

21 June 2022		ITEM: 5
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Housing Strategies 2022-2027		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: None	
Report of: Ryan Farmer – Housing Strategy and Quality Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Ewelina Sorbjan – Assistant Director of Housing		
Accountable Director: Ian Wake – Corporate Director, Adults, Housing and Health		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

As a local authority, it is important that Thurrock Council has a document that states its ambitions and goals regarding housing in the borough. The current Housing Strategy was adopted in Thurrock in 2015.

A new Housing Strategy has been developed which considers current legislation, regulation and market trends, the impact of recent welfare reforms, and new opportunities for meeting the housing needs of Thurrock’s residents whilst considering the turbulence and uncertainty brought about during and following COVID-19 pandemic.

This report summarises the strategic aims and objectives of the Housing Strategy 2022-2027. It also presents and summaries the strategic aims and objectives of two supporting strategies – the Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027 and the Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1. Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the contents of this report and comment on the vision, aims, objectives and actions proposed in the draft Housing Strategy 2022-2027.**
- 1.2. Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are also asked to comment on the aims, objectives and actions proposed in the draft Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027 and draft Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1. 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.

- 2.2. 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.
- 2.3. Developed alongside the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 were two other critical documents for the Housing service, supporting and providing supplementary information. These are:
- the Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027, which outlines the council's approach to managing, maintaining and investing in Housing assets to ensure that properties provide attractive, good quality council-owned homes for current and future residents
 - the Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 which will sets the aims and ambitions of the Housing service in improving its interaction and communication with those who live in and around Thurrock Council's homes and neighbourhoods

3. Housing Vision

- 3.1. 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.

- 3.2. 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.

- 3.3. 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.

- 3.4. With the above detail in mind, shared below is the vision for the Housing Strategy 2022-2027:

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'.

- 3.5. This vision, as well as the following Housing principles, also underpin the Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027 and Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027.

4. Housing Principles

- 4.1. The Housing Strategy 2022-2027 has been developed in part to set the basis for a new way of working for housing support and services in Thurrock. This strategy, the Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027, the Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027, and the new way of working all follow the below eight principles:

4.1.1. What is important to you?

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.

4.1.2. Right time, right place and high quality

We work to provide people with services that are high quality, easy to access, and offer appropriate support.

4.1.3. **Supports health and wellbeing**

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

4.1.4. **Minimises bureaucracy**

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.

4.1.5. **Local, strength based solutions**

Our solutions look to use the assets within neighbourhoods and do not consist only of the services we provide.

4.1.6. **Doesn't break the law and meets statutory duties**

We empower resident facing staff to make decisions in the context of each resident they serve rather than being constrained by thresholds and *one size fits all* service specifications.

4.1.7. **Flexible and adaptable**

We are flexible enough to respond and adapt delivery to changes in individual, neighbourhood and place circumstances

4.1.8. **Partnership working and collaborations**

Responsibility for housing is shared between individuals, neighbourhoods, our workforce and partners. We do '*with*', not '*to*'. We constantly co-design and co-produce.

5. **Housing Strategy Aims and Objectives**

- 5.1. The four aims and their respective objectives set out in the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 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 2022-2026 as well as the Better Care Together Thurrock: The Case for Further Change strategy.

The aims of the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 are:

- Deliver Housing Support and Service
- Meet Housing Need
- Protect Resident Safety
- Strengthen Community Engagement and Empowerment

- 5.2. Information regarding each of these aims and their respective objectives are presented in this report. Further details regarding specific actions that have been proposed can be found within the draft Housing Strategy 2022-2027 document.

5.3. **Deliver Housing Support and Services**

5.3.1. This aim 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 2022-2027 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.

5.3.2. The objectives within this section of the strategy are:

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

5.4. **Meet Housing Need**

5.4.1. 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 aim 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 aim 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.

5.4.2. The objectives within this section of the strategy are:

- 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

5.5. **Protect Resident Safety**

5.5.1. This aim 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 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.

5.5.2. The objectives within this section of the strategy are:

- 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

5.6. **Strengthen Community Engagement and Empowerment**

5.6.1. 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 aim 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.

5.6.2. The objectives within this section of the strategy are:

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

6. Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027

6.1. Background

- 6.1.1. Thurrock's Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027 provides a framework detailing how the council will manage, maintain and invest in its assets, ensuring that they offer quality and affordable homes for current and future residents. The strategy demonstrates how the council's housing portfolio will meet its priorities. It provides the strategic direction for those involved in the day-to-day management of the stock and future housing asset investment decisions.

This strategy aligns with the council's corporate values, the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 and the national policy context. It works alongside the HRA Business Plan in identifying the levels and timing of investment required to ensure the asset is maintained appropriately.

- 6.1.2. This strategy provides a set of guiding principles that allow the council to maintain and enhance its housing stock in both the short-term and the future. It ensures the council works transparently, keeping residents engaged throughout the processes and fosters a sense of joint ownership.

This strategy also recognises that for some assets, further investment may not represent the best value or meet the community's future needs. Buildings in this category would go through an asset review process that fully considers resident views. This full appraisal of the different options will inform the most appropriate decision for the future of the asset.

- 6.1.3. The council's strategic ambition is to ensure the delivery of good homes in well-connected neighbourhoods. The council seeks to invest in its assets and the local environment, creating places that support and promote the health, happiness and wellbeing of residents in the borough.

New and emerging legislation around building safety, decent homes standards and the net zero carbon agenda, in conjunction with an ageing stock, place significant financial pressures on the Housing Revenue Account. It is acknowledged that the council will need to explore external funding and continue to lobby central government for additional financial support to enable it to deliver this strategy.

6.2. Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027 Aims and Objectives

- 6.2.1. The strategy demonstrates how the council can make the housing portfolio meet its priorities and those of supporting strategies. It responds to both national and corporate priorities as well as the feedback from residents. There are three core aims that will ensure the properties continue to offer good quality homes for current and future residents at an affordable cost.

6.2.2. The aims of the Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027 are:

- Deliver High Quality Homes
- Maximise the Value of Assets
- Plan for a Sustainable Future

Further details regarding specific actions that have been proposed can be found within the draft Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027 document.

7. Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027

7.1. Background

7.1.1. The Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-27 sets out the aims and ambitions of the Housing service in improving its interaction and communication with those who live in and around Thurrock Council's homes and neighbourhoods.

The Housing service interacts with over 10,000 households across the borough across a broad range of services and recognises that each these households is unique. As a result of this diversity, those who access Housing services must have the opportunity for their voice and views to be listened to, not just heard.

7.1.2. The significance of meaningful engagement with residents may never have been higher than it is currently. The impact of and response to the tragedy at Grenfell Tower shows how important it is for residents and communities to be able to access information, express their views and opinions on changes, and play an active part in the way that duties are fulfilled and services are delivered by the Housing department.

This strategy aims to set the framework for future action, which is meaningful and valuable to residents and communities, reinforcing the understanding that residents and communities must be at the centre of all that the Housing service does.

7.1.3. The document seeks to establish an approach that will see resilient and respectful partnerships formed and maintained between the Housing department and those who access its services. The strategy sets aims to strengthen resident participation in the scrutiny and governance of the Housing service, which will offer greater transparency into how the Housing service operates.

Through this strategy, the Housing department lays the foundations to improve the experience residents and communities have when interacting with its services and further improve those services through continuous learning. This approach will ensure that the Housing department remains responsive, adaptable and flexible to residents' and communities broad and changing needs.

7.1.4. In developing this strategy, the Housing service has worked alongside its Excellence Panel, representing the residents who live in and around the Council's homes neighbourhoods.

7.2. Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 Aims and Objectives

7.2.1. Five key aims have been identified through the process of designing and developing the Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027. Together with their corresponding objectives, an action plan will be informed that addresses the engagement requirements set out in the regulatory framework for social housing providers and meets the engagement standards as recommended by Tpas.

7.2.2. The aims of the Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 are:

- Strengthen Community Engagement and Empowerment
- Protect Resident Safety and Security
- Improve Communication and Interaction
- Enable Resident Scrutiny and Participation
- Deliver Opportunities for Engagement

Further details regarding specific actions that have been proposed can be found within the draft Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 document.

8. Alignment with other strategic documents

8.1.1. The Housing Strategy 2022-2027, Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027 and Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 were not developed in isolation.

Due to the simultaneous development of the Thurrock Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026, the Local Plan and the Better Care Together Thurrock: The Case for Further Change strategy, it was possible to ensure that the development of the Housing strategies were undertaken with due regard and read across to these other key strategic documents.

8.1.2. Throughout the Housing Strategy reference is made to the aims and ambitions of these other documents. A significant degree of alignment has been achieved, providing a foundation for all documents to have a broader reach, greater influence, stronger acceptance and more opportunities to deliver successful outcomes than any single strategy could achieve in isolation.

9. Reasons for Recommendation

9.1. As outlined, the current Housing Strategy which has been adopted by the council, requires a refresh as it is was due for renewal in 2020.

- 9.2. Furthermore, the council requires documents such as the Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027 to ensure that housing assets receive appropriate levels of investment to maximise the amount of good quality homes available to residents, and such as the Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 to ensure that the residents are empowered to have their voices heard so that services are designed and provided that are fit for purpose and meet identified needs.

10. Engagement (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 10.1. Collaboration has been a key principle in the design and development of Housing strategies presented in this report. There was an aspiration for wide-ranging consultation to take place with a variety of key partners and stakeholders and this was achieved within the guidance and legislation in effect during the engagement period between August 2021 and January 2022.

- 10.2. Those that collaborated in the development of these documents include:

- Residents of Thurrock
- Community forums and resident groups
- Elected members
- Council officers from a range of services, including Housing, Adults Social Care, Children's Services, Public Health, Planning, Regeneration and Housing Development
- NHS representatives
- Housing associations
- Partner organisations
- Organisations from the voluntary sector
- Other social housing providers

- 10.3. Examples of engagement activity used in the development of these strategies included face-to-face and online sessions with residents, council staff, partners and key stakeholders, online surveys, statistical analysis, Teams virtual briefings and workshops, and presentations to key Council services, committees and boards.

- 10.4. Specific activity with members of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee took place in October 2021 to ensure that all appropriate stakeholders and issues as identified by members could be included throughout the engagement period.

- 11. Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

12. Implications

12.1. Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
Strategic Lead – Corporate Finance

Through robust financial management and assessment of plans to improve existing stock, develop new housing and deliver housing services across the borough, the council will ensure that the Housing Strategy 2022-2027, Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027 and Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 have the appropriate resources to deliver against the objectives and actions identified through the development stages.

12.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Simon Scrowther**
Principal Lawyer, Litigation

The Deregulation Act 2015 abolished the statutory requirement for English authorities to produce a housing strategy as previously required by section 87 of the Local Government Act 2003.

Meeting the Council's statutory housing obligations is reflected in the objectives of the housing strategy: statutory homelessness duty; provision of housing advice and landlord responsibilities.

The refreshed Housing Strategy 2022-2027, Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027 and Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 will ensure that the council is enabled and empowered to deliver on its statutory duties as both a local authority and a social housing provider, especially in light of pending changes to legislation and regulation proposed through the social housing white paper.

12.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Monitoring officer

Engagement activity took place with other public bodies, voluntary organisations, service users and other identified stakeholders during the development of this new strategy is implemented. A broad range of stakeholders throughout the community were identified and involved in the activity to develop a holistic strategy. A Community Equality Impact Assessment will be completed prior to implementation of the strategy to identify and address any issues affecting those within the protected characteristics.

12.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder or Looked After Children

Not applicable

13. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 - Draft Housing Strategy 2022-2027
- Appendix 2 - Draft Housing Strategy 2022-2027 Executive Summary
- Appendix 3 - Draft Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027
- Appendix 4 - Draft Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027

Report Author:

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