



Report for:	Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting:	4 September 2019
Part:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	Housing Strategy report
Contact:	Natasha Beresford, Strategic Housing Group Manager Margaret Griffiths, Portfolio Holder Housing
Purpose of report:	To inform members of the commitments within the council's new Housing Strategy.
Recommendations	1. For members to review and provide comments on the new draft Housing Strategy.
Period for post policy/project review	Annual review
Corporate objectives:	Building strong and vibrant communities Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those most in need.
Implications:	<u>Financial</u> This strategy is linked to the HRA Business Plan, which outlines the vision, priorities and financial position of Dacorum's Housing Service. This incorporates our latest asset management strategy outlining the investment we intend to make to our properties over the next five years. The Council has a financial model that demonstrates a sound financial long-term plan for its Housing Revenue Account.
'Value for money' implications	<u>Value for money</u> Regular benchmark reviews are undertaken using Housemark and all procurement is subject to evaluation criteria which are designed to demonstrate value for money is achieved.

Risk implications	Failure to have a Housing Strategy in place is contravention of The Local Government Act.
Community Impact Assessment	Assessment is attached at Appendix 2.
Health and safety Implications	Housing policies, procedures and contracts build in a requirement that all health and safety requirements are met and any higher risk matters are included in our risk register which identifies specific mitigating actions.
Consultees:	Fiona Williamson, Assistant Director Housing Mark Gaynor, Director of Housing & Regeneration Layna Warden, Group Manager Tenants & Leaseholder Alan Mortimer, Group Manager Property & Place David Barrett, Group Manager Housing Development
Background papers:	Appendix 1 Housing Strategy Appendix 2 Community Impact Assessment Appendix 3 Tenancy Strategy Appendix 4 Sustainable Tenancy Strategy
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	HRA – Housing Revenue Account

1. Introduction

1.1 Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2003, local authorities are required to develop a local housing strategy, outlining the vision for housing within the local area. The strategy should set out objectives on how the authority intends to manage and deliver its strategic housing role and provides an overarching framework against which the authority considers and develops policies or more localised strategies for specific housing issues.

1.2 The 2019-2021 Housing Strategy, replaces the former 2013-2018 Options, Solutions & Delivery - Dacorum Housing Strategy. The development of this strategy has taken into consideration a number of key issues that address relevant local issues, including fire safety, home energy conservation, homelessness and management of our assets. The Strategy has been reviewed by our Tenant & Leaseholder Committee, who provided positive feedback about the approach and the opportunity to work closely with the service to shape provision. This strategy supports and directly links to commitments within the Housing Service HRA Business Plan and other key strategy documents:

- Homelessness Strategy 2016-2020
- Asset Management Strategy 2016-2020
- Get Involved Strategy 2016-2020
- Older Persons Housing Strategy 2018-2022

This report outlines the commitments within the strategy and some of the work already underway to ensure that the council deliver's against these.

2. Commitment 1: We work in partnership to meet the demand for quality, affordable housing in Dacorum

2.1 Commitment 1 of the *Housing Strategy* looks at how we can address the demand for affordable homes across the borough. We acknowledge that effective joint working with local partners is crucial in making sure that people in our communities have access to a home through the development of new, affordable properties. Ensuring that local partners are all working towards the same goal is also key to providing people with the housing support they need.

We work closely with our Planning department colleagues, offering advice on the affordable housing elements of section 106 agreements.

2.2 We work with our Housing Association/Registered Providers on overall new housing provision and have been able to provide direct funding to increase the numbers of affordable homes. The Council is also a direct provider of new Council homes through its development programme. We have already delivered over 200 homes with a further 100 currently under construction. Over the next four years we will be delivering a further 400 much needed homes. All of our new build is at social rent levels, which are genuinely affordable rather than at the 80% of market rent that affordable rent delivers.

2.3. Further to the Localism Act 2011, local housing authorities are under a duty to prepare and publish a tenancy strategy. The attached Tenancy Strategy at Appendix 3, which was approved at Cabinet on 30 July 2019, sets out how Dacorum meets its obligations under section 150 to 153 of the Localism Act 2011. The aim of the Tenancy Strategy (Appendix 1) is to ensure that the Council has the ability to shape the affordability and security of all social housing properties let to Dacorum residents.

3. Commitment 2: We proactively and effectively tackle poor conditions across Dacorum's private housing sector

3.1 Commitment 2 of the *Housing Strategy* focuses on the development of our approach to regulating and improving conditions in the private housing sector in Dacorum. On a national scale, the private rented sector is the fastest growing housing tenure type, having more than doubled in size over the last decade. A 2016 Building Research Establishment Integrated Stock Model Report has identified that there are 65,289 dwellings in Dacorum, 11,700, or 18% of which, are privately rented properties, a further report is to be undertaken in Winter 2019 to obtain up to date information about our stock, this report will inform our strategic approach. It is important that we build a robust approach to tackling rogue landlords and strive to ensure that the private sector offers a safe and suitable housing option for Dacorum residents.

3.2 In the past year we have improved our approach to Private Sector Housing standards. Our Private Sector Housing team have in the past 6 months reviewed and

updated the website pages, providing Dacorum landlords and tenants easily accessible guidance for the private sector. Individual factsheets have been created outlining the Housing Health Safety Rating System identifiable hazards and the standards required when letting a property in the private sector. All suspected HMO's are being logged and inspected by the Private Sector Housing Team. This involves writing to landlords of suspected Houses in Multiple Occupation informing them of the changes in definition and the requirement to apply for a licence.

3.3 A quarterly Private Housing Newsletter is now issued for landlords and tenants, the newsletter provides the latest legislation, news and updates from central government and advice for both parties on how to approach these changes as they happen in the sector. Our dedicated landlord forum is run in partnership with the National Landlords Association is ran twice a year. The forum provides update to attending landlords on the latest enforcement guidance and changes; this is to ensure landlords within the borough keep a consistent approach when letting properties in the area.

3.4 With the government's increasing focus on the private rented sector, we will need to provide our landlords and tenants guidance for various acts which will be affecting the sector. The Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 we will be a crucial tool for tenants to use if their homes are not meeting the required standards for human habitation. A guidance and information booklet is currently being developed within the team to and is intended for publication online in early autumn 2019. This guide will provide tenants information on how to access support and advice from the Private Sector Housing Team if they are concerned about property standards.

3.5 The service will also be responding the current government consultation, which closes on 12 October 2019. The consultation seeks to explore how section 21 of the Housing Act 1988 has been used in the past, and the circumstances in which landlords should be able to regain possession once it has been abolished (including what changes may be necessary to Schedule 2 of the Housing Act 1988). It invites views on the implications of removing the ability of landlords to grant assured shorthold tenancies in the future, and how the processing of repossession orders through the courts could be improved.

4. Commitment 3: We understand our housing stock and use it to provide the right homes to meet tenant's needs

4.1 Commitment 3 of the *Housing Strategy* shows how we will work to make best use of our housing stock to meet the needs of our tenants. Ensuring that we are making effective use of the properties we manage is key to delivering housing services that offer value for money. By reviewing our current stock and making improvements to maintenance programmes, we can work towards an increasingly efficient and cost effective housing service.

4.2 The existing stock condition information, has been supplemented with details of the investment programmes that have been delivered by our strategic partners over the last 10 years. The current focus is to obtain survey information on external and communal areas of all our blocks. This additional detail will enable the investment and improvement programmes to be developed to include estate wide projects and inform decisions about the longer term options for the potential use of district heating systems or other energy efficiency measures. Estate wide projects will need consideration of the impact on

residents, especially if decants are required and it comply with the Section 20 process, for leaseholder consultation.

4.3 The remaining external stock condition surveys, for all non-block properties, plus internal surveys of all properties will then follow on, where we are working towards achieving in excess of 2000 survey updates per financial year. By working in partnership with both Tenancy management & our contractors, we are aiming to survey each property at least once every 5 years, in a rolling stock condition survey programme.

4.4 The data can then be used and cross referenced with any repairs patterns and enable us to plan and continuously review the projected reinvestment programme to ensure that expenditure is targeted on the correct areas at the correct time, and maximise the lifespan of the buildings components by targeting replacement just ahead of projected failures.

4.5 The stock condition survey is just one element required to assist in informing future delivery programmes and consultation with tenants, on their preferences and expectations is required to ensure the housing stock remains fit for purpose. The sheltered schemes are currently undergoing a review, which will feed into the asset management strategy and provide options for future investment or use.

4.6 The asset management strategy will be reviewed and updated to reflect the climate change agenda and increasing requirements in respect of fire safety and compliance with the Fitness for Human Habitation Act 2018.

4.7 The Aids & Adaptations process is also under review, to determine if the policy and decision matrix are still relevant, or if any refinements are required. It is expected that with the improved knowledge of all our stock, we will be able to utilise and offer those properties where suitable adaptations are already in place, or could readily be achieved, to benefit the needs of the tenants by facilitating a move.

5. Commitment 4: We support and empower our Dacorum Borough Council tenants

5.1 Commitment 4 of the *Housing Strategy* emphasizes the importance of empowering and supporting our tenants. Understanding the needs and priorities of our tenants is key to effectively targeting any support and communication they need. By building on our strong foundations in engagement, we can provide personalized support and work to strengthen their voices on key issues.

5.2 During 2019, we'll be reviewed our current and developing a new tenant Involvement strategy, which builds on our approach to engagement and sets out how we can facilitate our tenants participation at a national level. The development of this new strategy, will be undertaken in line with the 2018 Green Paper, this paper and the guidance of the Tenant Participation Advisory Service, which will enable us to develop our approach to engaging with residents and ensuring they have a voice in how our services are delivered.

5.3 We've developed a new Sustainable Tenancy Strategy, Appendix 4, which outlines our approach to ensuring that we can support our tenants to sustain their current home and prevent enforcement action, by working in partnership with key statutory and

voluntary agencies. The Tenancy Sustainment Team are working closely with other teams within the Council to deliver a service that meets the commitments set out in the Sustainable Tenancies Strategy. We are continually developing ways to promote wellbeing around both finances and mental health enabling tenants to feel safer in their homes and within the local community. We do this by working with a variety of partners at the council, within Dacorum and the surrounding area including Community Action Dacorum, Strive at the South Hill Centre and CMHT.

Our aim is to enable tenants to succeed where they may have failed or struggled without intervention. We work with the tenant to 'level the playing field' through working together, we identify areas to work on, issues around rent arrears, isolation or effects on the home such as hoarding.

5.4 In order to maximise full potential we work with other departments to identify those in need of help as soon as possible, before they have even picked up the keys to their home in some cases. We enable the tenant to understand and take responsibility for their tenancy, to report repairs in a timely way to prevent the property falling into disrepair or maximising their income to prevent them falling into rent arrears or debt crisis.

5.5 We want our tenants to enjoy good quality homes and be part of a strong community. We recently formed and facilitated a peer hosted coffee afternoon at the Liberty Tea Rooms, tenants that we have worked with or who are still involved with the team can meet up for a relaxed chat over a cup of tea, we have seen some friendships develop that now extend beyond the group. This has reduced significantly the social isolation of those involved.

5.6 We regularly refer tenants via the Tenancy Academy to access further education and training to improve their prospects of employment or to build on an established career. Access to holistic courses can be found at the New Leaf College, working on strategies to help with stress and emotional wellbeing, building resilience and confidence building.

5.7 We have reviewed our systems and introduced In-Form, this enables us to accurately record and report on clients that we are supporting across the service. As a result we now have improved systems and processes in place to effectively identify an individual's support needs and the capability to monitor changes to these. Using technology we can monitor progress against goals and outcomes set by individuals and use this information to proactively provide support to prevent them reaching crisis point.

5.8 The service leads a Supported Housing tenant forum, which provides a regular, ongoing opportunity to work with involved older tenants to place them at the centre of service development. The group worked with officers to develop a number of areas including the Older Person's Strategy, community alarm service provision and our Supported Housing Officer procedures. We have worked with them to understand what their priorities are and how we can consider them going forward. Additionally, to allow tenants to raise more localised issues we have regular scheme based tenants meetings with officers from a number of departments attending.

Social isolation – we carried out a survey of tenants to understand how much of an issue social isolation is within the service, the results challenged some of our assumptions and has enabled us to provide targeted interventions such as the Meet and Eat project and events to raise awareness about particular issues such as safeguarding. It has also given us a greater understanding of the support required to alleviate social isolation and loneliness.

5.9 As a council we are passionate about giving our tenants a voice and empowering them to feel part of the wider community. We know that loneliness is a growing problem for many older people. This can be a result of lost confidence or physical limitations such

as mobility. We are committed to a robust approach to engagement, developing relationships with partners in the voluntary and community sector and investing in activities.

6. Conclusion

6.1 This report provides members with an overview of the work across the Housing Service and our commitments within this new strategy. We ask members to provide any comments in relation to the strategy and our approach, ahead of Cabinet consideration to approve the strategy.