

Housing Strategy 2023 - 2028

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
CHE PAC	14 February 2023
Executive	22 March 2023
Will this be a Key Decision?	Yes
Urgency	Not Applicable
Final Decision-Maker	EXECUTIVE
Lead Head of Service	William Cornall Director of Regeneration & Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	John Littlemore Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

The Housing Strategy sets out the Council's strategic approach to tackling the major housing challenges facing the Borough for the next five years. It supports the Council's strategic ambition for the Borough to be a vibrant, prosperous, urban and rural community at the heart of Kent where everyone can realise their potential.

One of our four key priorities is 'Homes and Communities', which emphasises the importance of providing a wide variety of housing types to meet the needs of our residents. The Strategy identifies three key areas of activity: the delivery of housing; existing homes and housing standards; assisting vulnerable households.

The Strategy will form the basis for our work with Maidstone residents and partner organisations. It will inform the development of other important strategies and policies that link to housing, including the Local Plan.

Purpose of Report

Decision

This report makes the following recommendation to the Executive:

1. That the draft Housing Strategy 2023-2028 be approved for adoption.

Housing Strategy 2023 - 2028

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place • Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council's ability to achieve the priority of Homes and Communities. 	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>The report recommendation supports the achievement of improving deprivation and social mobility.</p>	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepting the recommendation provides the Council with a clear policy direction for the Housing Service and reduces the risk of the Council being legally challenged. 	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within budgetary headings and capital programme that are being finalised for 2023/24. Assuming the budget is approved funding will be available for implementation of the strategy. 	Head of Finance

Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing. 	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accepting the recommendations will fulfil the Council's duties under current housing, homelessness and safety legislation. 	Interim Team Leader (Contentious and Corporate Governance)
Information Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recommendations will impact personal information (as defined in UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018) the Council processes. The Information Governance Team will/have reviewed the processing of personal data affected and the associated documentation has been/will be updated accordingly, including a data protection impact assessment. The recommendations do not impact personal information (as defined in UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018) the Council Processes. 	Information Governance Team – either Anna, Georgia or Lauren to review and approve.
Equalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recognise the recommendations may have varying impacts on different communities within Maidstone. Where necessary, a separate equalities impact assessment will be provided for each bespoke policy change. 	Equalities & Communities Officer
Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In accepting the recommendations the Council would be fulfilling the requirements of the Health Inequalities Plan 	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Crime and Disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accepting the recommendation will support the priorities set out in the Safer Maidstone Partnership's Strategic Plan. 	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None identified 	Head of Housing & Regulatory Services

Biodiversity and Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate change increases inequality, as it has a disproportional impact on low income and vulnerable groups. Ensuring sufficient housing that is resistant to the long-term impacts of climate change (flooding and heatwaves), while enhancing biodiversity and utilising low carbon heating solutions, high standards of insulation and energy efficiency is in keeping with the aims of the MBC Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan. 	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Housing Strategy is an overarching plan that guides the council and its partners in tackling the major housing challenges facing the borough. It sets out the priorities and outcomes that we wish to achieve and provide a clear strategic vision and leadership in an uncertain economic climate.
- 2.2 The Strategy contributes to the council’s corporate priorities for Maidstone, which emphasises the importance of providing a wide variety of housing types to meet the needs of our residents. The Maidstone Housing Strategy is also intrinsically linked with other plans and strategies of the council, most notably the Local Plan and its current review. It is proposed that the new strategy looks ahead for five years, covering 2023- 2028.
- 2.3 The ambition behind this Strategy is to ensure that all people in the Borough have access to good quality homes that are affordable for them and meet their needs. Every council has a responsibility to understand what matters most to its local communities and to respond to this through investment, service planning and delivery. The Council also has to take into account both national and regional aspirations and sometimes balance these against local priorities.
- 2.4 Following the extensive research, analysis and consultation, it is recommended that CHE PAC recommends to the Executive that the new Maidstone Housing Strategy 2023-2028 is designed around the following key priorities and stated outcomes:
- 2.4.1 Priority 1: To deliver a mixture of housing types and tenures which are affordable and meet the needs of everyone in the borough.

Areas of Focus 2023 to 2026:

- Deliver the council’s ambition to deliver 1,000 affordable new homes.
- Ensure we have the capacity and framework to support the new Housing Management Service – including developing our Housing Revenue Account; a suite of tenancy documents and policies.

- Increase the availability of high-quality private sector rented homes through Maidstone property Holdings Ltd.
- Reduce the time households spend in temporary accommodation by providing a range of options that will include the council's ambition to build and manage its own affordable housing stock.
- Working with our housing association partners in the borough to explore how we can make more use of their stock available for those affected by homelessness.
- Make use of our Homefinders, landlord incentive scheme, by reviewing and strengthening our offer to landlords in the private rented sector.
- Purchase more temporary accommodation stock to reduce its reliance on nightly paid temporary accommodation and provide a better quality of home within our own locality.
- Maidstone Borough Council and Homes England are working in partnership to deliver a unique, attractive, and desirable new rural Kentish town located between Maidstone and Ashford. Heathlands will provide around 5,000 new homes, of which 40% will be affordable for local people. The new community will be designed sensitively to respond to its natural and distinctive setting

2.4.2 Priority 2: To ensure existing homes meet the decent homes standard, are energy efficient and safe, to enable healthy, independent living.

Outcomes – What we plan to achieve.

- The Council will continue to work with private landlords where hazards have been identified.
- We will continue to support residents access national funding programmes to ensure homes are energy efficient, to meet the national ambition to "Improve the quality of UK homes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to safeguard our comfort, health and wellbeing as the climate changes". [UK housing: Fit for the future?](#)
- We will work in partnership with suitable providers and the Greater South-eastern Energy Hub to promote and support the delivery of government funding schemes to homeowners, tenants, and landlords
- We will work with Registered Providers, private landlords, freeholders and Kent Fire and Rescue Service to ensure that all residential buildings, including those that are managed by ourselves abide by the relevant fire safety legislation.
- We will make sure that landlords follow guidelines and abide by their legal responsibilities to ensure their properties do not put their tenant's health and safety at risk. Particular emphasise will be given to ensuring that people's homes meet the government's Decent

Homes Standard and we will intervene where we find a failing on the part of the landlord.

2.4.3 Priority 3: To secure the very best support and housing outcomes for Maidstone's most vulnerable groups

Outcomes – What we plan to achieve.

- A main priority is to improve the experience for residents within housing to build resilience. This includes providing more training opportunities for all staff, for example - to have a better understanding of trauma awareness and Adverse Childhood Experiences and how best to achieve positive outcomes for our residents.
- The council is also working on a number of new initiatives to support victims of domestic abuse. This includes working with private landlords, providing digital mapping of the nearest support and future plans to coordinate a programme for male victims of domestic abuse, as well as medium to low-risk domestic abuse victims. We are also developing our initiative with Xantura and Kent Police, to use data to intervene as early as possible.
- The Council is developing a multi-agency approach to financial inclusion and will monitor these trends to be able to deliver what assistance and grant schemes are available.
- We will work with the Home Office to ensure those placed here from other areas are properly supported and their longer-term needs are met, including those from Syria and Afghanistan being accommodated under the relevant refugee programmes.
- We will continue assisting Ukrainian refugees who wish to remain in the UK after the Homes for Ukraine scheme ends through various routes including rematching with new hosts and the private rented sector.
- The Housing Service will work in partnership with Planning colleagues to develop the policies that will be adopted in response to the need for more gypsy and traveller sites.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The Executive could decide to not adopt a new Housing Strategy, but this is not recommended as housing remains a key area of activity for the council. A failure to have an up-to-date strategic document for this area of work may lead to poor outcomes for the service and our residents.
- 3.2 By adopting a new Housing Strategy the document will provide the council, its residents, and officers with a clear direction of travel for a range of housing services. This will also assist our core stakeholders to be able understand how they can support the council's ambitions around housing.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The preferred option is paragraph 3.2 for the reasons stated.

5. RISK

5.1 Assess if within the council's risk appetite and any mitigating actions proposed if needed.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

6.1 A range of consultations have been undertaken during the gestation of the Strategy. This included a survey between 12 November and 31 December 2021. It was promoted online through the Council's website and its social media channels. Residents who had signed up for consultation reminders were notified and sent an invitation to participate in the consultation.

6.2 Residents and Stakeholders differed in what they thought the most important priority was. Stakeholders placed 'prevent homelessness and enable vulnerable people to access appropriate housing and support' as the most important while residents placed 'ensure existing homes are safe, sustainable, of good quality and support residents' health and wellbeing' first.

6.3 When asked about building new homes residents rated 'improving the design of housing and neighbourhoods through the creation and maintenance of open space areas, energy efficiency and parking standards' as the most important element. Stakeholders placed this element second and rated 'providing attractive and energy efficient homes' first.

6.4 The Communities Housing and Environment Committee agreed with the recommendation to the Executive.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

7.1 Once the draft Housing Strategy is adopted by the Executive, the intention is to develop the accompanying action plan over the next three months. The draft action plan will then be brought back to the CHE PAC for consideration before being adopted by the Executive Lead Member with responsibility for Housing and Health.

8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix 1: Draft Housing Strategy 2023-2028
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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None