

<b>21 November 2023</b>		<b>ITEM: 7</b>
<b>Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Housing Strategy – Year One Update</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> None	
<b>Report of:</b> Ryan Farmer – Housing Strategy and Quality Manager		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Ewelina Sorbjan – Assistant Director, Housing Management and Development		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Ian Wake – Corporate Director, Adults, Housing and Health		
<b>This report is</b> Public		

### **Executive Summary**

This report provides an update to Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the Housing Strategy 2022-2027, which sits within the strategic framework for the Housing service alongside:

- Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027
- Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027
- Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy 2020-2025

Once completed, the Housing Development strategy will also be included.

The monitoring and delivery of these documents is undertaken by the Housing Strategies Delivery Board (HSDB).

HSDB provides oversight and monitoring on the implementation and embedding of the above within the Housing service. It acts as a 'pulse check' for ongoing developments, ensuring documents are having the impact on service provision as planned.

To ensure commitment to the Housing Strategy as the overarching direction for the service, HSDB is structured around the four key aims outlined in the Housing Strategy.

Since the launch of these strategies, service delivery has been within difficult and changing circumstances:

- the government intervention of Thurrock Council, and resulting financial restrictions
- the cost-of-living crisis, implementing a limit on rent increases and the rising cost of service provision
- emerging change in priorities, such as the tragic death of Awaab Ishak pulling a heightened spotlight on damp and mould

Although service improvement has still been achieved within this context, it is important to consider the progress that could have been made if the national and local context had been less turbulent.

This report summarises the current progress against the four aims in year one, ambitions for year two and anticipated challenges.

## **1. Recommendation(s)**

- 1.1. Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note and comment on the content of this report.

## **2. Introduction and Background**

### **2.1. Overview of strategies**

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 was undertaken with due regard and read across to these other key strategic documents.

The upcoming review of the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy will follow the same line of development.

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.

#### **2.1.1. Housing Strategy 2022-2027**

The Housing strategy recognises 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.

With the above in mind, the strategy is built around the below core 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.'*

This vision, as well as the below strategy aims, also underpin the Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027 and Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027.

### **2.1.2. Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027**

Thurrock's Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027 supplies 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.

The Asset Management Strategy is centred on three core aims:

- 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 Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027 document.

### **2.1.3. Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027**

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 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.

The Resident Engagement Strategy is centred on five core aims:

- 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 Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 document.

#### **2.1.4. Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025**

The Council's current Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy was adopted in 2020 and its development considered levels of homelessness in the borough, the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the impact of recent welfare reforms, and newly identified opportunities for preventing homelessness.

The document represents an ambitious approach rooted by the fundamental principle that homelessness is not simply a housing issue but is instead a complex social challenge requiring true collaboration to tackle effectively.

The Homeless Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy is centred on four core aims:

- Partnership and Collaboration
- Health and Wellbeing
- Provision and Accessibility
- Customer Excellence

Further details regarding specific actions that have been proposed can be found within the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 document.

### **2.2. Overview of aims**

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.

#### **2.2.1. Deliver Housing Support and Services**

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, a strengths-based 'whole person' approach instead, 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.

### **2.2.2. 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 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.

### **2.2.3. Protect Resident Safety**

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.

### **2.2.4. 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.

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.

## **3. Year One Progress**

- 3.1. With the Housing Strategy having now completed its first year, a pulse check has been undertaken to review the progress made towards the four key aims. This is in relation to both the Housing Strategy itself, and the other three strategies encompassed by HSDB.

The findings of this check can be found below.

- 3.2. It is, however, important to note the complex environment of the first year and the impacts this has had on progress. A significant impacting factor has been the government intervention, not only due to its financial implications but also strategic direction. The Council is currently undergoing a substantial cultural change and aiming to embed a new vision for the organisation. This will, in turn, influence the priorities and service delivery of the Housing service, which

may not align neatly with the current strategies. Services have been balancing between strategic commitments and new directions, as appropriate.

- 3.3. A further impacting factor has been the cost-of-living crisis. As a result of this crisis, a limit was placed on how much social rents could be increased, with the maximum being 7%. This is much lower than the ongoing Consumer Price Index, with highs being reached of 10%. This has naturally created a deficit within the Housing Revenue Account, leading service provision to adapt to close the gap. When coupling this with the financial implications of the government intervention and the long-term impact of the rent reduction scheme which ended in 2020, it has been a particularly challenging financial landscape for the Housing service and wider sector.
- 3.4. A final impacting factor has been wider strategic changes, in addition to those stemming from the government intervention. For example, damp and mould has taken a higher precedent than initially anticipated. Although made a priority within the Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027, the tragic death of Awaab Ishak has led to damp and mould being brought to the forefront at a national and local level. To respond to changes such as this, services have been required to balance emerging priorities with those which had already been established.

#### **4. Deliver Housing Support and Services**

##### **4.1.1. Embed the housing core principles and person-centred approach within service provision**

A notable workstream is the transformation pilot within the Stanford and Corringham locality. Using the Corringham Integrated Medical and Wellbeing Centre as a 'hub,' several services have connected to provide a person-centred approach within the community. From the success of this pilot and through working with the Centre for Public Impact, further pilots have been established:

- 'single point of contact' approach between Housing Operations, Homelessness, Mental Health services and Substance Misuse services
- collaborative work between colleagues in Children's Services and the Financial Inclusion team relating to Fuel Poverty
- establishing and working with the complex care team

Wider work is also ongoing with the pre-eviction panel, ensuring colleagues from across the organisation come together to support tenants at risk of eviction.

However, changes are also beyond Thurrock with better connections being made with colleagues at Basildon Hospital. This includes mental health services, social care, and discharge teams to promote an integrated approach to individual care.

Work has also been undertaken to ensure policies and processes are supportive of the multi-disciplinary approach. For example, there has been a particular focus on care leavers as a vulnerable group. Through reviewing current policy and process:

- greater support is provided to care leavers, [such as a housing specific guide](#)
- expectations of care leavers are better managed
- working relationships between teams are better connected and utilised

Measures have been implemented to ensure frontline staff are equipped with the skills and resources required to work in a multi-disciplinary way. For example, there is ongoing work with Children's Social Care to identify knowledge gaps and assist with the training of front-line services.

In addition, there have been opportunities established to share practice and knowledge across the Adults, Housing and Health directorate, through frontline improvement meetings and a programme of 'How, What and Why?' sessions which aim to expand understanding of key functions, responsibilities and duties in the organisation.

The current work around the decant of Blackshots demonstrates how the core principles and person-centred approach is embedded within the Housing service.

#### **4.1.2. Develop a neighbourhood model for housing services to better focus on delivering what matters to residents in different localities**

Through the Better Care Together Thurrock strategy, the Council and its health partners have identified four localities from which they wish to run their join services:

- Grays
- Aveley, South Ockendon and Purfleet (ASOP)
- Stanford and Corringham
- Tilbury and Chadwell

This is with the aim of delivering better outcomes for both individual residents and the wider community, delivering on key strategic goals as identified for each locality.

Earlier this year, Corringham was chosen to start the project as the Corringham Integrated Medical and Wellbeing Centre could be utilised as the primary location. Since then, a series of meetings and workshops have been held to bring the various teams together, to begin the process of working better together.

The initial focus was on frontline workers such as Local Area Coordinators, Social Workers, Tenancy Management Officers, and Community Nurses.

Overtime, additional teams, and services have been introduced such as Sheltered Housing and Caretaking. Most recently, this has been expanded to include services who do not work directly within the locality, but still provide services to the locality such as Housing Solutions and Private Housing.

A steering group is now being coordinated to begin work within the other three localities. For example, Accommodation Officers are working within Tilbury, and a multi-disciplinary team is working within Grays for Housing Solutions.

On a wider scale, in March 2023 the Better Care Together Thurrock: Housing, Health and Care Conference was held. This brought operational staff together from across the system to start to develop strong working relationships and professional understanding. The success of this event has led to interest in hosting smaller, locality-specific conferences to launch integrated teams further and utilising learning from the Corringham pilot.

Housing staff are also receiving training from colleagues in Occupational Therapy to enable them to undertake low-level OT assessments and produce recommendations for minor aids.

## **5. Meet Housing Need**

### **5.1.1. Use housing knowledge and data to influence and support the development of the Local Plan to ensure future planning policy is representative**

The research undertaken and evidence presented through the development of the Housing Strategy has been made available to colleagues preparing the council's Local Plan. The Housing service remains committed to supporting the development of the Local Plan to ensure it meets the identified needs of Thurrock residents and will provide further information, data, and analysis as and when required.

### **5.1.2. Identify and understand housing need in Thurrock in order to deliver more social and affordable housing for households in the borough**

The mix of affordable new build provision is considered at a programme level. This allows site specific decisions to be made, according to which types and sizes of dwellings best meet the location. This also allows consideration against needs identified annually via the housing waiting list.

As of April 2022, the Housing Development programme has a greater proportion of larger homes than initially identified by housing need data. However, this will be corrected with the next phase of development proposals. The current mix is partially a result of the planned disposal of sites, where smaller units were proposed and expressed requirements for 3 bed and above accommodation.

	Total % of programme	Programme target
<b>1 bed</b>	12%	40%
<b>2 beds</b>	39%	36%
<b>3 beds</b>	38%	17%
<b>4 beds</b>	10%	7%

**5.1.3. Build homes that can respond and adapt to changing housing needs through life in order to ensure individuals can live independently in suitable accommodation for longer**

All new build dwellings are obligated under Part M of the Building Regulations to meet Category 1 Standards in the following categories:

- Category 1 – Visible Dwellings
- Category 2 – Accessible and Adaptable
- Category 3 – Wheelchair

The Beaconsfield Place development completed in 2022 comprises of 35 homes constructed to HAPPI standards, an example of how building schemes are committed to promoting independence.

**5.1.4. Deliver at least 500 new council-owned affordable homes by 2027**

Although this will remain dependent on the Council's financial position, measures are in place to ensure opportunities are maximised where possible. For example, data is collated from service demand on Temporary Accommodation and homeless presentations. This data can then be used to inform future housing provisions.

A number of new build properties will be handed over imminently, including those built directly by the council and others which will not be owned by the council, but will still contribute to meeting local housing demand within the rental sector.

Please see the below table:

Year	Number of Properties	Acquisition
2020 – 2021	75	All leased
2021 – 2022	61	All direct acquisitions, with one property still going through conveyancing
2022 – 2023	36	All direct acquisitions

**5.1.5. Work in partnership across the system in order to improve access to health, care, and support services for those at risk of experiencing homelessness**

The key principles of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 have been embedded into service delivery. This ensures appropriate needs assessments are undertaken and therefore housing options are tailored to the need to the individual/household.

An innovative approach to preventing homelessness has been developed. Through the creation of the pre-eviction panel and evolution of the management move panel, a multi-agency approach to preventing homelessness amongst Council tenants has been fostered. The approach has shifted from ensuring due process is followed to enforce eviction to focusing on preventing eviction, as well as minimising the costs and impact associated with eviction and homelessness.

**5.1.6. We will ensure any household requiring temporary accommodation remain within the borough wherever possible and for as little time as possible**

There was a clear need for Temporary Accommodation placements to be within Thurrock unless preference or safety concerns required a placement to be out of borough.

By using monies from Right to Buy receipts, additional stock was purchased within Thurrock for the use of Temporary Accommodation. Alongside this, 'block booking' was used within the private sector to ensure further consistent housing provision. Through this approach, out of borough placements have dramatically reduced and ensured greater support and stability for local families experiencing homelessness.

This is outlined in the below table, using averages for each April in the financial year:

<b>Year</b>	<b>In-Borough</b>	<b>Out of Borough</b>
2021	86	80
2022	90	27
2023	84	27

**5.1.7. Deliver major regeneration projects at Blackshots, CO1 and Teviot Avenue to provide modern, sustainable homes that are fit for the future**

The redevelopment of CO1 as an affordable housing project has ceased. The project was no longer financially viable due to two key factors: rising project costs driven by an unprecedented period of build cost inflation and the rapid rise in cost for materials, labour, and electricity.

The Council's Asset Disposal Team is currently preparing a report for Cabinet approval to dispose of the site.

However, in March 2023 Cabinet approved a range of recommendations to progress the planned redevelopment of three tower blocks in Blackshots, subject to a final business case demonstrating viability to Cabinet. This is anticipated for October 2023. There are a total of 168 flats in the existing three tower blocks, with early designs suggesting a potential redevelopment capacity of 240 new homes. Plans to decant the blocks and repurchase any leasehold interests has commenced, with anticipated completion by March 2025.

A consultancy team is now procured to:

- develop design and cost planning
- prepare the business case
- undertake resident engagement
- provide an independent tenant and leaseholder service to the affected residents

In line with the engagement led by the consultancy team, there is the provision of:

- written information
- 1:1 visits with residents
- estate consultation events
- online consultation via the Council's portal

This is for both effected residents and the wider community encompassed within the redevelopment proposals.

Plans to redevelop three low-rise blocks at Teviot Avenue (numbers 158-228) continue to progress. The existing 36 flats are constructed of pre-cast reinforced concrete of the 'Cornish' type, designated as defective initially under the 1984 Housing Defects Act but consolidated into the 1985 Housing Act. This is due to their construction material and manufacture.

The flats have several issues, including inherent structural defects which can only be remediated by substantial reconfiguration of the overall structure. Evidence demonstrates remedial works over the next 30 years is more costly than the construction of replacement homes. Current plans indicate there will be an increase in the number of homes provided within the HRA, from 36 to 48.

Cabinet approval is due to be sought to start the process of decanting existing tenants, negotiating the purchase of leaseholder interests and to commence the procurement of a contractor to undertake the works. Planning permission is timetabled for late 2023, with the procurement of a main contractor in Summer 2024.

**5.1.8. Embed active travel in new developments in order to encourage sustainable transport and improve wellbeing**

It is now process for all new developments to have a travel plan as part of the planning application if development will generate significant amounts of movement. The travel plan includes an action plan that shows how sustainable transport such as use of public transport, cycling or walking, will be made accessible at the development and their use increased. Smaller projects have their transport implications assessed and developed in such a way as to support sustainable transport and healthy lifestyles.

**5.1.9. Overhaul the approach to allocating Sheltered Housing properties in order to support more people to benefit from this type of accommodation**

As part of the 2022/23 review of the Housing Allocations Policy, the age criteria for Sheltered Housing were revised. This means Housing Register applicants aged 55 and over can access this accommodation, as well as applicants over 50 in receipt of certain benefits. Furthermore, the use of sensitive lettings allows the right property to be used to meet an individual's need, even if age criteria is not met.

**5.1.10. Maximise the use of available funding in order to deliver improvements beyond the funding capacity of the Housing Revenue Account**

Funding has been confirmed for the Non-Traditional Refurbishment programme, benefitting at least 54 properties. This includes funding under ECO4 up until 2026; a government initiative to help reduce household carbon emissions and improve energy efficiency measures. The Council are now working with E.ON to deliver the works as the appointed contractor.

**6. Protect Resident Safety**

**6.1.1. Work in partnership to reduce local levels of crime and opportunities for crime to take place in order to reduce the number of victims of crime and make Thurrock a safer place to live**

Housing has provided support to the wider corporate work to progress the Community Safety Service. For example, the Community Safety Operating Model has been held, with the Housing service remaining committed to supporting the priorities of the Thurrock Community Safety Partnership.

There is ongoing work with the Safeguarding team for the use of markers on high-risk homes. In recent contract negotiations with Temporary Accommodation providers there was a focus on ensuring contracts will provide security or other measures to minimise Anti-Social Behaviour.

The Housing service is applying a person-centred approach to residents with more varied needs and high-risk profiles, including the formation of the

complex care service. This service seeks to provide tenancy sustainment support to those at risk of crisis in council-owned accommodation or accessing Housing Solutions' services.

The use of the Management Move Panel places tenant safety at the centre, bringing together IDVAs, Safeguarding, Social Care and Housing to discuss options for keeping tenants safe.

**6.1.2. 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**

The Private Sector Housing (PSH) and the National Residential Landlord Association (NRLA) provide joint landlord forums together. This mechanism serves the purpose to promote good practice in the Private Rented Sector (PRS), raise awareness of legal obligations of landlords, promote training opportunities and share changes in legislation.

The PSH has secured Green Energy Grant funding to deliver a Sustainable Warmth Programme in 2022/23 aimed at Homeowners and Private Landlords. This programme was aimed at properties with EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) of D and below to make them more energy efficient of grants up to £10k. The energy measures included insulation, low carbon heating systems, solar panels, ventilation, and energy efficient lighting.

The Well Homes table in Appendix A demonstrates the added value this service provides to vulnerable home occupiers and tenants in the PRS to improve housing conditions and the health and wellbeing of residents.

**6.1.3. Develop a strategic approach to reduce fuel poverty in Thurrock in order to address the harm this causes to residents**

A corporate steering group and operational group have both been established to tackle Fuel Poverty. Work to identify households at risk of fuel poverty is ongoing, with Financial Inclusion Officers interacting with residents on a case-by-case basis to offer support. Financial Inclusion Officers have generated an additional income of £580k, supporting 1,437 households, of which it is anticipated a sizeable number will be at risk of or experiencing fuel poverty.

**6.1.4. Encourage private sector residents to access available support in order to live independently in their homes for longer**

PSH has visited 121 owner occupiers and 76 vulnerable residents in the PRS in 2022/23. This totalled 197 property and Health Well Being assessments.

Following those inspections, the service improved 82 dwellings by removing or reducing Category 1 and 2 Hazards identified under the Housing Health Safety Rating System under Part 1 of the Housing Act to assess conditions and enforce housing standards. This is a risk-based tool to help local

authorities identify and protect residents against potential risks and hazards to health and safety from any deficiencies identified in dwellings.

**6.1.5. Tackle hazards in the private rental sector in order to improve resident safety**

At the end of March 2023, PSH removed a total of 1150 hazards. This is higher than previous years:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total number of hazards removed</b>
March 2023	1150
March 2022	1008
March 2021	746
March 2020	1000

The below table demonstrates powers the PHS have used to remove Category 1 & 2 Hazards in 2022/23:

<b>Enforcement Action</b>	<b>2022/2023 Total</b>
Improvement Notice (S.11 or S.12)	18
Prohibition Order	0
Emergency Prohibition Order	1
Emergency Remedial Action	0
Environmental Protection Act S80	10
Hazard Awareness Notice	1
Suspended Prohibition Order	2
Suspended Improvement Notice	3
Building Act 1984 or Public Health Act 1937 – Drainage	8
Public Health 1936 Notice	1
Management Regulations	22
Electrical Safety Regulations Remedial Notice	0
Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm Regulations Remedial Notice	0
Number of works in default	2
Number of prosecutions	7
Number of Civil Penalties	10

**6.1.6. Support residents out of fuel poverty in order to improve health and wellbeing and quality of life**

In June 2023, the Ground Source Heat Pump project will be complete, benefitting the residents of three tower blocks.

**6.1.7. 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**

All new housing developments are now gas free, ensuring a 'fabric first' approach to environmental efficiency and low carbon.

**6.1.8. Embed safety principles in new developments in order to reduce the likelihood of crime or anti-social behaviour in the future**

The Council seeks to achieve compliance with Secured by Design - Silver Standard for all new developments. The recently completed Beaconsfield Place achieved Gold Standard.

**6.1.9. Commit to tackling domestic and sexual abuse effectively, professionally, and appropriately in order to achieve the best outcomes for survivors of abuse**

There has been a particular focus on domestic abuse, with specialist training provided to the Housing Solutions team on the Domestic Abuse Act, to a total of £13,600. In addition to this, a total of just under £140,000 has also been utilised to provide therapeutic support to adult and children survivors, additional funding to SERICC and the inclusion of a Domestic Abuse focused Refuge Officer.

Furthermore, the Allocations Scheme has also been updated to reflect changes made by the Act, such as how vulnerability is assessed and tailoring housing options to those fleeing domestic abuse.

**6.1.10. Improve the supported and specialist housing offer in Thurrock in order to address shortfalls for vulnerable residents**

The Housing First programme continues to be delivered, and an extension to this programme has been agreed with Adult Social Care with slightly different eligibility criteria.

Alongside this, several properties are in use to support adults with no recourse to public funds and there has been an expansion of provision for mental health supported accommodation through the charity MIND.

A 'complex care team' is being established which will seek to provide tenancy sustainment support to those at risk of crisis in council-owned accommodation or accessing Housing Solutions' services.

The number of people arriving in the UK to seek asylum and be relocated under the following resettlement schemes during the last 18 months, continues to be high nationwide:

- Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme
- Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy
- Homes for Ukraine Scheme

The council has participated in the schemes, playing a significant and leading role in helping asylum and refugees settle in Thurrock. For example, working closely with the Home Office and East of England Strategic Migration

Partnership on asylum dispersal, engaging with the voluntary sector to help refugees and asylum seekers integrate into their community, and help sponsors to prevent homelessness of Ukrainian refugees. So far, Thurrock has accommodated the highest number of dispersed bedspaces of asylum seekers in the East of England region.

The council has 39 Afghan refugees, consisting of 8 households settled here via the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme and Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy. The distribution of Ukrainian guests across Thurrock can be seen in the below table:

Area	No of Guests
Aveley and Uplands	17
Belhus	8
Chadwell St Mary	2
Chafford and North Stifford	22
Corringham and Fobbing	4
East Tilbury	3
Grays Riverside	8
Grays Thurrock	20
Little Thurrock Blackshots	3
Little Thurrock Rectory	3
Ockendon	14
Orsett	6
Stanford East and Corringham Town	1
Stanford Le Hope West	9
Stifford Clays	2
The Homesteads	1
Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park	5
Tilbury St Chads	2
West Thurrock and South Stifford	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>139</b>

In 2023/24, the Private Housing Service commissioned Project 108, part of My Community Church, Chadwell St Mary via the Community Engagement Team, a local registered charity to support refugees and asylum seekers in the borough, delivering the following services. This 12-month contract has regular performance reviews to ensure the supplier fulfils their obligations and delivers end user value. The service includes:

- welcome visits to new arrivals in Thurrock
- Café Connect drop-in sessions in Chadwell St Mary and Grays ward, once every month providing support services and advocacy help to refugees
- integration opportunities with the community eg knit and natter groups, school holiday craft events, toddler groups,
- a 'Welcome Course' which is an introduction to British life aimed at new arrivals.

- Customer Satisfaction Surveys

## **7. Strengthen Community Engagement and Empowerment**

### **7.1.1. Implement digital solutions in order to improve resident access to information and housing services**

Work has commenced on the Housing Digital Strategy to provide a framework for the Housing service.

Information on Housing and Homelessness has been updated on the Council's website, including use of digital media to provide advice on rough sleeper service. Furthermore, there is a channel shift to a direct online portal for homeless applications and move to complete online process for the Housing Register.

### **7.1.2. Tackle the drivers of dissatisfaction in order to make positive changes and improvements to the things that matter most to residents**

The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) has created a new framework for assessing how well social housing landlords in England are doing at providing good quality homes and services. In addition to introducing revised consumer standards, this will involve a set of tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs) that social housing landlords must report to the RSH. There are 22 tenant satisfaction measures in total which cover 5 main themes of keeping properties in good repair, maintaining building safety, respectful and helpful engagement, effective complaints handling and responsible neighbourhood management.

In March 2022, the monthly general perception tenant satisfaction survey was amended to reflect the RSH requirements for TSMs as set out in their proposals which were published in December 2021. Data collection on the proposed suite of TSMs began in April 2022, a year early, in order to collect baseline data and to begin using the resulting data to make service improvements based on residents' feedback.

In September 2022, following the publication of the final suite of TSMs, the service made a small number of amendments to its general perception tenant satisfaction survey to reflect the RSH requirements. Data collection for the final suite of TSMs began in October 2022 and reportable data collection began in April 2023.

In Summer 2024, the council will be required to submit its first year (2023/24) of TSM data to the RSH and in Autumn 2024 the RSH will publish the first year of TSM data.

7.1.3. **We will embed an approach for co-design and improvement of services in order to meaningfully involve and empower residents and communities**

The redevelopment of the Allocations Scheme was directly and indirectly influenced by resident feedback, through face-to-face sessions with residents to collect views, as well as through engagement with other stakeholders which interact with households seeking to access the Housing Register.

**8. Items presenting challenge in context of government intervention**

8.1. **Deliver and refresh the Council's Housing Development programme in order to identify new opportunities to provide at least 500 new social homes for rent**

The ambition to develop 500 homes for rent will remain dependant on the Council's financial capacity to fund new developments using Right-to-Buy receipts and supported borrowing from rental income.

As of April 2023, five projects formerly identified as delivering homes have been switched to disposal to support the Council's financial position. Of the 154 homes originally programmed for delivery within these 5 projects, planning policy compliant private sector delivery could achieve 91 affordable homes delivered via a Registered Provider. There remain 152 homes potentially deliverable through the HRA programme subject to funding.

8.2. **Establish and embed a clear vision and deliver against ambitious plans in order to direct future housing development and regeneration**

Completion of the housing development strategy has been delayed until 2023/24, subject to full assessment of the impact of the council's financial position on housing development activity. Focus on stock renewal has continued, with estate redevelopment projects at Blackshots and Teviot Avenue progressing.

8.3. **Rationalise Sheltered Housing stock in order to identify opportunities to provide new housing**

At this current time, due to the financial circumstances facing the council and the ongoing government intervention, this action has been reviewed and assessed, and any further Sheltered Housing stock rationalisation is being held. Should the situation change and new opportunities become apparent, this decision will be reassessed.

**9. Reasons for Recommendation**

9.1. It is important that there is appropriate oversight of these strategies to ensure that they remain fit for purpose, meeting the needs and addressing the priorities which are present in the wards and communities across the borough. The members of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are well

positioned to be able to provide feedback on the progress of the Housing Strategy in its the first year and direction for the priorities for year two.

## **10. Implications**

### **10.1. Financial**

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**

**Head of Finance - Finance**

The collection of Housing Strategies outlined in this report aim to support the Housing service, wider Adults, Housing and Health directorate and overall organisation in achieving financial sustainability as quickly as possible through a rigorous programme of service rationalisation, transformation, cost control and growth.

### **10.2. Legal**

Implications verified by: **Godwin Mangse**

**Interim Principal Lawyer Housing & Litigation  
– Legal Services**

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.

Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires a Local Authority to review homelessness in its area and to produce a strategy under s1(3). Section 1(4) requires that Thurrock Council shall exercise that power so as to ensure that a new homelessness strategy is published within the period of five years beginning with the day on which the last homelessness strategy was published.

The strategy should reflect the new changes/duties placed on Local Authorities by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, implemented on 3 April 2018 to intervene earlier to prevent homelessness and to take reasonable steps to relieve homelessness for all eligible applicants, not just those that have priority need under the Act.

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 continued delivery of the Housing Strategy 2022-2027, Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027, Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 and Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 will ensure that Thurrock 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 and Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.

In accordance with the remit of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Members are asked to review and scrutinise the updates outlined in this report.

### 10.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**

#### **Team Manager – Community Development**

Consultation and engagement activity took place with residents, elected members, council staff and public and third sector partners to setting aims, and objectives included within the strategies outlined in this report.

In the case of the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025, as set out in the Homelessness Code of Guidance, consultation activity took place with other public bodies, voluntary organisations, service users and other identified stakeholders before the new strategy was implemented.

By undertaking the homelessness review, a broad range of stakeholders throughout the community were identified and involved in the activity to develop a holistic strategy.

The results of engagement activity will help to inform a Community Equality Impact Assessment prior to implementation of the strategy to identify and address any issues affecting those within the protected characteristics.

Further Community Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out to determine the impact of any proposed changes.

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

Not applicable

### 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. Appendices to the report**

- Appendix A – Well Homes Activity by Month

### **Report Author:**

Claire Devonshire

Housing Strategy Officer

Business Improvement – Housing

## Appendix A – Well Homes Activity by Month

Well Homes Activity	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Well Homes Total
WH Assessments Completed	18	15	15	11	9	11	6	6	8	7	1	8	115
HFU 6mths visits											2	1	3
No. of Private Rented properties	8			3	3	3	1	2	2	1		1	24
No. of Owner Occupied properties	7	2	2	5	1	6	2	3		2		6	36
No. of HFU		13	14	3	5	2	3	1	6	4	3	3	57
No. of People reached - private rented	2			8	14	12	1	4	2	8		1	52
No. of People reached - owner occupers	17	4	9	10	1	14	3	9		6		12	85
No. of people reached - HFU		25	29	7	6	5	4	2	9	5	8	16	116
Total No. of People Reached	19	29	38	25	21	31	8	15	11	19	8	6	230
Referrals to Thurrock Council Services (homelessness, DV, social services)	1	3	4	2	3	2	2			4			21
Referrals to Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions Services (handy-person, gardening, decorating)		2			0		1		1				2
Referrals to Private Housing Service (Private Rented Property Inspection Requests)				1	1	1		1					4
Referrals to Private Housing Service (Well Homes offers etc)	2				0								2
Referrals to Energy Services	1		1	5	0	2	1			1		4	15
Referrals to Income / Debt Services	4	20	11	6	5	2	3		9	7	2	16	85
Referrals to Health and Lifestyle Services	12	25	13	6	17	4	5		7	10	1		100
Referrals to Essex Fire and Rescue Services		1	1	2	0			1					5
Referrals to Local Area Co-ordinator		1			0	1	1						3
Referral/signpost to energy provider achieving boiler install												2	2
Other referrals made	15	18	21		10		1	1	16	11	2	28	123
Total Number of Referrals	35	70	51	22	36	12	14	3	33	33	5	6	320
Total Referrals from External Agencies	15	13	12	3	7	2	3	2	8	5	3	3	76

  

Private Housing Service - Well Homes Activity	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Well Homes Total
Total Number of Category 1 Hazards removed from privately rented properties	5	4	5	13	5								32
Total Number of privately rented properties improved	19	19	11	16	17								82
Total Number of Category 1 Hazards removed from owner occupied properties	2												2
Total Number of owner occupied properties improved	2				1								3
Total Number of Well Homes Offers Completed	2												2
Well Homes Loans													0
Security Measures		2											2
Quick Fix Grants													0
Savings to NHS by Private Sector Housing Service activity (£)	17418	29850	29839	143910	73471								294,488
Savings to NHS and Society by Private Sector Housing Service activity (£)	7793	3123	1873	11146	54551								78,486
Landlords accredited through London Landlord Accreditation Scheme													0