Housing Statement 2018-2023

September 2018
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1. Foreword

This housing statement takes a new approach to setting out our strategic goals for housing. It will provide an overview of how quality housing delivery, with a mix of tenures, is needed to help achieve our corporate priorities. The statement will highlight some key issues and challenges as well as potential opportunities going forward over the next 5 years.

More detailed strategic objectives will be developed in separate specialist strategies or plans with a focus on action plans and deliverable outcomes. This will hopefully stimulate more involvement by residents, stakeholders and partners where they have an interest in a certain area of housing.

Since the Housing Framework was adopted in July 2013 there have been innumerable changes affecting the housing sector. These have influenced the delivery of new homes, how we manage our existing homes and assist people, in need of support, who are living in both the social and private housing sectors.

In light of reduced resources, we will need to continue to be innovative and bold in our approach, seeking out new ways of working to remain efficient and effective in our service delivery.

Cllr Gerald White
Portfolio Holder for Housing
2. Introduction

The Deregulation Act 2015 removed the power to require councils to prepare housing strategies. Therefore, this Housing Statement sets out our overall approach to housing in the borough. This will be supported by detailed strategies and plans that are either in place or to be refreshed or developed, as illustrated diagrammatically in section 6. Each will have an action plan that will contribute to meeting our overarching housing priorities that in turn assist in delivering our corporate objectives.

Our overarching priorities for housing are driven by the challenges and opportunities we face going forward. An adequate, safe, secure home provides a platform for economic growth, personal wellbeing and attainment and can engender a sense of pride and belonging to a local community.

Our overarching priorities are:

1. Increasing the supply of homes that residents can afford and will help meet local housing need

2. To ensure housing enables independent living and promotes good health and wellbeing

3. Support housing initiatives that stimulate prosperity, employment opportunities and economic activity

In delivering our three overarching priorities will we continue to build on existing partnerships and explore and develop new ways of working with a range of organisations. This will open up opportunities to maximise resources, bring forward new ventures and improve outcomes for all partners and residents.

3. Corporate Priorities

The Corporate Plan 2015 identifies 4 key priorities for the borough. Housing contributes in a range of ways to achieving all of these.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corporate Plan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enterprising Ashford: Economic investment and growth</td>
<td>To attract a strong workforce a range of attractive quality homes are needed with mixed tenures that are affordable to a people taking up different employment opportunities and working in supporting services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To promote growth and achieve greater economic prosperity for Ashford borough. We will work to secure inward investment to create a wide range of jobs carried out by a highly skilled workforce.</td>
<td>Housing construction contributes to the wider economy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Living Ashford: Quality housing and homes for all
To secure quality homes across the borough, catering for a range of ages, tenures and need, in well planned and attractive new places.

Housing addresses local housing needs, through new build and managing existing social housing. Improving access to and conditions in the private sector. Providing supported accommodation.

Active and Creative Ashford: Healthy choices through physical, cultural and leisure engagement
To provide or enable a range of quality leisure and cultural activities where people can make healthy and affordable lifestyle choices and enjoy assets that create attractive, desirable and active communities.

New developments are master planned to include opportunities for healthy lifestyles. Social Housing providers run initiatives to encourage residents to take part in healthy living and foster good community relationships.

Attractive Ashford: Countryside and Townscape, Tourism and Heritage
To achieve an environment that creates higher standards of public space design, alongside improved standards of presentation of key green spaces. To safeguard and conserve our local heritage and areas of outstanding landscape quality to ensure the very best attractive environment with thriving and vibrant town centres.

Housing can work to improve street scenes and neighbourhoods and bring empty properties back into use.

Monitoring standards in the private sector including park homes and taking enforcement action where necessary.

Developing new homes with attractive open spaces.

Other council services will contribute to achieving the housing priorities through a number of activities they undertake. Cross service communication and joint working will optimise where a coordinated joint approach can deliver enhanced outcomes.

4. The Local Plan

The Local Plan policies shape the housing delivery in the borough for both open market homes and affordable homes to meet local housing needs. Therefore the Local Plan and the Housing Statement have a dynamic relationship. The policies of the local plan assist in the delivery of affordable housing, through the affordable housing requirement on qualifying sites and enabling rural exception site delivery. However, it is recognised that that the overall affordable housing need cannot be met in full through these policies alone.

Planning policy is also a contributing factor in delivery of the priorities of the Housing Statement to enable independent living, promote good health and wellbeing and stimulate prosperity, employment opportunities and economic activity.
5. Challenges and Opportunities

A number of changes affecting affordable housing delivery and its residents have emanated from central government. Most notably the ongoing implementation of welfare reform, the Housing and Planning Act 2016, the Housing White Paper 2017, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the introduction of the Better Care Fund.

Some of the key challenges are listed below:

- Delivery of new homes does not match identified need
- Broadening of the definition of affordable housing put forward in the Housing White Paper may mean fewer affordable and social rented homes
- Increasing disparity between private rents and Local Housing Allowance rates
- How to increase access to the private rented sector for lower income households
- Improving the quality and stability for tenants living in the private rented sector
- Increased losses of social housing through Right to Buy
- Average income increases not keeping pace with average house price increases
- Increase pressure on the housing waiting list
- Increased homelessness leading to higher costs for temporary accommodation
- Continuing implementation of welfare reform and roll out of universal credit may lead to a likely increase in rent arrears and homelessness
- Uncertainty around revenue funding for supporting housing was stifling supported housing development. A government announcement in August 2018 that Housing Benefit will be kept in place will hopefully stimulate supported housing development
- The effect of rent reduction in social housing, put in place for 4 years from 2016, on housing services such as maintenance of properties and services to tenants
- Implementation the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

There are also a range of opportunities that the council can grasp. The points below note a few such opportunities but there will be more to investigate.

- Exploration of new ways to deliver affordable housing to meet local housing needs appropriate to local incomes
- Support local communities to deliver community-led housing solutions
- Lobbying for increase in HRA debt cap to deliver more local authority built homes
- Increased appetite from investors and housing associations to form joint ventures or similar
- Changes to flexible tenancies to cover all new tenancies could assist in making best use of the council’s housing stock
- Greater powers to tackle rouge landlords and poor conditions in the private sector
- Take a holistic view of housing and community regeneration incorporating all tenures
- Being part of a Kent wide review to improve delivery of disabled facilities grants
- Further build on our homelessness prevention work as Homelessness Reduction Act comes in to force
- Stronger joint working with other organisations to tackle social housing fraud
- Broaden our engagement with other council services and external organisations to deliver targeted, effective initiatives
6. The Housing Statement, strategies and plans

The strategies/plans sitting beneath the Housing Statement will each contribute to achieving the priorities set out in this Housing Statement.

1. Increasing the supply of homes that residents can afford and will help meet local housing need

2. To ensure housing enables independent living and promotes good health and wellbeing

3. Support housing initiatives that stimulate prosperity, employment opportunities and economic activity

The review of the Housing Framework 2013-2018 together with an evidence base for each strategy/plan will inform where the greatest pressures lie. Action plans will be developed in consultation with residents and other organisations to set out clear goals to achieve in each area.

The diagram below depicts the strategies that will sit beneath the Housing Statement.

The funding streams for Housing Services are the Housing Revenue Account and the General Fund. The Housing Revenue Account is money received from council tenants rent and is ring-fenced to provide services for the benefit of council tenants. The services where the majority of the above funding streams are committed is indicted in the diagram below.
The key areas to be covered in each individual strategy are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy/plan</th>
<th>Key areas</th>
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<tr>
<td>Affordable Housing Supply and Allocation</td>
<td>Sets out how the council will work through a variety of potential mechanisms such as joint ventures, developing an affordable housing property company, community-led housing etc. to increase the supply of social rented and other forms of affordable housing including supported housing that is truly affordable in relation to local incomes. Will consider the role of the social lettings agency and options for expansion. Considers options to assist residents into home ownership and develop pathways to assist social housing tenants to move to alternative tenures. Provides an outline of how homes are let to meet local housing need.</td>
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<td>HRA Asset Management</td>
<td>Sets out how the council will manage its housing stock and other assets within the HRA. To maximise income balanced with maintaining good condition of the stock in the longer term and meeting housing need. Need to consider impact of the rent reduction regime until 2020.</td>
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<td>Tenancy Strategy (Approved September 2017)</td>
<td>Sets out how tenancies will be issued and reviewed in line with legislative</td>
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<td>Tenant Participation</td>
<td>Sets out how the council will increase its understanding of what is important to tenants and how it will engage with tenants to deliver more effective and efficient services.</td>
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<td>Private Sector Housing</td>
<td>Sets out how the council will meet its statutory responsibilities. How it will work to improve conditions in the private housing sector, including for owner occupier, private rented landlords and tenants and those renting and living in HMOs and mobile/park homes. Explore how empty homes can be brought back into use. Consider the council’s commitment to improving energy efficiency and the provision of disabled facilities grants within the private sector and new approaches further to the Kent wide study.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health and Housing</td>
<td>Sets out how good housing can benefit health and wellbeing. Consider how closer working with health and social care can be established and what role can be played by the voluntary sector. Will consider which residents can benefit from improved health and well-being through housing interventions and homelessness prevention and how these could be implemented. Consideration of impacts of welfare reform on health and wellbeing.</td>
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<td>Homelessness Strategy (Current strategy adopted October 2016, will be reviewed after implementation of Homelessness Reduction Act 2017)</td>
<td>Sets out how the council will work with others to tackle and prevent homelessness in the borough and meet its statutory responsibilities.</td>
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7. Annual Review

A report on how the three overarching objectives are being met will be presented annually to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The report will also note progress on developing each of the specialist strategies/plans that sit beneath the Housing Statement.