



Wokingham Borough Council Affordable Housing Strategy 2024-2028

"Right Homes, Right Places"

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Housing plays a huge role in the health, environmental, social and economic well-being of everyone who lives in the Borough. It is more than just bricks and mortar; everyone is affected by housing. Housing underpins local growth and economic stability as well as contributing to healthy, thriving communities.

With the effect of global economic shocks including soaring energy prices, rising interest rates and increasing inflation, have in turn created a cost-of-living crisis. This and coupled with the fact that Wokingham remains a Borough of high unaffordability means there is a real requirement to address housing need, especially as there is an increasing trend of more households presenting as homeless and younger people having to make stark life choices due to the high cost of housing. The Council's aim is to create a future pipeline of affordable and sustainable homes for those most in need. This will help to reduce social and economic inequalities across the Borough by creating stable and safe homes. Working with our partners and engaging with our residents and landlords across the Borough, we will help to ensure that we address and understand our housing need and help maximise affordable housing delivery where possible. We will build the right homes in the right places, improve the quality, sustainability and design of the housing stock and support our residents by developing socially inclusive and healthy communities.

By affordable housing we mean housing for those residents whose housing needs are assessed as not being met by the general market. Products include discounted rents and affordable home ownership products.

THE COUNCIL'S ROLE INCLUDES:

- Working with developers and partners to deliver good quality environmentally and financially sustainable homes in the right places, maximising affordable housing where possible especially social rented homes
- Working with partners including, but not limited to, our housing companies, town and parish councils, RPs, neighbouring authorities, integrated care boards and the NHS
- Investing in our own housing stock, acting as a corporate landlord to ensure we provide a decent standard of homes and respond to new regulations on health and safety
- To manage and respond to our housing needs
- Delivering ambitious estate regeneration programmes to develop well connected and socially inclusive communities
- Working with landlords to improve standards of private rental sector properties
- Working across different departments, agencies, and other Berkshire authorities to ensure effective infrastructure delivery to mitigate against development and support new and existing communities
- Prioritising people with additional support needs to access appropriate accommodation and support
- Acting as the corporate parent and providing accommodation for young people leaving care

KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

- IN WOKINGHAM, THE POPULATION SIZE HAS INCREASED BY 15.0%, FROM AROUND 154,400 IN 2011 TO 177,500 IN 2021. THIS IS HIGHER THAN THE OVERALL INCREASE FOR ENGLAND (6.6%) WHERE THE POPULATION GREW BY NEARLY 3.5 MILLION TO 56,489,800 (AND SOUTHEAST 7.5%. AS OF 2021, WOKINGHAM IS THE 28TH MOST DENSELY POPULATED OF THE SOUTH EAST'S 64 LOCAL AUTHORITY AREAS (CENSUS 2021).
- BETWEEN 2011 TO 2021, IT IS ESTIMATED THAT WOKINGHAM SAW A 11.1% INCREASE IN THE POPULATION AGED BETWEEN 15-64 AND A 28.2% INCREASE IN THE POPULATION AGED 65+. (CENSUS 2021). THE POPULATION IS EXPECTED TO GROW BY 8.9% (14,867) BY 2028 FROM 2018 (ONS 2020).
- THE AVERAGE PRICE OF A HOME IN THE BOROUGH IS £511,505 COMPARED TO A NATIONAL AVERAGE OF £292,882 (UK HOUSE PRICE INDEX, AUG 2023)
- THOSE ON THE COUNCIL'S HOUSING REGISTER IDENTIFIED AS BEING IN PRIORITY HOUSING NEED (BAND 1-3) STANDS AT 606 HOUSEHOLDS (SEPTEMBER 2023)
- THE COUNCIL HAS OVER 2500 AFFORDABLE HOMES WITHIN ITS STOCK, WITH REGISTERED PROVIDERS OWNING OVER 4500 AFFORDABLE HOMES IN THE BOROUGH

OUR HOUSING PRIORITIES – WHAT WE WILL DO

PRIORITY 1

Continue to address and understand our housing needs

Why is this important?

The population and make up of our Borough is changing with the biggest financial pressures coming from an ageing population over 65+ who require more adaptive accommodation to meet their changing requirements. As a local authority we will need to work more closely with external partners such as the NHS and third sector agencies to help address these changing needs. More generally, the cost-of-living crisis is putting additional pressures on our residents. We have a small and expensive private rental sector in the Borough. There are increasing numbers of residents presenting as homeless. More affordable housing will be needed to meet demand and address the outcome of these pressures. We need a diverse mix of homes to meet the changing needs of our Borough, especially around a growing older population with homes for key workers required to support the ageing population.

This includes exploring how we can improve the offer of affordable homes for veterans. Furthermore, the future Adult social care reforms will lead to increased demand for older residents to remain in their own homes, if they so wish, with appropriate care and support.

PRIORITY 2

Provide suitable accommodation options to our most vulnerable residents

Why is this important?

We want to support more people to live independently and stay healthy by offering the right housing options to meet their needs. With the cost-of-living crisis and increased complex health needs we need to offer more support and options to those who are homeless, currently sleeping rough, at risk of homelessness or are survivors of domestic abuse. Our priority groups for young people aged 16-25, are those in and transitioning out of care, 16/17-year-olds at risk of homelessness and Unaccompanied Asylum- Seeking Children (UASC) leaving care. We also have a large pipeline of need from those residents with learning disabilities, physical disabilities or are struggling with their mental health who require more support through specialist housing schemes.

PRIORITY 3

Ensure that homes are healthy, safe, efficient, environmentally sustainable and well designed

Why is this important?

Poor housing can have a severe impact on our health and wellbeing. Overcrowded homes don't have space to study or play. Lack of stable housing can mean frequent school moves, with no chance to learn or make friends. In less obvious ways, poor housing can result in mental ill health, stress and anxiety caused by living in insecure, unaffordable or damp and mouldy homes. From April 2024, under the forthcoming Social Housing Regulation Act, housing associations and stock-holding local authorities will be required to demonstrate their adherence to consumer standards. A good choice of high quality, sustainable and well managed housing will help the Borough to achieve energy efficiency and reduce the environmental impact of housing, contributing to Borough's commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030. This also includes providing more environmentally sustainable measures to existing stock.

PRIORITY 4

Create positive social impact which will help promote inclusive growth and develop thriving communities

Why is this important?

Building communities, not just homes, is essential for the future of the Borough. The Council, together with its partners such as Registered Providers, the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel and third sector organisations, has a key role through engagement in helping to create thriving communities and address the root causes of housing crises such as improving employability, enhancing tenancy sustainability, reducing worklessness and a reliance on benefits. By building healthy communities, using Marmot principles*, we can help address social and health inequalities across the Borough. By investing in social capital programmes and delivering initiatives such as

creative social prescribing and tenancy sustainment schemes, and arts based approaches to improving health and wellbeing will help to empower residents and transform lives, as well as more broadly helping to support the local economy and wider community.

*Eight policy areas have been designed by Professor Sir Michael Marmot to support healthy and sustainable communities, these include early years development, employment, living standards, communities, ill-health prevention, discrimination, and environmental sustainability.

OUR SUCCESSES SINCE THE LAST HOUSING STRATEGY

- As a Local Authority we delivered one of the highest numbers of affordable homes in England, completing 542 affordable homes in the past 3 years and generating a future delivery pipeline of over 1600 additional affordable homes
- Implemented a new allocations policy to help allocate affordable homes to those most in need. Compared to other Berkshire and Greater London authorities the number of people on our Housing Register remains static but low
- Gorse Ride estate regeneration phase 1 completed (46 homes), with plans for phase 2 underway. The estate has been designed to be gas free
- Delivered an award-winning programme of six specialist housing schemes for 34 adult social care users, providing long term quality homes for those with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, complex needs or requiring mental health support
- Delivered a new Semi-independent Living (SIL) accommodation scheme for care leavers in Wokingham, providing accommodation for up to 7 care leavers
- Awarded Govt. grant funding to deliver four properties for those sleeping rough in the Borough and who require intensive support using a Housing First model. Secured further funding through the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme.
- Awarded £3.1m grant funding towards the purchase of 17 homes for use by Ukrainian and Afghan refugees
- Provided an 18 unit affordable rented scheme for key workers in Wokingham through one of our Registered Provider partners
- Increased our provision of temporary accommodation by securing long term leases with private landlords and delivering a 23 unit modular build scheme in Winnersh
- Focussed on practical responses, preventative initiatives, enhancing housing pathways to help end rough sleeping
- Reduced the number of care leavers in temporary accommodation from 9 to 2 residents
- Helped people access and secure private rented housing, through schemes such as the Rent in Advance/ Deposit Loan Scheme
- Met and maintained the Decent Homes Standard target on our own housing stock, with the majority of stock meeting an EPC C rating
- Submitted a successful bid has under the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund to bring c110 homes to an EPC C by 2025.
- Over 1600 households in the Borough received assistance from Help to Heat (a Govt. energy grant).

OUR CHALLENGES GOING FORWARD

Affordable housing delivery is dependent on developers bringing their sites coming forward which in turn is partly affected by the wider economic climate- rising build costs, shortages of skilled workers and a downturn in house prices can see delays in the delivery of schemes or a lack of planning applications coming forward which then results in the demand for affordable housing outstripping supply.

- Finite resources (such as land availability, financial resources) means that the Council cannot meet all need and faces a difficult task of prioritising competing requirements. For example, there are increasing demands from those facing homelessness, adult social care users or children's services requiring more specialist accommodation
- The reduced supply of affordable homes due to Right to Buy which reduces the amount of affordable housing stock in the Borough. Nationally around 40% of homes purchased under Right to Buy have later been sold into the private rental sector. This leads to more residents relying on housing benefit due to a lack of social rented homes
- There is a small and expensive private rental sector in the Borough. With an increasing number of people on low incomes and a shortage of affordable housing this is pushing people to live in an unsuitable accommodation or to seek accommodation further afield
- There is a challenge within the Borough to manage and balance housing need whilst protecting the quality of our environment especially in order to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030
- Wokingham Borough has an increasing proportion of residents with long term health conditions, such as dementia, and people with learning disabilities or difficulties, it is important that we address and manage demand for long term care and maintain high quality services, especially where delivery of specialist accommodation can help alleviate financial pressures or deliver more effective care and support
- There are pockets of deprivation, unemployment, and a risk of poverty within working families. With the cost of living crisis we are seeing more people presenting as homeless

WHAT DO OUR RESIDENTS SAY?

The 2023 STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) are included below. This is a survey of the Council's housing tenants. The latest data nationally has average overall satisfaction for local authorities at 65.7%. The data below shows that overall, Wokingham is performing well when compared to the national picture:



82%
Satisfaction
with Repairs



85%
Satisfaction that
tenants' homes
are safe



81%
Satisfaction that
home is well
maintained



81%
Overall
Satisfaction



81%
Satisfaction with
Sheltered scheme
facilities



82%
Satisfaction with
lettings service



84%
Rent provides
good value
for money

THE NEW HOMES SURVEY

- 82% OF RESPONDENTS WERE EITHER SATISFIED OR VERY SATISFIED WITH THEIR NEW HOME
- 100% OF SHARED OWNERS WERE SATISFIED WITH THEIR NEW HOME
- 70% AGREE THAT THEIR HOUSE AND AREA ARE ATTRACTIVE
- 77% FELT A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

PRIORITY 1

Continue to address and understand our housing needs

OUTCOMES

Delivery of more affordable homes in the Borough

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

- Work towards maximising affordable housing delivery through the Local Plan Update, subject to development viability
- Over 600 affordable homes to be delivered through the Council's partnership with Registered Providers during the Affordable Housing Strategy period (subject to development sites coming forward)
- The Council to consider 100% affordable sites up to a threshold of 50 homes per site and subject to the requirement for supporting infrastructure requirements
- The Council to support affordable housing delivery through its own housing companies
- The Council to explore opportunities to repurpose underutilised or vacant assets and to maximise affordable housing delivery on its own land assets, subject to viability and prioritisation of service need
- Create an Affordable Housing Delivery Options Strategy to look at options for future delivery including maximising external funding and regeneration opportunities
- Address the housing needs of our refugee communities, Gypsy Roma Traveller and Boat Dweller communities

OUTCOMES

Increased capacity within the private rental sector

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

- Work with private landlords to expand the private rented sector to increase the range of available housing options
- Aim to enhance access to more affordable rental accommodation by exploring the possibility of local rent control measures or incentivising landlords to offer lower than market rents
- Explore how the Council's housing companies could provide accommodation through a private rental sector approach

OUTCOMES

More opportunities for supporting the local economy and key sectors such as social care

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

- Work with our partners to provide more key worker accommodation and explore the possibility of short-term tenancies for transitional key workers on short term contracts where this supports sectors such as social care.

OUTCOMES

Enable people to stay in their homes for longer or providing suitable accommodation options for the ageing population

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

- Understand the requirement for those older residents who want to stay in their own homes with appropriate care and support
- Working with external partners such as NHS and third sector agencies to help address changing needs
- Work with colleagues in Adult Social Care to help prepare for the adult social care reforms and any potential impact on housing requirements
- Ensure we have the appropriate funding in place to support those who want to stay in their homes for longer (e.g., Disabled Facilities Grant funding)
- Ensure all new homes are accessible as per the accessibility standards

PRIORITY 2

Provide suitable accommodation options to our most vulnerable residents

OUTCOMES

Delivering housing and support tailored to meet identified need

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

- Developing more supported housing for vulnerable people based on need including rough sleepers, those requiring temporary accommodation, survivors of domestic abuse, adult social care clients, children in care and care leavers and those requiring more support
- Inclusion of specialist accommodation as part of affordable housing provision within new development schemes where appropriate, especially where schemes are close to local facilities or public transport
- Work with the Council's Registered Provider partners to deliver more specialist and supported accommodation
- Continue to provide a range of care and support services to help vulnerable people live independently
- Explore the feasibility of providing more targeted support for those in housing need through schemes such as a mother & baby unit or other family focussed schemes which support single fathers

OUTCOMES

Improving guidance and information

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

- Continue to improve access to information, advice and guidance on housing, distributing information through a variety of partners including our town and parish councils, Citizens Advice Wokingham, voluntary and charity sector partners
- Enhance the digital advice and guidance available to residents via the Council's website and social media

OUTCOMES

Developing effective policies and strategies to ensure housing delivered meets need

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

- Implementation of a new Young People's Housing Strategy and an updated Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy in 2024
- Development and implementation of a new Older Persons and Specialist Accommodation Housing Strategy
- Develop a Specialist Housing Supplementary Planning Document ensuring best practice in the design and delivery of specialist housing for our most vulnerable residents

PRIORITY 3

Ensure that homes are healthy, safe, efficient and well designed

OUTCOMES

Improving the quality and management of affordable homes

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

- Improve the quality and on-going management of homes and environments containing affordable housing
- Make best use of existing homes and assets to help tackle housing need as well as over-crowding and under-occupation
- Ensure all landlords in the Borough engage with and listen to their tenants and deliver the best possible housing management service
- Ensure that the Council continues to engage with and involve its tenants through the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel and ensure the core values of their Tenants Charter are reflected across all affordable housing
- Support our Private Rented Sector (PRS) residents and work with PRS landlords to improve standards of properties and expand the capacity of the PRS to increase the housing options available to the Borough's residents

- Improve the temporary and emergency accommodation offer for rough sleepers and homeless residents
- Ensure that fire safety, health and safety remain the top priority in every home and housing scheme

OUTCOMES

Ensuring quality and sustainability of design of all affordable homes

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

- The adoption of a new Local Plan, updated Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document and Borough Design Guide
- Improve energy efficiency, reduce carbon emissions and fuel poverty, working towards achieving a carbon neutral Borough by 2030.
- Make the best use of Council-owned land setting the standard for high quality sustainable new housing and ensure that new Council owned homes aspire to be carbon neutral
- Improve energy performance of Council housing stock to EPC C and above by 2030, delivering schemes to support retrofitting of existing older stock to ensure we meet our climate emergency aims
- Engage with the Council's partner Registered Providers to support retrofitting of older homes in the Borough
- Ensure new developments make adequate provision for sustainable transport, electric vehicle charging points, superfast broadband and work from home facilities

OUTCOMES

Regenerating communities and housing stock

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

- Continue to deliver regeneration programmes of older, poor quality housing stock such as at Gorse Ride in Finchampstead
- Ensure any regeneration projects are led by the local community and address their needs and priorities
- Ensure any regeneration projects help to build resilient communities and housing stock for future climate impacts

PRIORITY 4

Create positive social impact which will help to underpin local growth and develop inclusive and thriving communities

OUTCOMES

Developing more socially inclusive communities through housing initiatives to support local residents

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

- Promote independence, health and wellbeing to all residents
- Work to improve life chances for all tenants including a stable home and employment opportunities
- Create communities and homes, not housing and estates, ensuring that the impact on existing communities from new development is minimised during the development period and is positive in the longer term, utilising arts based approaches to community cohesion and placemaking
- Continue to expand employment and training opportunities for all residents including exploring and implementing opportunities for vulnerable residents
- Improve day to day housing affordability through preventative projects to tackle challenges such as fuel poverty
- Work together with partner Registered Providers on specific activities which contribute to social and community inclusion and support tenancy sustainability such as creative social prescribing

HOW WILL WE MEASURE SUCCESS? WE WILL USE THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLE INDICATORS TO MEASURE OUR PROGRESS AGAINST THE HIGH LEVEL OUTCOMES:

CONTINUE TO ADDRESS AND UNDERSTAND OUR HOUSING NEEDS

Number of affordable homes delivered especially social rented homes

- Number of affordable homes negotiated
- Delivery of additional GRT pitches and boat dweller moorings

PROVIDE SUITABLE ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS TO OUR MOST VULNERABLE RESIDENTS

- No care leavers in temporary accommodation
- Ending all rough sleeping by 2025 (to note this is a national government policy approach)
- Numbers of people accessing information, advice and guidance
- Number of care leavers and Learning Disabled residents in suitable accommodation
- % of those presenting as homeless, homeless acceptances and use of B&B
- Delivery of supported housing projects

ENSURE THAT HOMES ARE HEALTHY, SAFE, EFFICIENT AND WELL DESIGNED

- % of affordable housing stock which meets the Decent Homes Standard
- Ensure all new homes are carbon neutral
- Adoption of a new Local Plan and sustainability policies
- Implementation of an updated Affordable Housing SPD and Borough Design Guide
- Annual publication of Climate Emergency Action Plan progress report (CEAP)
- Number of council-owned properties with EPC rating C and above
- % of Homes with EPC C rating or above by 2030
- Number of social housing properties achieving high efficiency standards
- RPs to complete a stock survey of all existing Wokingham properties
- RPs to measure and report back on the SAP and EPC rating of all new developments in Wokingham

CREATE POSITIVE SOCIAL IMPACT WHICH WILL HELP TO UNDERPIN LOCAL GROWTH AND DEVELOP INCLUSIVE AND THRIVING COMMUNITIES

- Number of residents supported through initiatives such as creative social prescribing or arts based community cohesion initiatives
- Number of households lifted out of fuel poverty
- Number of residents participating in business enterprise/skills development courses
- Member/Officer groups
- Ongoing engagement/consultation with key groups e.g. young people to understand their needs and requirements
- Using tailored arts based approaches to increase participation in community initiatives

An accompanying action plan has been developed which will be updated annually and will set out how the Council will deliver against the priorities set out above. Progress will be monitored by the Council, a Member/Officer group created to hold the Council's housing strategies to account and the Council's Registered Provider Partnership. Local housing data is collated and analysed every 3 months in the Housing Facts and Figures report.



Wokingham Borough Council

Tel: (0118) 974 6000

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