

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	28 SEPTEMBER 2020		
TITLE:	HOUSING STRATEGY FOR READING 2020 - 2025 READING'S PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2020 - 2025		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR JOHN ENNIS	PORTFOLIO:	HOUSING
SERVICE:	HOUSING	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	SARAH TAPLISS BRYONY HALL	TEL:	0118 937 4136
JOB TITLE:	STRATEGIC HOUSING & DEVELOPMENT OFFICER HOUSING NEEDS MANAGER	E-MAIL:	sarah.tapliss@reading.gov.uk bryony.hall@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report presents the Housing Strategy for Reading 2020-2025 and Reading's Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2020-2025 and seeks authority to publish both strategies.
- 1.2 The Housing Strategy is an overarching strategy which draws together and provides an overview of strategies and plans across the Council which seek to facilitate the Council's ambition of the provision of decent, sustainable affordable homes within thriving neighbourhoods.
- 1.3 A key theme running through the Housing Strategy is the embedding of the Climate Emergency Strategy and the ambition to complete a 'deep retrofit' of existing homes in Reading alongside a programme of education and support to residents to enable energy efficient lifestyles.
- 1.4 Reading's Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2020-2025 outlines the Council's intentions to intervene early, prevent homelessness and ensure access to suitable accommodation whenever prevention is not possible. The Strategy supports the priorities of the Housing Strategy 2020-2025.
- 1.5 The following are appended to this report:
 - Appendix A Housing Strategy for Reading 2020 - 2025
 - Appendix B Reading's Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2020 - 2025
 - Appendix C Equality Impact Assessment: Reading's Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2020 - 2025
 - Appendix D Housing Strategy Consultation Feedback
 - Appendix E Preventing Homelessness Strategy Consultation Feedback

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Policy Committee approve the publication of the Housing Strategy for Reading 2020 -2025 and Reading's Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2020 - 2025

- 2.2 That Policy Committee authorise the use of s106 funds collected under the Council's Zero Carbon Homes Local Plan Policy for the purposes of local housing retrofit schemes within the Borough
- 2.3 That Policy Committee delegate authority for the selection of retrofit schemes to the Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Lead Councillor for SEPT following recommendations from the Climate Programme Board.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Council's strategic approach to housing is delivered via a suite of separate and connected strategic documents. The Housing Strategy for the town acts as an overarching summary of the key strategic priorities guiding the range of activity being delivered and sets out a clear vision of the future of housing in Reading. The last strategy was published in 2009, and a new updated Housing Strategy is required to reflect both the national and local changes over the last decade.
- 3.2 Consultation in relation to the suggested themes and priorities of the Housing Strategy was completed in 2019, obtaining respondents views on the following proposed themes:
- Supply of Accommodation
 - Quality of Accommodation and Neighbourhoods
 - Support to Residents
- 3.2 The Council's homelessness response is underpinned by Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 which states the statutory functions it must undertake in preventing homelessness and assisting people threatened with, or who are actually homeless. The Government amended this homelessness legislation through the Homelessness Act 2002 to ensure a more strategic approach to tackling homelessness and requiring that all housing authorities have a homelessness strategy. Each borough's strategy must:
- be based on a review of all forms of homelessness
 - be renewed at least every five years
 - set out the authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing sufficient accommodation and support for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming so
- 3.3 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 introduced the following duties for Council's in England: (a) an enhanced prevention duty extending the period of being threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days and (b) a new duty, for those who are already homeless, to support households for 56 days to relieve their homelessness by helping them to secure accommodation. The Act requires Council's to provide homelessness services to all those affected, not just those who have 'priority need'. It also introduced a 'duty to refer' upon certain public authorities where their service users have been identified as being homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- 3.4 Section 2.10 of the Homelessness Code of Guidance states that Council's must consult public authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate before adopting or modifying their Homelessness Strategy, as well as consulting with service users and specialist agencies that provide support to homeless people in their borough.
- 3.5 Reading Borough Council's Homelessness Strategy 2016 - 2021 set out three key themes: (1) To increase the use and accessibility of the private rented sector; (2) To prevent homelessness by supporting people to access housing and to sustain their accommodation, and (3) To increase the range and accessibility of information and advice available to enable people to make informed decisions about their housing

situation. Reading's current strategy is not due for review until 2021. However, significant legislative change and reductions in the utilisation of emergency accommodation for homeless households, following the introduction of several successful interventions, have warranted early review and renewal. Review of Reading's Homelessness Strategy 2016 - 2021 (Appendix A) shows the borough's achievements against the previous strategy's aims. Reading's Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2020 - 2025 sets out the Council's strategic plan for homelessness prevention over the next five years.

- 3.6 A public and partner consultation exercise on proposed themes/priorities for a new homelessness strategy in Reading was completed in 2019.

4. THE PROPOSAL

Current Position:

- 4.1 The majority of individuals who provided responses to the consultation on proposed priorities/ themes agreed that for both strategies they were appropriate in setting out the Council's strategic approach to housing and addressing homelessness in Reading. Therefore, these themes and priorities have been incorporated into the draft strategies appended to this report.
- 4.2 Some of the consultation responses highlighted issues or made suggestions that are addressed within other specific Council strategies. This includes, but is not limited to:
- Empty Homes Strategy 2020 - 2026
 - Domestic Abuse Strategy 2019 - 2022
 - Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 - 2024
 - The emerging Climate Change Strategy for Reading 2020-2025
 - Reading Borough Local Plan - Adopted November 2019
 - Emerging Accommodation with Care Strategy for Reading

4.3 Options Proposed

- 4.3.1 The themes proposed within the Housing Strategy (attached at Appendix A) are focused on the supply of accommodation, the quality of housing and neighbourhoods and sustainable support to residents aligned with the following key priorities:

Supply of Accommodation

Priority One - Deliver high quality and sustainable homes and neighbourhoods.

Priority Two - Facilitate a supply of housing that will meet the identified needs of all residents.

Quality of Accommodation and Neighbourhoods

Priority One: Enhance the quality, safety and sustainability of existing homes.

Priority Two: Create attractive and connected neighbourhoods.

Support to Residents

Priority One: Prevent homelessness and help people sustain their accommodation.

Priority Two: Enable residents to access support, maintain their independence and have a voice in respect of the services they receive.

- 4.3.2 Reading's Draft Preventing Homelessness Strategy (attached at Appendix B) is underpinned by the following priorities:

Priority One - Intervening early to prevent and reduce homelessness in Reading

Priority Two - Supporting people who are vulnerable to recurring homelessness

Priority Three - Increasing provision of decent, suitable accommodation

- 4.3.2 These priorities have prevention of homelessness at their core and incorporate:

- **Universal approaches** - widely and generally available advice and information for everyone
- **Targeted upstream intervention** - for people identified with potential risk factors for homelessness
- **Supported tenancy sustainment** - support and advice to any household currently at risk of losing, or having previously lost, their accommodation
- **Pre-crisis interventions** - preventing anticipated homelessness
- **Provision of accommodation and crisis interventions** - helping to secure suitable accommodation

4.3.3 The recommended decision in relation to the use of s.106 funds for housing retro fit programmes relates to key outcomes set out in the Housing Strategy and supports the ambitions of the Climate Change Emergency Strategy.

4.3.4 It is proposed that both the Housing Strategy for Reading 2020-2025 and Reading's Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2020 - 2025 as appended to this report are approved for publication.

5. Other Options Considered

5.1 It is not a legislative requirement to have a Housing Strategy, however Housing is a key issue for residents, and it is good practice to have an overarching strategy that provides a focus for the delivery and quality of accommodation within the Borough. It is a statutory responsibility to publish a Homelessness Strategy for the Borough. It is possible to delay the publication of each strategy and wait for the existing Homelessness Strategy to end and introduce a new strategy in 2021. However, the existing Strategies require updating and delaying their implementation following the consultation in 2019 would undermine the Council's commitment to this key issue.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

6.1 This proposal will contribute to the following Corporate Plan priorities:

- Ensuring access to decent housing to meet local needs
- To protect and enhance the lives of vulnerable adults and children

6.2 The proposed decision on this report will contribute to the Council's strategic aim to promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all.

6.3 The Housing Strategy 2020=20205 and Reading's Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2020 - 2025 will contribute to the Community Safety and Health agenda.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The Housing Strategy is a high-level strategic document that sets a clear intention in respect to Sustainability and Climate Change. The priorities in the strategy and associated supporting strategies in respect to both delivering new homes and improving the quality of existing properties, set clear targets to support the sustainability agenda and for Reading to become carbon neutral by 2030.

8. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

8.1. Initial informal conversations were held with some internal and statutory stakeholders regarding the development of themes for consultation on the priorities of both Strategies.

8.2. Full public and partner consultation was undertaken in 2019 for the Housing Strategy for Reading 2020-2025, and for Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2020-2025. Consultation Feedback is appended at Appendices D & E.

In summary the following groups were consulted with in the following ways:

- Online survey via RBC's Consultation Hub (open public consultation)
- One-to-one interviews with people who have lived experience of homelessness; being at risk of homelessness and of recurring homelessness
- Use of social media (Facebook and Twitter) and RBC internal communications (Intranet and Inside Housing) to provide an information piece and promote the on-line survey
- Cross-sector focus groups with informed and experienced partners.
- Director consultation (electronic) with developers and Registered Providers.

7.3 In March 2020 a presentation was made at the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee regarding the themes and priorities for both strategies - these were unanimously supported and endorsed by the Committee.

7.4 As a result of consultation, the themes for the Housing Strategy, and the five core underpinning themes of the Homelessness Strategy have been developed. During the drafting process these have been refined and the order has been amended so that the overall strategy and objectives could be logically formed and followed by readers.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

8.2 Due to the high-level nature of the Housing Strategy for Reading 2020-2025 an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been completed as the full impact of each of the actions is not known. However, there is a commitment that any key decision made as part of the delivery of these priorities, or within the subset of strategies that sit as part of the delivery programme, will be subject to a full EIA.

8.2 An EIA is relevant to the Homelessness Strategy. The full assessment can be found in Appendix C. It concludes that publishing and delivering the strategy will not have a negative differential impact on racial groups; gender; people with disabilities; people of a particular sexual orientation; people due to their age; people due to their religious belief, other than to recognise and target the specific needs of groups identified as being at particularly heightened risk of homelessness due to their demography, geography or health and well-being needs.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Under Section 1(4) of the Homelessness Act 2002, it is a legal requirement for the Council to review, formulate, consult on and publish a homelessness strategy every five years or the local authority can choose to do this more frequently if circumstances in the area have changed. Section 1(5) requires the local housing authority to take their homelessness strategy into account in the exercise of their functions.

9.2 The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government's *Homelessness Code of Guidance* states that an effective action plan should be developed to ensure that the objectives set out in the homelessness strategy are achieved.

- 9.3 The amended *Homelessness Code of Guidance* published in February 2018 under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 states that additional duties introduced through the 2017 Act should be incorporated into a local authority's homelessness strategy including the involvement of all relevant partners for earlier identification and intervention to prevent homelessness and establishing effective partnerships and working arrangements with agencies to facilitate appropriate duty to refer referrals.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The financial implications of the priorities of the Housing Strategy for Reading 2020-2025 will be reviewed and managed within available resources prior to key decisions being implemented.
- 10.2 Reading's Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2020 - 2025 runs in parallel to legislation that outlines the Council's duties in preventing and relieving homelessness under the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The cost of these statutory duties will be met by Reading Borough Council's General Fund, with funds contributed from central government under Flexible Homeless Grant. The Strategy and Delivery Plan are consistent with the Council's likely available resources to manage homelessness over their proposed period. The Strategy and Action Plan have been developed to ensure the best use of Council resources, managing and minimising costs associated with the use of emergency and temporary accommodation.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Homelessness Strategy 2019 - 2024 and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 - 2024, Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure, 3rd July 2019.