emotional or psychological and jealous or controlling behaviour abuse types affected over half of residents each year.

The Domestic Abuse Act has defined children as victims in their own right. The specific needs of children residing in refuge is not known and will be a focus for future assessments.

### What will we do?

We will offer support to survivors of domestic and sexual abuse effectively, professionally, and appropriately by introducing measures to ensure that residents receive a dedicated approach that considers the circumstances of each individual

We will work to improve pathways into safe accommodation in order to best support those fleeing abuse





## Support vulnerable adults and children into housing

There is an urgent need to reform the accommodation and care pathway for vulnerable residents in Thurrock, such as those with mental illness, and those leaving care.

The role that housing plays in mental health support for individuals is crucial. Therefore, providing the right type of housing is fundamental to the help individuals to recover and live well in their community, as well as reducing demand on statutory services.

Accommodation and care for individuals with the highest levels of need coupled with challenging behaviour has been identified as the most difficult to source and sustain in Thurrock.

The accommodation and care provision for individuals in Thurrock with mental illness consists of residential care, supported living and floating support. Anecdotal evidence across housing, health and social care indicates that there is a gap in provision people with needs that are too complex and challenging for supported living and are inappropriate for residential care, and for whom the gap between general needs housing and supported living is too great.

The current model does not accommodate the fluctuating needs of people with mental illness. Unlike other groups, mental illness is not a linear condition and without the right support and boundaries may result in instances of frequent admissions and placement breakdowns. An individual may require one or all levels a model of accommodation and care provision, at different times, for short or long periods of time. The majority will require a multi-agency approach to their support in the community; however, when this support is delivered directly by each responsible agency can add to the feeling of overwhelm and chaos for the individual.

Locally, there are instances of multiple high-cost placements that do not deliver the quality and outcomes aspired to. A lack of concerted focus on achieving what is important to the individual and little opportunity to review plans and adapt, mostly occurring at times of crisis, has led to a drive to transform supported living.

Local authorities have a duty, as a corporate parent, to ensure continued involvement in supporting young people as they leave care and move into independence until they are 25 years of age. This approach should mean that bureaucratic processes are overridden, and decisions are made with the child's needs in mind.

Young people in care and leaving care can be highly vulnerable and at risk of experiencing multiple accommodation moves. They can often struggle to cope with the challenges of living independently at a young age without a family network, and they may need help to access services or deal with specific problems they face.

Good practice guidance published by the Government in 2020 recommends that council housing departments and children's services should produce a joint protocol that sets out how they will work together.

### What will we do?

We will improve the supported and specialist housing offer in Thurrock in order to address shortfalls for vulnerable residents

We will align housing staff with Integrated Locality Networks in order to implement an integrated approach to care and support planning

We will continue to support the Head Start Housing initiative in order to provide suitable accommodation for care leavers as a foundation for their future





## Improve estate standards

As a landlord, the council is responsible for managing and maintaining large areas of communal space, both indoors and out.

The *Charter for Social Housing Residents* seeks to ensure that all social housing residents can enjoy good homes and neighbourhoods.

In the white paper the Government announced a Decent Homes Standard review that would also consider how improvements to communal space around social homes could make places more liveable, safe, and comfortable.

Around 3,500 council-owned properties are located on estates or in areas with outside communal space that the housing service is responsible for maintaining.

Feedback from Thurrock residents during the development of this strategy included concerns about feeling safe in and around the borough's neighbourhoods, in particular relating to anti-social behaviour, drug crime and misuse, road and footpath safety, and inadequate street lighting.

Residents expressed improvements to specific estates and neighbourhoods should be made following engagement with those who live in those areas, ensuring that local needs, priorities and concerns are fully considered.

Through recent satisfaction survey activity, the responses of tenants who gave satisfaction ratings of 'fairly dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied' were analysed. 40.9% of the dissatisfied responses related to the quality of work carried out, specifically relating to standards of cleaning and litter either not being picked up or left behind. 34.1% was due to the frequency of the caretaking, with perceptions that extending periods of time pass without any work being carried out.

Similar analysis was undertaken regarding drivers of dissatisfaction relating to grounds maintenance in and around the council's housing stock. Over half of the responses (54.5%) related to the frequency of grass cutting and cleaning of the area. A quarter of responses referred to the general quality of work with the majority of these mentioning cutting and trimming of grass and bushes, and 13.5% of tenants said that waste was left behind and the area was left untidy.

### What will we do?

We will implement a new approach to estate inspections in order to protect resident safety in estates and communal areas by delivering and embedding a new estate inspections quality and safety framework, supported by a more frequent inspection regime to assess and remove health and safety risks

We will adopt a collaborative approach to improve safety on estates in order to address the issues that matter to local residents. We will establish a programme of resident and ward councillor estate walkabouts to improve the connection to and understanding of the local area. We will use this information across housing, with our community partners and with residents to make our estates clean, attractive spaces where residents feel safe, using lighting, CCTV, and environmental improvements to do this

We will invest in and embed technology in order to facilitate robust management of estate standards

We will implement new approaches in order to tackle issues of nuisance parking on estates and improve the appearance of local areas, such as replacing high-cost wooden knee rails and bollards with green infrastructure such as hedging and shrub plants in order to deter such behaviour and improve the quality of environment





## Strengthen Community Engagement and Empowerment

The COVID-19 pandemic led people to experience significant periods of social isolation and separation from their friends, family, and wider support networks. It also saw communities come together, with people supporting one another through immensely challenging and testing circumstances. The collective strength and resilience showed within communities

This chapter considers how relationships are built and strengthened between residents, the areas in which they live, the communities of which they are a part, and the organisations and groups that provide support and the council.

A significant ambition of this strategy is to support communities to build resilience and to broaden engagement with them. This strategy seeks to use the wider system and its networks to take an integrated approach in supporting communities, giving residents active and meaningful roles in matters that affect them in the context of housing and their estates and neighbourhoods.

### Improve resident satisfaction and access to information

The Charter for Social Housing Residents seeks to ensure that landlords remain transparent and accountable to their tenants at all times. The white paper sets out that every social housing resident should be able to expect to know how their landlord is performing.

As a mechanism to achieve this, the Regulator of Social Housing is seeking to introduce a suite of tenant satisfaction measures for all registered providers of social housing, including local authorities.

In addition to greater transparency, these measures aim to inform the regulator about landlord compliance with the consumer standards under a more proactive consumer regulation regime as proposed in the social housing white paper.

There has been a generally positive trend in resident satisfaction levels recent years, however levels of resident satisfaction with housing services were lower in 2021/22.

In 2020/21, the last full reporting year, a total of 1983 ratings were provided by residents. Of these, 1497 reported that they were fairly or very satisfied with the overall service provided by housing. 234 residents provided neutral responses, and 252 shared that they were fairly or very dissatisfied.

Whilst satisfaction was reported as being very high in some areas such as rent value for money and the perception that homes are safe and secure, the perception of the repairs service fell below the target set for the reporting year.

Analysis and categorisation of recent resident feedback indicates that presently, the repairs and maintenance service is the main factor for dissatisfaction with over half of all comments (56.1%) relating to it.

Within the repairs and maintenance category for dissatisfaction, outstanding repairs represented 28.3% of the feedback received.



Sheltered Housing tenants with a tenancy length of between 10 to 15 years, 15 to 20 years and under a year were 100% satisfied with the repairs service and the least satisfied have been a tenant between one and five years (70%).

Tenants within general needs properties that have lived in their property for 10 to 15 years were most satisfied (76.2%), and those who had held their tenancies for between 15 and 20 years are the least satisfied (53%).

Further to these key measures, tenants are also asked to either indicate whether they agree or disagree with measures relating to landlord characteristics.

General feedback provided indicates that tenants find housing staff to be friendly and approachable, working to keep tenants informed and treating them fairly. Some concerns were raised by tenants regarding the ease of interaction with the housing service and how effective and efficient that service is.

However, the greatest proportions of dissatisfaction relate to tenant perception regarding the housing service listening to their views and understanding their needs.

Analysis of key terms used by tenants expressing their dissatisfaction when asked for their perception on whether they felt the housing service listened to their views is helpful as an indicator of similar themes from different residents.

*Listen, nothing* and *done* all feature prominently in the word cloud visualisation. Analysis of underlying tenant responses show that these are related – among dissatisfied tenants there is the perception and experience that they do not see action taken when feedback is asked for or given about the things that matter to them.

### What will we do?

We will implement digital solutions in order to improve resident access to information and housing services

We will demonstrate our commitment to listen to residents in order to better understanding their needs and priorities by exploring the reasons for dissatisfaction, delivering focus groups with tenants and closing the contact loop with tenants by responding to the issues they raise, progress any actions required as a result and providing evidence of the outcome

We will tackle the drivers of dissatisfaction in order to make positive changes and improvements to the things that matter most to residents by using continuous learning and acting upon the feedback we are given from tenants

We will utilise technology and data analytics in order to better understand drivers of resident satisfaction and dissatisfaction

We will proactively prepare to report against new national tenant satisfaction measures in order to make our performance as a landlord more visible to our tenants by implementing a robust approach to recording, monitoring and reporting against the new tenant satisfaction measures that will be published by the Regulator of Social Housing by April 2023





## Strengthen, integrate, and diversify community and resident engagement

The *Charter for Social Housing Residents* sets an expectation for residents to have their voice heard by their landlord. Within the social housing white paper, the Government sets out that it will:

- expect the Regulator of Social Housing to require landlords to seek out best practice and consider how they can continually improve the way they engage with social housing tenants
- deliver a new opportunities and empowerment programme for social housing residents, to support more effective engagement between landlords and residents, and to give residents tools to influence and hold landlords to account
- review professional training and development to ensure residents receive a high standard of customer service.

The white paper also expects that the Regulator of Social Housing will require landlords to show how they have sought out and considered ways to improve tenant engagement.

Traditional forms of engagement, such as consultation and surveys, are not always effective and can even have an adverse impact upon wellbeing if people feel pressurised to take part.

During the development of this strategy, residents stressed the importance of diversifying and expanding the opportunities and methods used for engagement. Recent years have seen significant growth of digital communication technology in homes, such as video calling and meetings, and the decline in face-to-face interaction due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Engagement can take many forms, but the crucial factor for the future is that it is tailored appropriately.

### What will we do?

We will embed an approach for the co-design and improvement of services in order to meaningfully involve and empower residents and communities. Approaches will include formally and informally co-designing solutions and provisions, influencing and making decisions, raising issues, inputting in the tendering of new contract arrangements and addressing challenges relating to housing in Thurrock

We will implement community reference and investment boards, as set out in the *Case for Further Change*, which will explore options for pooled locality funds at neighbourhood level in order to strengthen community empowerment, and we will work with communities and the voluntary sector to deliver at a more local level, only centralising that which cannot be provided effectively in neighbourhoods and localities

We will embed professional standards in housing services in order to ensure high service standards and consistency by providing training opportunities for staff across the service that meet or exceed requirements for training standards as set out by the Regulator of Social Housing in line with emerging legislation and regulation

We will develop opportunities to educate about housing in order to develop skills for independent living by building stronger links and relationships with the schools and colleges within Thurrock and creating a platform to engage with children and young people





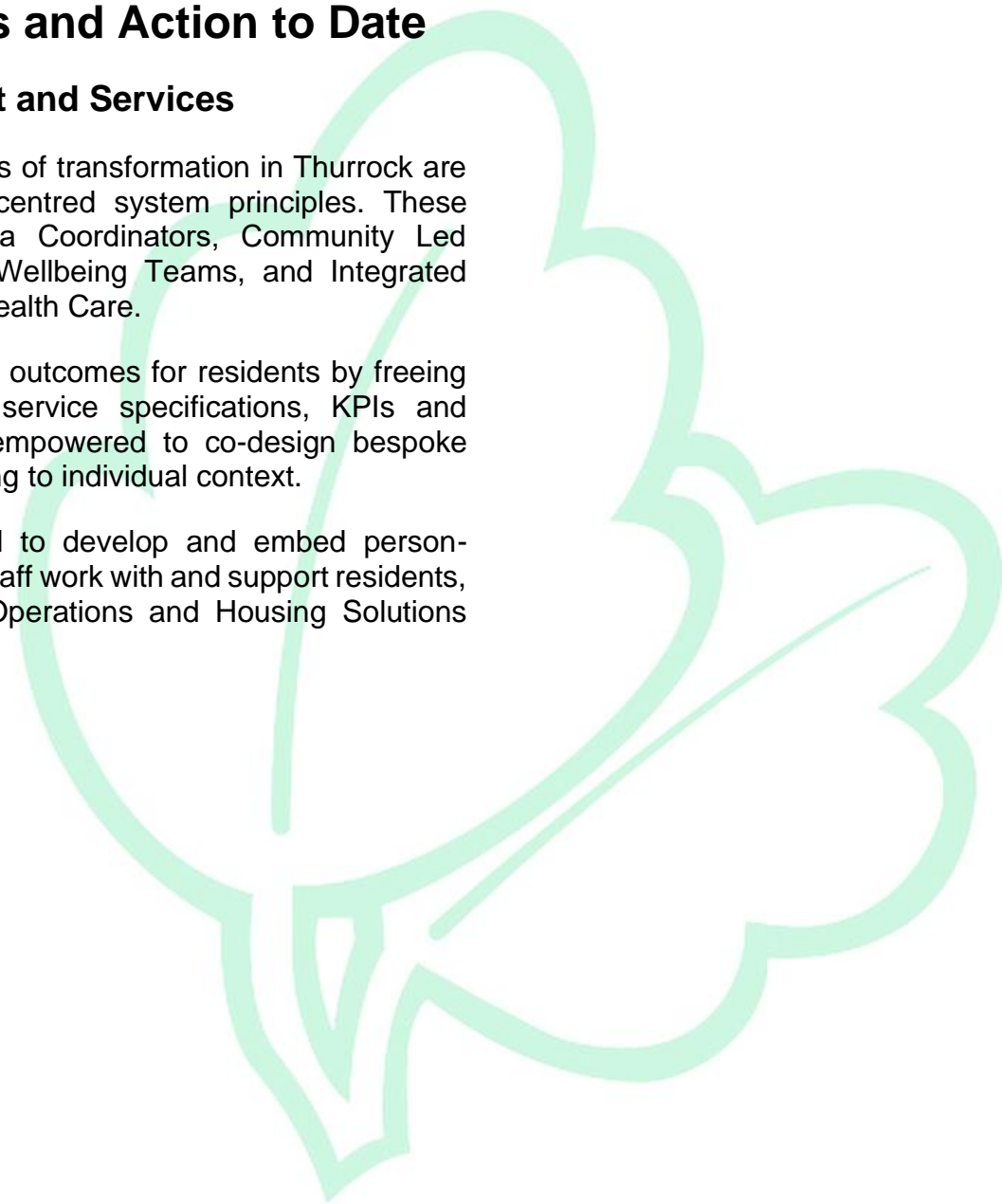
## Recent Achievements and Action to Date

### Delivering Housing Support and Services

Many of the most successful areas of transformation in Thurrock are already operating using person-centred system principles. These include the council's Local Area Coordinators, Community Led Solutions, Community Builders, Wellbeing Teams, and Integrated Primary and Community Mental Health Care.

These teams are delivering better outcomes for residents by freeing frontline staff from pre-defined service specifications, KPIs and bureaucracy. Instead, they are empowered to co-design bespoke solutions with residents, responding to individual context.

The housing service has started to develop and embed person-centred approaches into the way staff work with and support residents, including pilots in the Housing Operations and Housing Solutions service area.



## Meeting Housing Need

### Identifying and providing the right homes for Thurrock based on household need

The development of a new SHMA is currently underway to update the understanding of local housing need, and is anticipated to identify the housing need for Thurrock until 2040 and will guide the development of the new Thurrock Local Plan.

The council does have a pipeline of new build schemes, informed by regular reviews of the council's Housing Register to provide an indicator of social and affordable housing demand, including any additional support needs or property adaptations that may be required.

This information has also been used to guide developments undertaken by other registered providers of social housing in Thurrock.

An affordability joint strategic needs assessment has progressed well in partnership with the council's Public Health team. The detailed findings and understanding provided by that assessment will be taken forward as actions of this strategy. They will feature alongside the development of a 'Thurrock Affordability' standard that considers local costs of living, local income, and housing market prices.

Over the past two years, 119 new council-owned homes have been built in the borough. In the 2020-21 financial year 29 new homes were provided at the Alma Court development in South Grays and a further 53 new homes constructed at Heathlyn Close and Claudian Way in Chadwell St Mary.

Further to this, in 2021-22 the council let 35 properties built to HAPPI standards at Beaconsfield Place in Tilbury and two further wheelchair accessible homes in an innovative scheme at Defoe Parade in Chadwell St Mary.

Planning approval has been secured for the provision of four new council homes at Loewen Road in Chadwell St Mary and for a multi-tenure project at Culver Centre and Field in South Ockendon, to be delivered through Thurrock Regeneration Limited.

There is also an existing pipeline of proposed projects, such as the redevelopment of part of the Civic Offices site for further council-owned homes. The current number of potential dwellings on new build projects under consideration is 474, featuring a mix of council-owned properties and other delivery approaches.

The council has also acquired over 120 existing properties from the local housing market for use within its housing stock, utilised as part of a wider plan to transform the council's temporary accommodation offer.

### Addressing the housing affordability crisis in Thurrock

Every new build property and home acquired from the housing market have been offered at weekly rental levels within LHA rates applicable in Thurrock, making these properties the most affordable homes for rent in the borough, and is also the case across the approximately 9,900 homes in the council's housing stock, all of which are offered at social and affordable rent levels.

The council has committed that it will continue to deliver new homes through both estate regeneration and smaller scale development within affordable rent levels, continuing to ensure affordable housing is available to those most in need in Thurrock.





## Preventing homelessness

Although the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 generally directed local housing authorities to place much greater focus on homelessness prevention through general service provision, Thurrock Council's housing service has taken significant action to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness.

A number of roles have been created and exist in the service to target specific areas of challenge or priority regarding homelessness, with some funded in part or full from DLUHC grants.

The ongoing temporary accommodation transformation plan has delivered successful outcomes to date, reducing the number of households in emergency and temporary accommodation significantly below pre-pandemic levels.

There are a number of cross-service initiatives that aim to support households at risk of or experiencing homelessness. A pre-eviction panel has been established focussing on council tenants, featuring wide representation from across the council with a sole focus on the prevention of tenancy breakdown.

Briefings and training sessions have been delivered by housing solutions staff to colleagues in adults social care and children's services, with aims to deliver these sessions to other frontline and resident facing staff across the organisation.

Multi-disciplinary groups have been established to review case studies from the different perspectives of partners in the wider system, developing a shared understanding of existing challenges and aiming to identify areas of good practice and where improvement can be made to reach positive outcomes for households in the future.

## Delivering sustainable estate regeneration

The most significant regeneration project in Thurrock currently underway is the investment in over 140 acres at Purfleet-on-Thames, delivering up to 2,850 new homes. Purfleet Centre Regeneration Limited is a joint venture between Urban Catalyst and Swan Housing, in partnership with Thurrock Council. The first phase of 61 homes is currently anticipated to be handed over in Spring 2023.

Specific projects have commenced to take forward regeneration opportunities for council-owned homes at Blackshots, Teviot Avenue and Civic Offices 1. Initial resident engagement activity has already been completed with households at Blackshots and Teviot Avenue, with very high proportions in favour of redevelopment.

## Reviewing the model of Sheltered Housing provision

During the past two years, the Sheltered Housing team have continued to deliver a valuable service to all tenants which has been enhanced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several actions have been taken within the service to address underperformance in void turnaround, specifically regarding properties above the ground floor. A dedicated Sheltered Housing Officer has been assigned to this area to improve performance.

The Sheltered Housing Team is working with other services across the council to identify suitable applicants, making person-centred decisions relating to the age eligibility where a move to sheltered housing would have a beneficial impact on the health and wellbeing of a household.



## Protecting Resident Safety

### Improving warmth, safety, and standards in private sector homes

As a direct result of interventions by the Private Sector Housing team, 2642 category 1 and 2 hazards were removed from properties in Thurrock between 2018-19 and 2020-21.

An additional HMO licensing scheme was introduced in 2019 and has licensed over 230 HMOs to date. Work to explore a selective licensing scheme for the private rental sector has commenced.

The council was awarded £61k in grants from DLUHC to tackle criminal landlords and drive-up standards. Through proactive, targeted action, civil penalty fines have been used as a method of enforcement action, generating up to £220k for housing related offences.

The council launched Well Homes in 2014 to improve the housing conditions and the health and well-being of residents living in private properties. The Well Homes scheme offers help to make homes safer by reducing the risk of ill health or accidents and puts residents in touch with health and lifestyle services that can improve quality of life.

The council secured a Warm Homes Fund grant of £453k for first time central heating systems and was allocated £1.8m scheme that makes energy-saving improvements to the homes of people who struggle to pay heating bills and keep their homes warm in the winter.

Between 2017-18 and 2020-21, the council awarded over £1.9m of Disabled Facilities Grants to 310 applicants to fund essential adaptations to give disabled people better freedom of movement into and around their homes, and to facilities within the home.

## Investing in and maintaining quality council-owned homes that are fit for the future

Since 2017 capital works totalling over £46m have been undertaken across the council's housing stock to address priorities areas. Between 2019/20 to 2020/21, 732 properties benefitted from external refurbishment and double-glazed window replacement, including street properties and 90 blocks of flats.

A new stock condition survey targeting 30% of the stock is being undertaken in the winter months of 2021/22 to gain an accurate picture of any properties suffering from seasonal damp or mould problems.

The council has also introduced a proactive approach to identifying properties experiencing damp and mould, with new questions in the general perception, repairs, gas repairs, gas servicing and new tenancy surveys undertaken on behalf of the council.

This new approach was introduced as a direct result of the council's engagement with the Housing Ombudsman study and report produced on the subject of damp and mould.

The council's resident liaison officers (RLOs) have been trained by the national fuel poverty charity NEA. They are able to advise residents on how best to manage the home environment and how to manage their resources and their heating systems. RLOs can help residents to claim grants and liaise with financial inclusion officers to ensure they are accessing all the financial support they are entitled to.

Between April 2019 and March 2021 £408,961 was invested in servicing of mechanical ventilation and heat recovery units, repairing and replacing rainwater goods and completing the repair works under the specific mould remediation and prevention programme. A total of 4820 properties have benefitted from these works.



In addition, the council invested £5,219,307 in improving overall building efficiency. These works included the replacement of central heating boilers in 1807 homes, the replacement of windows and/or doors in 331 homes and the roof and insulation for 87 homes.

In February 2022 it was announced that the council would receive £3.2m under the first wave of the social housing decarbonisation fund to deliver a new ground-source heat pump project to the three high-rise tower blocks in Chadwell St Mary, replacing older and less efficient storage radiators and hot water systems.

### **Strengthening community safety and preventing anti-social behaviour**

A noise nuisance reporting app aimed at reducing duplication and allowing residents to report issues with greater ease has been introduced, offering an effective alternative to diaries and logs.

Across the council, work is underway to develop and implement a new Community Safety Operating Model to improve the council's delivery of its community safety partnership strategy.

In conjunction with this, a new Community Safety Service is being developed, bringing together the CCTV and Concierge teams from the housing service under a single structure with other related teams.

Proposals have also been made to develop a new integrated centre for crime and enforcement within a central location that will house an advanced CCTV, command and control capability, supported by police and new community safety officers.

### **Tackling domestic and sexual abuse and violence**

The council has conducted a review its of policies and processes to achieve DAHA accreditation – the benchmark for how housing

providers should respond to domestic abuse – and developed a new Domestic Abuse policy.

To reflect the council's commitment to tackling domestic abuse, the policy introduces several measures to ensure that residents receive a dedicated approach, considering the circumstance of each individual and always upholding best practice.

### **Supporting vulnerable adults and children into housing**

In March 2016, children's services and the housing service developed a strategic partnership to support Thurrock's young people to access suitable accommodation at affordable rates.

In December 2018, Head Start Housing was launched, aiming to provide suitable accommodation for Thurrock's care leavers and a safe space to live and learn before moving on to a private rental or social housing tenancy. It has a portfolio of properties ranging from one to five-bedrooms, with varying levels of floating support to 24/7 provision.

Care leavers are supported to access housing benefit and, when they are ready, education, employment or training using the home as a foundation.

The housing service made a commitment to provide spaces for 30 individuals to Head Start Housing by end of 2023, and 24 spaces had been identified by the end of 2021.

Considerable progress has been made in the past three years, and the Head Start Housing Strategy has been refreshed to shape and drive positive change over the next 5 years.

Thurrock Council has actively supported and participated in the Government's Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme. A cross-organisational group was



established to ensure a coordinated approach and private landlords were engaged to supply appropriate properties for this project.

Landlords and new tenants were supported to ensure the smooth running of tenancies alongside ongoing resettlement support, such as arranging English lessons if required, setting up bank accounts, finding jobs and getting children into education.

The council has successfully worked to increase the amount of council-owned temporary accommodation in the borough and has taken significant steps to date which includes the purchase of Brook House, now operating as a ten-unit temporary accommodation hostel.

Thurrock Council continues to operate a Housing First programme, providing intensive support to people who are long term or recurrently homeless with high support needs. The project has so far successfully supported seven individuals who were homeless or threatened with homelessness and faced persistent barriers to accessing housing, some of which were caused by health conditions and addictions.

### **Improving estate standards**

The council commissioned a review of caretaking and estate services, with the report and recommendations being received in November 2021.

An overall service improvement plan has been developed incorporating the recommendations and actions from the review that seeks to improve estate standards and service delivery across the council's homes and neighbourhoods.

A new vision for estate services has also been set. The council aims to provide proactive and flexible estate services, working together with communities to provide safe and clean neighbourhoods that meet residents' needs, delivering value for money and supporting health and wellbeing.

The proposals for new housing development schemes led by the council integrate the principles of "Secured by Design" to help reduce crime and anti-social behaviour and improve resident feelings of safety.



## Strengthening community engagement and empowerment

### Increasing resident satisfaction and access to information

In June 2020 the housing service upgraded its Housing Online portal for tenants and housing register applicants. The system offers great potential for improving resident interaction with the council's housing services and the ability reports and concerns to be submitted directly, for example relating to issues of anti-social behaviour.

An improved Housing Options offer is also possible through the Housing Online portal which will reduce duplication for staff, offer a more joined-up experience for residents, and increase the quality of data and reporting which are available.

Between July 2020 and October 2020, a full postal tenant satisfaction survey was undertaken by the council's service provider, KWEST Research Ltd, which was sent to every tenant. The project used a multi-mode approach, comprising a postal census survey targeting all the Council's tenant households, accompanied by email invitations and an online version to broaden survey reach and accessibility.

The survey results provide confirmation that the homes and services provided by the Council are meeting the needs of most residents. This is demonstrated by high proportions of residents expressing satisfaction with many key service areas including rent value for money, quality of home, home is safe and secure, neighbourhoods as a place to live and the overall Housing service.

The housing service has successfully made use of technology to send specific and tailored text messages to its tenants for a range of reasons, such as to provide information and support for rent accounts, share information about resident engagement days and to alert tenants to issues that may be affecting their blocks, such as lift repairs and maintenance.

### Strengthening, integrating, and diversifying community and resident engagement

The housing services have strengthened its approach to resident engagement activity recently, working to share more information with tenants about subjects that matter to them.

In 2021, the council published a *Collaborative Communities Framework* for Thurrock to share the strengths and assets-based approach for how the council and its services intends to work with communities.

Co-produced through the *Stronger Together* partnership over three years, it sets out how we will work and enable our communities to co-design and influence decisions, address their own challenges and realise their own ambitions.

The publication of the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 and the *Case for Further Change* provide an opportunity and starting point to build on the foundation of the Collaborative Communities Framework, strengthening the relationship and engagement between housing services, residents and the wider community, voluntary and faith sector in Thurrock.





## Monitoring and Review

The Housing Strategy must be kept under constant review. This is partly due to the increased likelihood that legislation will be introduced during the lifetime of the document, which may have a material effect on the aims, objectives and actions outlined in the Housing Strategy. In addition, as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on housing becomes more apparent in the months and years after the document's publication, new priorities or actions may emerge.

The monitoring and review of the Housing Strategy will be undertaken by a new Housing Strategy Deliver Board that will be established. This Board will be responsible for monitoring the progress of the action plan published alongside the strategy. The action plan will be kept as a live document and regularly updated to ensure progress and that key actions are delivered within defined timeframes. The Housing Strategy Delivery Board will absorb the Homelessness Partnership Board, forming a single body with responsibilities for the progress of key strategic documents relating to housing.

As outlined above, it is anticipated that new actions will be added to the action plan during the lifetime of the strategy. Additions may be a reaction to changes in external factors (such as legislation) or proactively if an opportunity arises. These additions will be managed appropriately and ensure that the key themes continue to be reflected throughout the action plan.

An annual update will be provided to Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to ensure appropriate oversight of the action plan.

## Acknowledgements

This strategy has been developed in partnership with a range of individuals, groups and organisations.

We are very grateful for each and every contribution made by residents, colleagues and partners that fed into the development of this strategy.

We would like to acknowledge the support of the chairs of the borough's community forums, the members of the WELCOM Forum, Purfleet-on Thames Community Forum and Orchards Community Forum, and members of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Lower Thames Crossing Taskforce for their active engagement in this work.

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A large number of people contributed to this piece of work; however, we would especially like to thank and acknowledge the important contributions and support offered by the following people:

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