

Bracknell Forest Housing Strategy 2023-2028

Draft Executive Summary

The vision for this housing strategy is that:

All Bracknell Forest residents are able to live in good quality, safe, and affordable homes, where they can be independent and financially secure, and can access the right support when needed.

The strategy outlines the main national changes to housing, welfare and planning policy that have taken place in recent years, along with the significant impacts on people's health, welfare and housing circumstances due to the Covid-19 pandemic and, most recently, a growing cost of living crisis.

The analysis of local demographic and housing data shows a growing population with the over 65 population growing at a faster than average rate. Future population and household growth is driving a need for additional local homes and more specialist care and support provision.

Bracknell Forest enjoys a thriving local economy and a higher than average proportion of its working age population are in employment. Bracknell Forest has a relatively low level of deprivation.

House prices in Bracknell Forest are higher than average and are rising at a similar rate to the UK generally. Despite relatively higher earnings, younger households are increasingly unable to afford to buy a home. The private rented sector is relatively small in Bracknell Forest and rents are increasing, which presents challenges in accessing good quality, affordable housing for rent.

Priority 1: Prevent homelessness and increase housing options and support for households in need

Key challenges

- Continuing to maintain and improve rates of homelessness prevention
- Providing support for vulnerable homeless households to enable them to secure and maintain accommodation
- Ensuring domestic abuse victims unable to remain in their homes have access safe and supported accommodation
- Dealing with the continuing impacts of Welfare Reform, including Local Housing Allowance rates, the benefit cap and bedroom tax
- Accessing suitable long-term housing options for households in temporary accommodation, given a relatively small private rented sector
- A lack of short- and long-term supported accommodation options for single people
- The potential for an increase in evictions and financial hardship due to the cost of living crisis

- Reducing the use of costly nightly paid accommodation by addressing shortfalls in certain types and sizes of temporary accommodation

We have recently developed both a new Homelessness Strategy action plan and an Ending Rough Sleeping Plan and are taking forward the recommended actions that we have agreed with our partners. Central to this is delivering an efficient, effective and customer focused homelessness service, providing high quality housing advice and assistance and focused work with our partners to identify, prevent and reduce homelessness. Actions currently underway include:

- Working more closely with private sector landlords and lettings agencies to increase access for households in temporary accommodation
- Delivering new, enhanced support services for domestic abuse victims in safe accommodation
- Acquiring additional units of temporary accommodation for single people and former rough sleepers, including accommodation for wheelchair users
- Working with Children's Services to provide joined up housing and support for care leavers and 16 and 17 year olds as part of our offer for care leavers
- Targeting assistance to households at risk of financial hardship using datasets and software such as LIFT (Low Income Family Tracker) to help avert homelessness

What we will do in future

- Develop a co-ordinated response to increase the ability of local households to cope with financial hardship and ensure that they have the skills and support they need to successfully secure and maintain housing for themselves
- Deliver new support services for former single people, including tenancy sustainment and a mental health outreach service
- Develop a specialist supported accommodation offer for rough sleepers including emergency beds and housing-led accommodation with support
- Review the stock of temporary accommodation against future demand forecasts and reconfigure it to achieve a better fit to ensure we are providing good quality temporary accommodation for those who need it
- Develop additional temporary accommodation and move-on options for homeless people through a programme of acquisitions and small-scale one-off development.
- Ensure that the Homelessness Forum is actively and regularly involved in monitoring the Homelessness Strategy and Rough Sleeping Action Plan

Priority 2: Deliver new homes in sustainable communities that meet the needs of local residents

Key challenges

- Delivering a sufficient number of new homes to meet future housing growth targets in a sustainable way
- Achieving an increase in new affordable homes to meet a range of needs
- Meeting the critical shortage of larger family homes for social and affordable rent which is resulting in long waits in overcrowded accommodation
- Addressing the lack of affordability of housing in the local area through affordable home ownership options that respond to local need and increasing the provision of affordable homes for social rent
- Meeting targets for reducing carbon emissions in new homes

- Responding to the demand for specialist forms of accommodation, including custom and self-build homes and provision for gypsies and travellers

The emerging Bracknell Forest Local Plan seeks to promote sustainable and inclusive housing growth to meet future needs through planning for the right number and types of new homes in the right places. In addition to this, we are already bringing forward a number of actions to deliver new homes that meet our priority needs by:

- Preparing a new Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which will provide detailed information on how affordable housing requirements will be applied under the new Local Plan
- Promoting shared ownership as the most affordable option for affordable home ownership and ensuring that these homes are offered to local residents first
- Producing information for developers and registered providers setting out the priority needs for affordable housing
- Working with the Council's Joint Venture partner on opportunities to develop new, good quality housing on council owned land
- Strengthening the housing enabling function to ensure planning decisions are informed by an up to date understanding of local housing needs and priorities

What we will do in future

- Maximise the number of affordable homes provided on new developments by ensuring a robust approach to planning viability and challenging developers who do not deliver affordable housing policy compliant schemes
- Develop ongoing dialogue with Registered Providers to enable them to understand the Council's priorities and develop proposals using available funding programmes
- Work with planning colleagues, developers and partners to ensure that the delivery of affordable housing reflects the types, tenures and sizes most needed
- Promote opportunities for self-build and custom build development
- Ensure that the Council makes use of its wider place shaping powers and its land ownerships and resources to deliver housing growth and meet local housing needs
- Ensure a continued supply of accessible and adaptable homes with a greater emphasis on two and three bedroom properties to meet the needs of applicants on the housing register
- Regularly update and publish data on priority needs for affordable housing, to include property sizes and types, and the need for wheelchair adapted homes
- Work with developers to ensure new homes have reduced carbon emissions and high levels of thermal efficiency

Priority 3: Make the best use of existing homes and improve housing quality

Key challenges

- Responding to new housing needs and the changes to buildings regulations to improve standards of management and conditions, fire safety and carbon emissions.
- Working with private sector landlords to ensure a stock of good quality, affordable, accommodation for local households.
- Improving energy efficiency especially in older properties to help reduce energy costs and tackle fuel poverty

- Incentivising existing social tenants who are under-occupying to downsize to free up larger properties
- Addressing concerns about damp and mould, inadequate external wall insulation /cladding and fire safety systems in social and private housing including office to residential conversions

The Council recognises the important role that the private rented sector plays in Bracknell Forest in meeting housing demand. We are working with the sector to provide more housing options for residents and encourage improvements to the condition of dwellings. As the ending of assured shorthold tenancies is a common cause of homelessness, we are working with landlords to reduce this.

Similarly, we are working closely with our social housing partners to ensure that households in greatest need benefit from increased access to good quality, well managed and maintained, affordable housing. Lastly, recognising the growing importance of fuel poverty, worsened by living in homes with poor energy efficiency, we are developing a co-ordinated approach to target the most vulnerable households. The range of actions we are already taking include:

- Improving communication with private rented sector landlords and letting agencies through the Landlords Forum
- Identifying households in the least energy efficient housing and supporting them to access grant funding and other assistance
- Developing a new allocations policy to ensure that the limited social housing becoming available to let is allocated to those with the highest needs
- Increasing access to the private rented sector through incentives and building relationships with landlords
- Surveying the council's temporary accommodation to identify the need for works to address damp and mould, fuel economy and insulation

What we will do in future

- Increase use of social media to engage private sector landlords
- Undertake further investigation and intelligence gathering to target HMOs and other properties that fall below housing standards
- Develop an empty homes policy to bring long-term vacant homes back into use
- Commission a new private sector housing condition survey so that we can pro-actively identify where to focus our resources
- Develop proactive relationships and work collaboratively with Registered Providers to improve standards in social housing
- Help the most vulnerable and provide fuel poverty advice and funding to improve the condition and the energy efficiency of their homes.
- Develop collaborative and innovative approaches to under-occupation with Silva Homes and other RPs, to provide tailored packages of assistance including help with moving, decoration, carpets and furniture, etc, to release larger social homes.

Priority 4: Provide a range of housing options for people with care and support needs

Key challenges

- Meeting the need for housing with support for older people, including Extra Care provision and nursing care provision for Older People with more complex needs, including dementia and behaviour that may challenge.
- Providing increased Supported Living options for working age adults to meet gaps in provision for people complex needs and behaviour that challenges
- Introducing flexible models of care and support that can respond to urgent care and accommodation needs to enable people to maximise their independence and avoid inappropriate placements
- Meeting increasing demand for funding for aids and adaptations so that people can remain living independently in their homes for as long as possible.
- Ensuring a co-ordinated approach to meeting the needs of young people, particularly those leaving care, under the Council responsibility as 'Corporate Parent'.

The approach to meeting our care and accommodation needs is based on the principles of collaboration and co-production. Collaboration means working across housing and social care services, as well as with external housing, health and care and support providers, to ensure a whole system approach that delivers good outcomes and value for money for people and for the council. Co-production ensures that people who use services, and their families and carers, influence and shape the care and accommodation options available to them in Bracknell Forest so that they can live healthy, safe, and independent lives with care and support when they need it. The work that is currently underway includes:

- Developing a new provision for people with learning disabilities that need higher levels of care and support
- Undertaking a review of current supported housing provision for young people
- Continuing to review the number, level and location of supported accommodation in the area for different groups.
- Resolving and prioritising outstanding DFG cases and prioritising current referrals according to need, setting out a clear, straightforward process that is easily understood by customers and partners
- Preparing a Market Position Statement which outlines what support and care services people need, gaps in current provision and how they can be met, the future shape of care and support in the local area and how it will be funded and purchased

What we will do in future

- Work in partnership with other providers to deliver the objectives and priorities identified in the Care & Accommodation Strategy
- Ensure proposals for an enhanced support and adaptations service support the aims and ambitions of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Better Care Fund Plan for households to remain living in their homes, where appropriate
- Explore flexible models of care and support for emergency/ short-term/ transitional care and accommodation across a range of client groups
- Undertake partnership work across East Berkshire, Berkshire and the CCG to develop opportunities for market development of specialist provision for people with highly complex, or specialist needs, including people with mental health needs
- Work with partners and developers to encourage the development of new Extra Care Schemes and nursing care to meet future needs
- Explore options to expand provision for young people, including lower support move-on accommodation
- Undertake a review of supported living provision for adults with a learning disability, develop a commissioning plan and review current panel arrangements and costs
- Review the need for a more in-depth housing needs analysis and review for working age adults with care and support needs

