



Committee and Date
Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

9 November 2023

Item

Public



Social Housing and the Housing Strategy

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1. Synopsis

Social housing is a key element of the housing market and housing delivery in Shropshire, ensuring that people who cannot afford to meet their housing need through the open market are able to access suitable accommodation. Shropshire Council’s action plan to support this tenure through its Housing Strategy is reported here.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This report follows on from key recommendations of the Economy and Environment Oversight Committee on the subject of housing need and social housing in Shropshire, as a key contributor to the objectives of The Shropshire Plan, where Housing is noted as essential to a healthy economy.
- 2.2. The recommendations made through this work aim to shape and inform Shropshire’s Housing Strategy and help to bring the Strategic Housing function more centrally into the thinking, planning and delivery of other key strategies such as the economic growth strategy and transport plans. This includes greater alignment between the Housing Strategy and Planning Policy teams.
- 2.3. This report notes where progress has already been made towards delivery of the recommendations and sets out an action plan for further work still required.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. That committee notes the progress made towards delivering the recommendations agreed at Cabinet in September 2023.
- 3.2. That committee notes and provides feedback upon the action plan showing work undertaken and planned, and agrees to receive future updates on progress.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. The risk for Shropshire Council should it not progress the recommendations previously agreed by Cabinet is that it will fail to maximise the benefits of social housing for those in greatest need and will lose opportunities to support the rural economy.
- 4.2. Failure to maximise opportunities for social housing will also result in higher costs both to the poorest households who may be displaced out of county, and to the Council itself, through a need for more expensive temporary accommodation in place of permanent housing solutions.
- 4.3. Through effective action in pursuing better housing options, the Council has the opportunity to mitigate these risks, and improve outcomes for households and their communities.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. There are no financial implications directly related to this report.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. Having suitable housing in communities that is located in closer proximity to places of work, education, health services, and retail and food shops can help to reduce the amount of travel by motor vehicle that is required. This can reduce energy and fuel consumption.
- 6.2. Ensuring that homes are energy efficient either as new build or existing properties that are retrofitted with insulation and newer heating solutions will also help to reduce fuel consumption.

7. Background

- 7.1. Earlier in 2023 Members of the former Communities Overview Committee, and subsequently the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee,

undertook an enquiry into social housing in Shropshire, to contribute to the planned review of the Housing Strategy.

7.2. The objective of this work was

- To review and understand housing need in Shropshire;
- To understand the different types of social housing, and the wider description of affordable housing and its forms, for example, key worker housing;
- To identify and consider specific challenges related to the housing market in Shropshire; and
- To identify key messages and make evidence-based recommendations to inform the review and update of the Housing Strategy.

7.3. A range of learning and findings were identified from this work, which were summarised in the report to the 20 July 2023 meeting of the committee. These findings were further summarised in the committee's report to the Cabinet meeting of 6 September 2023.

7.4. Six recommendations were made through this work, with the aim that they help to shape and inform the Housing Strategy and to bring the Strategic Housing function more centrally into the thinking, planning and delivery of other key strategies such as the economic growth strategy and transport plans. This includes greater alignment between the Housing Strategy and Planning Policy teams.

7.5. A further recommendation was that feedback be provided to the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting of 9 November 2023 to confirm which recommendations have been accepted and which have not. Also that an action plan should set out what will be done and by when to deliver the accepted recommendations, and where recommendations have not been accepted an explanation should be provided.

8. Additional Information

8.1. The six recommendations from the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed by Cabinet were as follows:

- Following the implementation of the revised allocations policy and scheme, the Council should ensure that this is adhered to by all registered providers through regular monitoring to guarantee those in the highest need are allocated housing.
- The Council should recognise the importance of the strategic housing function and how housing is integral to planning policy, social care and economic development, and therefore the need to strengthen the relationship between these functions.
- The Council should promote a place-based approach to housing and economic development, which includes commissioning affordable and supported housing based on evidenced need so as to ensure that housing priorities are delivered in the right place. Thus, responding to the fact that Shropshire is made up of any different communities across a large geographic area with different needs.

- Investment in social housing must acknowledge the specific needs of rural settlements, therefore products need to be tailored accordingly. For example, intergenerational supported housing, which could include staff accommodation, would help to promote a preventative agenda in villages and small towns (e.g., preventing admissions to hospital and care homes, and supporting people with learning disabilities and mental health problems to live independently).
- The Council should explore and pursue opportunities to attract funding, such as Community Land Trusts, and lobby for new products specifically to support the rural economy which will not only deliver the preventative agenda, but also balance the housing market and help to ensure that people can continue to afford to live in communities in Shropshire. For example, innovative funding products to fund intergenerational living and for sub-market private rented accommodation for key workers who are not necessarily able to access social housing, as they are not in a high priority reasonable preference category.
- The Council should review and implement any new legislation on short-term lets, helping to ensure that the balance is struck between the economic gain to communities and places through increased visitor spend, against the availability of homes to buy and rent where there is local concern.

8.2. A range of actions have already been delivered or are underway to address these recommendations. Further actions are now being scoped or planned to address them more fully. The Action Plan set out in Appendix 1 lists these for review.

9. Conclusions

9.1. The findings and recommendations of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee are now being used to inform the development of housing related strategy and policy, with progress reflected in the Action Plan appended.

List of Background Papers

- **Cabinet 6 September 2023 - Social Housing and Reviewing the Housing Strategy**
- **Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee 20 July 2023 - Social Housing and Reviewing the Housing Strategy**

Local Member: Not applicable.

Appendices: APPENDIX 1 Action Plan

APPENDIX 1 ACTION PLAN

	Recommendation	Action
1	<p>Following the implementation of the revised allocations policy and scheme, the Council should ensure that this is adhered to by all registered providers through regular monitoring to guarantee those in the highest need are allocated housing.</p>	<p>Action to date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The revised allocations policy and scheme is now being applied. • Shropshire’s main RPs have been contacted individually and have agreed and signed Nominations Agreements to ensure lettings are made in line with policy. • The HomePoint team now regularly challenge landlords rejecting the highest banded bidders for a property, to ensure that this is legitimate. This has resulted in a higher number of lets being made to priority bidders. <p>Further action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closer working between the HomePoint team in Housing Services and the Housing Enabling team in Planning should see earlier exchanges with landlords around the first lettings of newbuild homes, to ensure that they are identified for cases in highest need. • A planned upgrade of the Abrisas system that sits behind HomePoint will improve reporting so that concerns can be identified and addressed earlier.
2	<p>The Council should recognise the importance of the strategic housing function and how housing is integral to planning policy, social care and economic development, and therefore the need to strengthen the relationship between these functions.</p>	<p>Action to date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new Housing Strategy Officer post was created and appointed into in summer 2023, creating additional capacity in the strategic housing function. • Planning policy and social care colleagues attend the Housing Executive Board meetings, to share information and action on strategic housing matters. • Housing strategy has been identified as a key element of the Marches Strategic Partnership and the Strategic Infrastructure Partnership, where Shropshire Council working with neighbouring counties and with other partners to ensure that appropriate plans are put in place to meet need into the future.

		<p>Further action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A restructure of the Housing Strategy function is planned, with new recruitment into the vacant Housing Strategy and Development Manager post, and a planned move of housing enabling colleagues from planning policy to Housing Strategy. This will create stronger links between the functions. • Planning Policy officers will be initiating a draft Supplementary Planning Document on Housing in 2024, to provide more detailed advice for house builders on the Council’s requirements and priorities, linked to the Housing Strategy. • Economic Development colleagues will be invited to join the Housing Executive Board meetings in future.
3	<p>The Council should promote a place-based approach to housing and economic development, which includes commissioning affordable and supported housing based on evidenced need so as to ensure that housing priorities are delivered in the right place. Thus, responding to the fact that Shropshire is made up of many different communities across a large geographic area with different needs.</p>	<p>Action to date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Housing Commissioning Priorities document was drafted and issued to all Registered Providers and to Cornovii Developments Limited in summer 2023, planned to guide development programmes. This is based upon evidenced need derived from the Housing Needs Survey 2022 and includes reference to general needs and supported housing. • Planning consent was achieved for a new housing scheme at Coton Hill House, Shrewsbury, which will provide supported accommodation for homeless people to enable them to move on into settled homes. <p>Further action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A report will be created based upon the findings of the Housing Needs Survey, so that this information is more accessible to partners needing to reference the data, allowing better evidenced decisions to be made. • A focused piece of work is planned to create a Housing Strategy for Shrewsbury, linking to the Big Town Plan, the economic goals for Shrewsbury, and the evidenced housing needs shown in the Housing Needs Survey. • Opportunities are actively being sought to meet specific housing needs across Shropshire, in support of a range of different resident groups.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of the Tenancy Strategy is intended to move it to be better aligned to local incomes.
4	<p>Investment in social housing must acknowledge the specific needs of rural settlements, therefore products need to be tailored accordingly. For example, intergenerational supported housing, which could include staff accommodation, would help to promote a preventative agenda in villages and small towns (e.g., preventing admissions to hospital and care homes, and supporting people with learning disabilities and mental health problems to live independently).</p>	<p>Action to date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Housing Commissioning Priorities document referenced above includes reference to supported housing requirements and identifies a range of locations where newbuild development will be appropriate. • Cabinet has approved the Sustainable Affordable Warmth Strategy addressing the investment needs of rural and urban homes. <p>Further action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Independent Living and Specialist Housing Strategy for Shropshire is in draft and will be issued for public consultation prior to amendment and submission to Cabinet for approval. This will set out in greater detail the needs and opportunities for specific property types and services and will be used to encourage developers and landlords to provide these. • A service review is underway which will result in the drafting of a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy, to capture the range of situations that result in families and individuals becoming homeless, and which will create an improved approach to addressing the triggers which locally create these issues.
5	<p>The Council should explore and pursue opportunities to attract funding, such as Community Land Trusts, and lobby for new products specifically to support the rural economy which will not only deliver the preventative agenda, but also balance the housing market and help to ensure that people can continue to afford to live in communities in Shropshire. For example, innovative funding products to fund intergenerational living and for sub-market private rented accommodation for key workers who are not necessarily able</p>	<p>Action to date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council officers meet regularly with Homes England as the main funder of social housing in England, as well as with WMCA which has recently been granted devolved funding for housing investment, to lobby for funding to support Shropshire’s housing priorities. • The establishment of the Marches Strategic Infrastructure Partnership has initiated discussions on funding for rural housing, alongside our neighbouring Councils with similar demographic and geographic challenges. <p>Further action</p>

	<p>to access social housing, as they are not in a high priority reasonable preference category.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An affordable and intermediate housing options strategy will be initiated which considers the challenges faced by rural settlements and market towns, and provides options to address these. • The Housing sub-group of the Marches Strategic Infrastructure Partnership will identify opportunities to lobby and bid for funding to address the housing needs of the rural economy, with the intention of having more weight as a group than Shropshire on its own.
<p>6</p>	<p>The Council should review and implement any new legislation on short-term lets, helping to ensure that the balance is struck between the economic gain to communities and places through increased visitor spend, against the availability of homes to buy and rent where there is local concern.</p>	<p>Action to date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National policy discussions on short term residential lets are being monitored. However, no new legislation has yet been issued for implementation locally. <p>Further action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with the Housing sub-group of the Marches Strategic Infrastructure Partnership, opportunities will be identified to lobby for legislation relating to short-term lets, to address the impact this has on availability of homes for local residents. • New legislation will be implemented appropriately to ensure that the visitor economy and local housing needs are well balanced.